

## ABSTRACT

### **A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF AWARENESS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS ON THE STAFF, LEADERSHIP, AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PAULSBORO**

by

John Paul Wallace

United Methodist pastors have access to family systems theory in pastoral care courses in seminary, clinical pastoral education, and seminars presented by conferences or other clinicians. The pastors applied their new awareness to their congregation; however, no indication of measurement of a change in behavior occurred. This study evaluated the effects of understanding and reflecting on family systems concepts (Bowen theory) during and after participants attended a four-session family systems seminar along with eight weeks of reflection on interrelationships. The study included thirty participants who were members/constituents, staff, and/or leadership of First United Methodist Church Paulsboro.

The research involved an evaluative study using mixed-method explanatory design, which utilized a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire, surveys, and focus group to analyze the affects of understanding family systems concepts presented at four seminar sessions. The concepts discussed were multi-generational transmission, sibling position, and emotional triangles and their effects on one's differentiation of self. Furthermore, the study discovered if the new awareness of these concepts changed one's behavior and, thereby, help one to fulfill John Wesley's general rule to *do no harm*. Thus, the study attempted to bring in practical application of family systems to people within

the congregation and then measured the effects on interactions within one's family, work, or church family.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF AWARENESS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS ON THE  
STAFF, LEADERSHIP, AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH PAULSBORO

presented by

John Paul Wallace

has been accepted towards the fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

_____	_____ May 18, 2011 _____
Mentor	Date
_____	_____ May 18, 2011 _____
Internal Reader	Date
_____	_____ May 18, 2011 _____
Dean of the Beeson Center	Date

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF AWARENESS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS ON THE  
STAFF, LEADERSHIP, AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH PAULSBORO

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by

John Paul Wallace

May 2011

©2011

John Paul Wallace

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	xiii
CHAPTER 1 PROBLEM .....	1
Prologue .....	1
Introduction.....	2
Exposure to Family Systems.....	2
Three Key Influences .....	3
Problem.....	6
Purpose.....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Define Terms .....	8
Ministry Intervention .....	9
Context.....	11
Methodology.....	12
Participants.....	12
Instrumentation .....	13
Variables .....	14
Data Collection .....	15
Data Analysis .....	15
Delimitations and Generalizability .....	16

Theological Foundation .....	16
Biblical Concept of Family Systems.....	16
Family at Creation.....	17
Family in the Old Testament.....	18
Family in the New Testament.....	19
Church as Family Systems.....	19
Overview.....	21
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE.....	22
Purpose.....	22
Problem.....	22
Church as Family Systems.....	24
Example of Bowen’s Family Systems in Genesis .....	29
John Wesley and Family Systems.....	31
Family Systems and Leadership .....	32
Family Systems Theory .....	35
Sigmund Freud.....	38
Alfred Adler .....	38
John Carl Flügel.....	39
Harry Sullivan.....	40
Ludwig von Bertalanffy.....	41
Nathan Ackerman .....	42
Murray Bowen .....	43
Bowen’s Family Systems Concepts.....	45

Multi-Generational Transmission Process .....	46
Sibling Position.....	47
Differentiation of Self.....	47
Emotional Triangles.....	48
Edwin Friedman.....	49
Recent Studies in Church-Related Family Systems.....	50
Mixed-Methods Explanatory Design .....	56
Summary of Literature Review.....	57
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	59
Purpose .....	59
Research Questions.....	59
Research Question #1 .....	59
Research Question #2 .....	60
Research Question #3 .....	60
Research Question #4 .....	61
Participants.....	61
Instrumentation .....	62
Pre-Intervention Semi-Structured Interview.....	63
Pre-Intervention Questionnaire.....	63
Seminar Session Participant’s Evaluation .....	64
Family Systems Reflection Guide .....	65
Post-Intervention Questionnaire .....	65
Focus Group.....	65



Variables .....	66
Data Collection .....	67
Data Analysis .....	68
Ethics.....	68
Anonymity Assurance.....	68
Data Reporting .....	69
Disposition of Materials.....	69
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	70
Introduction.....	70
Description of Participants.....	72
Report of Data.....	73
Critical Analysis.....	79
General Seminar Findings.....	81
Report of Data.....	81
Critical Analysis.....	94
Interpretation of Findings .....	95
Research Question #1 .....	95
Report of Data.....	96
Critical Analysis.....	100
Interpretation of Findings .....	101
Research Question #2 .....	101
Report of Data.....	101
Critical Analysis.....	111

Interpretation of Findings .....	114
Research Question #3 .....	115
Report of Data.....	116
Critical Analysis.....	119
Interpretation of Findings .....	120
Research Question #4 .....	121
Report of Data.....	121
Critical Analysis.....	122
Interpretation of Findings .....	123
Summary of Major Findings .....	123
New Awareness and Transformed Perspective.....	123
Multi-Generational Transmission and Genogram .....	124
Emotional Triangles.....	124
Do No Harm.....	124
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	125
Major Findings.....	125
New Awareness and Transformed Perspective.....	125
Multi-Generational Transmission and Genogram .....	128
Emotional Triangles.....	130
Do No Harm.....	133
Implications.....	136
Limitations .....	137
Unexpected Observations or Outcomes.....	138

Impact of Staff or Leadership as Participants in Study.....	139
Impact of the Number of Educators as Participants in Study .....	139
Interactions over Genograms and Sibling Positions .....	139
Transformation.....	140
DSI Delta Results.....	140
Death of Project Participant .....	141
Indicators of Enmeshment within Leadership .....	141
Impatience with Others .....	142
Recommendations.....	142
Postscript.....	144
How I Am Different.....	144
How My Ministry Changed .....	145

## APPENDIXES

A. Project Invitation Letter .....	147
B. Project Participation Covenant Agreement .....	149
C. Seminar Reminder E-mail.....	151
D. Pre-Intervention Family System Semi-Structured Interview Form .....	152
E. Pre/Post-Intervention Questionnaire .....	156
F. Glossary of Terms Used in Family Systems Theory .....	159
G. Family Systems Seminar Syllabi .....	164
H. First Seminar Session Participant’s Evaluation Form .....	171
I. Second Seminar Session Participant’s Evaluation Form.....	173
J. Third Seminar Session Participant’s Evaluation Form .....	174

K. Fourth Seminar Session Participant’s Evaluation Form .....	176
L. Focus Group Agenda and Questions .....	178
M. Family Systems Reflection Guide.....	179
N. Focus Group Questionnaire .....	181
WORKS CITED .....	182
WORKS CONSULTED .....	189

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
4.1. Project Task Completion Rates.....	72
4.2. Participant Educational Degree Completed.....	74
4.3. Primary Occupation .....	77
4.4. Pre-Intervention Questionnaire (DSI).....	99
4.5. Relevant Deltas of Participants.....	104
4.6. Culling of Data from Weekly Reflections and Focus Group.....	118

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
2.1. Historical Development of Family Systems .....	37
4.1. Age.....	73
4.2. Marital Status .....	75
4.3. Current Employment.....	76
4.4. Years Associated with FUMC .....	78
4.5. Primary Role with FUMC.....	79
4.6. First Seminar Session Effectiveness .....	81
4.7. Second Seminar Session Effectiveness.....	82
4.8. Third Seminar Session Effectiveness .....	82
4.9. Fourth Seminar Session Effectiveness.....	83
4.10. Seminar Session Effectiveness (Mean).....	84
4.11. Meaningfulness of First Seminar Family Systems Concepts .....	85
4.12. Meaningfulness of Second Seminar Family Systems Concept.....	86
4.13. Meaningfulness of Third Seminar Family Systems Concept .....	87
4.14. Meaningfulness of Fourth Seminar Family Systems Concept.....	88
4.15. Concept Meaningfulness (Mean).....	89
4.16. Usefulness of First Seminar Session Information to FUMC’s Leadership and Congregation.....	90
4.17. Usefulness of Second Seminar Session Information to FUMC’s Leadership and Congregation.....	91
4.18. Usefulness of Third Seminar Session Information to FUMC’s Leadership and Congregation.....	92

4.19. Usefulness of Fourth Seminar Session Information to FUMC’s Leadership and Congregation.....	93
4.20. Session Usefulness (Mean) for FUMC’s Leadership and Congregation.....	94
4.21. Exposure or Heard Family Systems Terms .....	96
4.22. Pre-Intervention Questionnaire (DSI) Data .....	100
4.23. Individual Post-Intervention Questionnaire (DSI) Data .....	102
4.24. Individual Pre-Post Intervention DSI Comparison .....	103
4.25. Individual Delta of Pre/Post-Intervention Questionnaire .....	103
4.26. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week One .....	106
4.27. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Two .....	106
4.28. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Three .....	107
4.29. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Four .....	107
4.30. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Five.....	108
4.31. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Six .....	108
4.32. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Seven .....	109
4.33. Prevalence of Family Systems Concepts Week Eight .....	109
4.34. Process of Change.....	121

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to the FUMCs of Van Alstyne, Wylie, and Paulsboro for their support and patience through the Doctor of Ministry process. Thanks to Elizabeth DeRobio, Barbara Hotze, Kristin Gray, and Bridget Hoenig for their help with initial editing process, and for Judy Seitz, Chief Editor of the DMin program, for her patience and guidance in providing the most professional work possible. Thanks also to Dr. James Clark for working with the statistics portion of this project in design, collection, input, and basic statistical calculations.

I give my utmost gratitude to Dr. Dale Hale, Dr. Verna Lowe, Dr. Milton Lowe, for their patience with me. The ongoing encouragement along the long journey was one of grace, mercy, and challenge. Furthermore, Rev. Dr. Tom Palmer was exceptional as my field supervisor and colleague in ministry during my course work.

My research reflection team of Todd Kislingbury, Jack Harris, Oakey Hagood, Opal Barr, and Carolyn Maynard held me accountable for completing my work over the past years. Additionally, I thank the staff and leadership of FUMC Paulsboro for participating in the project.

I give my utmost thanks to God for giving me my wife, Marlane, who encouraged me from the outset to pursue a DMin degree. Thank you for your prayers and for not allowing me to quit. I want to award you a PMT (push me thru) degree.

All of this support contributed to my development as a person and pastor to live out Wesley's three simple rules: "To do no harm,... to do good,... to stay in love with God." Thanks be to God.



## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM

#### Prologue

I share three items that constantly flowed through my mind over the duration of this dissertation. First is the Scripture, “From [Jesus Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16, NIV). Second, as a pastor, I strive to live up to one of John Wesley’s simple rules: “Do no harm.” Third, I tried to provide an explanation of *family systems* for people who are not aware or schooled in such theory.

Family systems is a theory developed by Murray Bowen, MD, whereby a collection of relationships interact with one another emotionally. One person’s action affects the other persons’ actions/reactions in the emotional relationship. Furthermore, the actions of a group affect the actions/reactions of other groups within the system.

Dr. Edwin Friedman in *Generation to Generation* applied this theory in individual pastoral (leader’s) family, families within church family, and the church family as a whole. He observed how each concentric level of the family or the organization interacts emotionally with the other parts.

Eight main concepts within family systems theory apply to a system, whether nuclear family, extended family, leadership, or church family: nuclear family, family projection process, emotional process, sibling position, multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, differentiation of self, emotional cutoff, and emotional process in society.

## **Introduction**

As I begin my tenure with a new congregation, I realize my leadership style impacts the leadership style of this congregation, and vice versa. I believe our leadership styles, abilities, and modus operandi can improve through the understanding and practice of family systems theory in leadership. The discussion and experiences of my exposure to family systems theory and three key influences described below reveal the passion for pursuing this study.

### **Exposure to Family Systems**

A few pastoral care courses at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University introduced me to family therapy, pastoral counseling, and family systems theory. Both Dr. Howard Stone and Dr. Andrew D. Lester were proponents of the theory, sharing many of the concepts with their students. They provided a foundation of awareness for applicability of the theory when providing pastoral care to parishioners and basic church life and ministry. Converting the fledgling knowledge into practice resulted in steady positive behavior modification even though at times the modification was quite difficult.

About six years after the first introduction, family systems still intrigued me. I later participated in a monthly seminar on “the church as family systems” led by Rev. Patricia Beghtel-Mahle of the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church. Intrigued once more, I gained a new fervency for using family systems, yet, again, the fervency waned as my normal individualistic actions and reactions overruled thinking and applying family systems to church life.

January 2007 culminated many changes in the life of my congregation at that time. A contemporary worship service was added to two existing worship services, and

Sunday school hours expanded to three concurrent opportunities. In spite of all the planning, several years prior and the communication accomplished, anxiety increased. With increased anxiety came increased dissatisfaction with the church in several groups of people, many of whom declared the church leadership was attempting to divide the church family.

In the spring 2007, Rev. Beghtel-Mahle, my district superintendent, provided another seminar on church as family systems with monthly sessions. Many conversations took place with Rev. Beghtel-Mahle in the ensuing months of 2007 where she reminded me, “Jack, it is not about you or about individuals. Look at the situation as a family system.” She also directed me to read Peter L. Steinke’s *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*.

### **Three Key Influences**

I believe God orchestrated three key influences in the developing stages of the selection of this dissertation project occurred in 2007. The three influences fueled my passion and interest in the subject of family systems and my guidance as a pastor and church leadership as a whole. The first influence came from Dr. Verna Lowe, professor for my dissertation research class. Lowe shared a challenging thought to doctoral students. She related that if students are pursuing this degree to get letters at the end of their name, or to be called doctor, or to receive another certificate for their wall, they have the wrong motivation. The main reason for obtaining this degree is to develop tools and abilities for sound research and investigation and, most importantly, to become a better pastor who does no harm.

The second influence came after completing the class with Dr. Lowe and while flying home. I decided to read Bishop Rueben P. Job's book, *Three Simple Rules*, that was given to me as a Christmas gift. In this concise book, Job declares that people's lives will flourish and thrive if they learn and practice three of Wesley's general rules as stated in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*: "Do no harm, ... do good, ... stay in love with God" (73-74).

Bishop Job reminded me of the importance of practicing the first rule of "do no harm," and how that rule affects the attitude and behavior of persons within conflict:

Each of us knows of groups that are locked in conflict, sometimes over profound issues and sometimes over issues that are just plain silly. But the conflict is real, the divisions deep, and the consequences can often be devastating. If, however, all who are involved can agree to do no harm, the *climate* in which the conflict is going on is immediately changed. If I do no harm, I can no longer *gossip* about the conflict. I can no longer *speak disparagingly* about those involved in the conflict. I can no longer *manipulate the facts* of the conflict. I can no longer *diminish* those who do not agree with me and must honor each as a child of God. (original emphasis 22)

Bishop Job's statement about "do no harm" affirmed what Dr. Lowe declared in that Christians are to do no harm to the children (family) of God. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is one rooted in family systems where the goal of understanding and practicing of family systems within not only families but within the leadership and the church family as a whole brings about doing no harm.

The third key influence came from some insights given to me by my friend, Dr. H. John Fuller, a Christian brother, confidant, and superintendent of Wylie Independent School District, Wylie, Texas. During a very frustrating time in my leadership at a particular congregation, Dr. Fuller gave me his listening ears and words of counsel and encouragement and coached me through the hard times. He readily understood that

leadership is dependent upon understanding the organization as a system, and he coached me from that perspective.

As leaders of local congregations, pastors should strive to have the right gifted people working in the leadership of the church. Dale Galloway explains one of the seven habits of a visionary leader as “building a winning team” (*Leading with Vision* 71-3). Furthermore, because the church is in the people business that is affording God’s transformation of people, a leader is called to “be a people person” for “without people there can be no church [family]” (73). Therefore, the right gifted people, transformed and transforming people in Christ, are those who understand who they are, whose they are, and how they function within the system, the family of God. These people can help a congregation become great in its mission and ministry. Thus, all the more reason for leadership to strive to help one another to gain a better understanding of themselves and their function within the family system.

A factor that supports the need to understand the effects of family systems theory on leadership is the presence of conflict. The potential for conflict within families, organizations, and churches is always present. Murray Bowen, founder of Bowen family systems theory discusses this potential of conflict in describing differentiation of self and chronic anxiety (Kerr and Bowen 75) described later in this chapter. Pastoral counselor Terry Parsons once shared at a marriage seminar, “Where two or three are gathered together, there is conflict.” This conflict becomes even more prevalent during times of family changes. Where two or three are gathered together, emotions weigh in on the situation, especially a situation of family, congregation, or leadership transitions. However, if one becomes aware of family systems concepts in his or her family,

congregation, or leadership within the church applies them individually and collectively, a positive influence occurs on the system.

### **Problem**

Families and church families always experience different emotions and react in various ways when changes occur. For some families and congregations, the changes are very frequent, while others are less frequent. However, in any change, people experience a range of emotions from absolute elation to absolute despair. If people become aware of their family or church as a family system and practice the concepts and understandings as they apply to themselves individually and collectively, the result will be a positive influence on the function of the family system.

As I reflected over my tenure as an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church, I discovered that my attitude and emotional response or reactivity as a leader to any given situation in the church affected the attitude and emotional well-being of my family, the church leadership, the staff, and the congregation. As John C. Maxwell states, “Leaders are effective because of who they are on the inside—in the qualities that make them up as people.... People have to develop [leadership] traits from the inside out (x).... Everything rises and falls on leadership” (xi). Thus, I discovered that the times when I thought conflict was about me or my leadership, the people’s followership suffered.

In those moments when I became anxious to the point of functioning in a reactionary manner, the congregation displayed uneasiness and anxiousness themselves. When I approached the situation from the family systems perspective, I was able to become a non-anxious presence, a leader who would lead through the storm. This reflection can be illustrated simply in two ways. First, when our little baby daughter fell

and scraped her knee, how we as parents reacted affected our daughter's reaction, either good or bad. Second, when I was a lead air traffic controller in the control tower, how I reacted within an emergency affected the other air traffic controllers and the pilots. Thus, as family systems theory purports, my self-differentiation, or lack thereof, affects my family system, the church family system, the leadership family system, and the like.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact that the understanding and application of the three family systems theory concepts of multi-generational transmission, sibling position, and emotional triangles had on the differentiation of self of the individual participants, the affective change of behavior in relationships among the thirty individual participants, the church staff and leadership, and on the congregational sample of First United Methodist Church (FUMC) Paulsboro, Texas. Furthermore, the study ascertained if the new insights and practices helped participants to practice John Wesley's general rule to *do no harm* to others.

### **Research Questions**

1. What was the understanding or experience of family systems of the participants at FUMC Paulsboro prior to the family systems seminar?
2. What cognitive changes occurred in the understanding and practices of the family systems of the individual participants of FUMC Paulsboro after participating in a family systems seminar and after two months reflection?
3. What affective changes occurred in the participants as a result of this new understanding of multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, sibling position,

and differentiation of self after the family systems seminar and after two months of reflection?

4. How have the new insights and practices helped the participants fulfill John Wesley's general rule to *do no harm* to those with whom they interrelate in their family, leadership, staff, or congregation?

### **Define Terms**

*Church as family systems* relates to the further application of Bowen family systems theory (BFST) into application and practice of family systems in faith-based organizations by Friedman. It is a concept that Friedman develops in *Generation to Generation*. It is also a concept used by Rev. Begthel-Mahle in her presentation of the same to colleagues in the North Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

*Church council* is the basic organizational leadership template established by the United Methodist Church *Book of Discipline* (BOD), which governs the organization and polity of the local church. The church council is comprised of both administrative and ministry directors or committee chairs in a particular local church. Church council refers to Paulsboro FUMC's local church organization that sets the mission and vision of the local congregation to meet the mission of the United Methodist Church as a whole.

The term *staff* refers to both paid employees and volunteers who carry out specific administrative or ministry duties in the daily operation of FUMC to fulfill the mission and vision established by the church council.

This dissertation uses *systemic* in two ways. First, the word means "pertaining to a system; pertaining to or affecting a particular body system" ("Systemic"). Second, the



word refers metaphorically to *affecting the body generally* as pertaining to the body of Christ developed by the Apostle Paul in several of his epistles in the New Testament.

*Do no harm* is a concept developed by John Wesley as one of his general rules for the United Societies. Three general rules Wesley established for moral living of members of his societies: *do no harm, do good, attend to the ordinances of God*. He believed these general rules were fruit unto salvation. One must work according to these three rules because of their saving faith in Jesus Christ:

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, *First*: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:... Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling.... Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation;... Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us. Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:... The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus. (*United Methodist Book of Discipline* par.103)

Bishop Job expounds upon these general rules. He reports that the actions in word and deed are required as a disciple of Jesus Christ toward all humankind. He focuses on three of the examples of Wesley, namely, *uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; doing to others as we would not they should do unto us; and doing what we know is not for the glory of God*.

Bishop Job further interprets and explains the importance of the first rule of *do no harm* that I believe applies to family systems theory concepts used in this project that affects attitude and behavior in interrelationships.

### **Ministry Intervention**

The steps of the ministry intervention were as follows:

1. Completed discussion of the dissertation project with the church council and staff of FUMC Paulsboro 24 July 2008 to explain the vision and purpose of the project;
2. Invitation to the prospective participants in the project via a project invitation letter (see Appendix A);
3. Informed prospective participants at the pre-meeting using the pre-intervention semi-structured interview form (see Appendix D). If the person agreed to the process, then a project participation covenant agreement was signed by both parties (see Appendix B);
4. Completed a pre-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E) during pre-meeting, or if person was unable to attend meeting, participant completed the questionnaire before attending the seminar sessions;
5. Seminar reminder e-mail (see Appendix C) sent one week prior to the first seminar session to each participant;
6. Completed the family systems seminar intervention comprised of four sessions (see Appendix G). The sessions included an overview of family systems and concentrated presentations on the concepts of *differentiation of self*, *multi-generational transmission*, *sibling position*, and *triangulation*, respectively;
7. Completed evaluation of the seminar session using seminar participants' evaluation form (see Appendixes H, I, J, and K) upon completion of each session, respectively;
8. Weekly recorded insights using family systems reflection guide form as a guide (see Appendix M). The eight weekly reflections were completed from the start of the first seminar session. Participants recorded the effects and experiences of the new

awareness of family systems in their own lives and life of the church online utilizing *Survey Monkey*;

9. Completed a post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E) to measure any change or impact on the individual's differentiation of self; and,

10. Participated in a focus group to gather other related affective information not gained from other instruments using questions in Appendix L. Recorded, transcribed, and reviewed the focus group discussion, along with notes taken, to reveal qualitative data.

### **Context**

FUMC Paulsboro is a rural church that had the same pastor appointed for fifteen years. The church's campus is located one block south of the center of the small town of Paulsboro, Texas. A campus composed of several buildings sits on one city block. The church owns additional land and buildings on adjacent blocks for expansion of the church's mission and ministry.

Most of the people of FUMC pride themselves as being United Methodist, and their traditions are deep-seated. The congregation is also a mainstay of the community of Paulsboro with its involvement in the life of the surrounding community. One of their expectations is that pastoral leadership be fully involved in the community.

The church has 574 in membership and an average of 185 in worship in two services on Sunday. In order to gain some knowledge and understanding of the people, I conducted a brief survey of the people using what I termed Pastor's Cultural Survey. The survey required people to enter their names and phone numbers to validate and allow follow-up to the survey information gained. Sixty-six people (11 percent of membership, 29 percent of worship attendees) responded to the survey. The results of the survey

revealed systemic functioning within the church, through the sense of homeostasis, identification of the perceived informal leaders, and scant presentation of the heritage and traditions. Upon receipt of the informal surveys, each respondent was personally thanked in writing for his or her participation.

Furthermore, my arrival into the staff's family system created an imbalance. Changes in staffing in June 2008 brought another family system change, resulting in another imbalance. The new staff team and leadership participated in the intervention to enhance the effectiveness of the leadership and staff.

### **Methodology**

The project used a mixed-methods explanatory (descriptive). The following overview provides a brief explanation of the participants, instrumentation, variables, data collection, and data analysis utilized in the project.

### **Participants**

The literature review provides support that each person within the congregation is part of the church as a family system and, thus, the population. Originally, the sample for the project was members of the FUMC's leadership in the church council and staff church's total leadership and the congregation as a whole. However, due to busy schedules and lack of commitment of the leadership, the sample was expanded to participants invited by letter from 138 households associated with FUMC Paulsboro and a general invitation from the pulpit for two consecutive Sundays prior to the project pre-meeting. Thus, the sample transformed from what Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie identify as "purposive sampling" to "convenience sampling" (76).

## **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation used in the project included a pre-intervention semi-structured interview, a pre-intervention questionnaire, an evaluation of each family systems seminar session, a post-intervention questionnaire, and eight family systems weekly reflections of practice and observation by each participant.

The pre-intervention semi-structured interview form provided both quantitative and qualitative information pertaining to the participants' past understanding and experience of family systems theory.

A pre-intervention questionnaire given prior to the family systems seminar provided four quantitative subscales related to *differentiation of self* from the Differentiation of Self Indicator (DSI; Skowron and Schmitt 221-22). The subscales evaluated were emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others (222).

A family systems seminar evaluation completed after each seminar session provided both quantitative and qualitative information concerning presentation, new understandings, observations, applications, and suggested improvements.

A family systems reflection form for each week of observation, practice, and reflection provided qualitative information of new perspectives and practices experienced over the course of the intervention period.

A post-intervention questionnaire completed after the sixty-day period of reflection at or after the focus group provided information related to change in the participants' differentiation of self.

The focus group provided affective changes in attitudes, emotions, and behavior beyond what could be provided from the post-intervention questionnaires. Furthermore, the focus group provided qualitative data concerning the participants' fulfillment of *do no harm*.

### **Variables**

The independent variable is the family systems seminar and weekly reflections of eight weeks from the start of first seminar session.

The dependent variables are (1) the improvement of the individual participant's differentiation of self and (2) the improvement leadership function and practice of the staff and leadership of FUMC Paulsboro.

The organismic variable of gender may affect the outcome of some of the data of the study due to natural abilities or mental processes of each gender. Such organismic variables may occur but only through observation over the course of the study.

The main area of intervening variables is mortality. This mortality includes six possibilities:

First is nonparticipation in that proposed selected participants may not participate in the study.

Second is the loss of motivation to complete the intervention whereby over the course of the study, participants may lose their motivation to continue with the study at any point of the project's process.

A third mortality variable is loss of motivation to participate in reflection and/or recording reflections. Reflecting and/or recording reflections (i.e., weekly journaling) may be a new concept for the participants' and their motivation to complete the

reflections may wane over time. Furthermore, the loss of motivation to participate in reflection and/or recording reflections may be too emotionally challenging for the individual participants.

The fourth variable is withdrawing or moving. In spite of a written agreement to participate in the study, a participant may withdraw from the study for personal reasons or the participant may move away from the area.

The fifth possible mortal variable is self-reflection avoidance. As the study progresses and intervention of the family systems seminar is completed, a participant may dislike or avoid self-reflection. This avoidance may be from the participant's own anxiety or from pressures from the individual's family system at home.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was interactive through the observation of participants during the seminar sessions. Statistical data included basic demographic data, and quantitative/qualitative data organized and coded into several specific areas determined from questionnaires for the seminar session evaluations, weekly reflections, and focus group discussions.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis occurred after the completion of the various instruments utilized in the study. The processes used in the data collection included data reduction "where the raw data [was] analyzed and reduced to descriptive form" (Greene 145). The data reduction provided coding and categorizing questions into basic themes from the semi-structured interviews, pre/post-intervention questionnaires, seminar session evaluations, weekly reflections, and observation of participants prior to and during the intervention

seminar and during the two-month period following the start of the intervention. Data correlation and comparison was completed to “identify patterns of relationships” (145).

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

This study was primarily a qualitative study with some quantitative data from the study population only. This study may generalize its findings to a greater population of FUMC Paulsboro, but it may not generalize its findings to other churches’ leadership, staff, and congregations.

### **Theological Foundation**

The theological foundation of this project discusses the biblical concept of family systems, family at creation, family in the Old Testament, family in the New Testament, and church as family system.

### **Biblical Concept of Family Systems**

The foundation of family systems, good or bad, prevail throughout the Bible for it tells the ongoing story of a covenant-keeping God wanting a relationship with God’s covenant-breaking people. Therefore, the story of this covenant relationship is one of family. The liturgy of the *Great Thanksgiving in the Service of Word and Table I* reflects this theme of relationship and family. When the liturgy is read each Communion Sunday by the presiding pastor, the liturgy invokes the Holy Spirit upon the elements of the bread and cup and upon the gathered people:

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit *make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world* [emphasis mine], until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. (*United Methodist Book of Worship* 38)



The invocation of the Holy Spirit to bring unity with Christ and one another is a call to become a family in Christ.

### **Family at Creation**

The first creation story in Genesis 1:26 indicates the sense of a relationship. As Wesley writes in his *Explanatory Notes of the Old Testament*, “Let us make man—The three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, consult about it, and concur in it; because man, when he was made, was to be dedicated and devoted to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” (7). Thus, this verse is a reference to the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) at the creation of humanity. It is the relationship to which John the Evangelist alludes in John 1 that Jesus, the Word, was at creation: “In the beginning was the Word.” These references show relationship, which, in turn, shows a sense of family system.

In both the first and second creation stories (Gen. 1 and 2), God creates man in order to have fellowship with him. The creation is one of family. When God creates man and gave him the animals to care for, man was still lonely, and “the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18). Thus, a child of God, Eve is created for another child of God, Adam. The creation of woman brings a foundation of family (Gen. 3:21-25).

God created human beings for fellowship to have a relationship with him. God designed to create families that are in unity with him and one another. God’s intention for all, from the start of creation to the present, is to exist in fellowship with God and one another. Leslie D. Weatherhead asserts that in God’s intentional will God is pouring out goodness to all and the desire to have a love relationship and fellowship with humanity. “The intentional will of God means the way in which God pours himself out in goodness,

such as the true father longs to do for his son” (13). At creation, the writer of Genesis declares, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Therefore, this intentional goodness from God develops a love relationship and fellowship toward humanity that awaits humanity’s response towards God. This interrelation is one of family. Wesley alludes to this interrelation in “Sermon 56 God’s Approbation of His Works”:

Such was the state of the creation, according to the scanty ideas which we can now form concerning it, when its great Author, surveying the whole system at one view, pronounced it “very good.” It was good in the highest degree whereof it was capable, and without any mixture of evil. Every part was exactly suited to the others, and conducive to the good of the whole. There was “a golden chain” (to use the expression of Plato) “let down from the throne of God”; an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest; from dead earth, through fossils, vegetables, animals, to man, created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity (396-97).

Thus, one can readily see God’s intention of a systemic creation that was not just good but very good. All things created to interrelate with one another, and humans as the image of God being in a family relationship of love with God.

Adam and Eve challenge God’s intentional will in Genesis 3 where the story of original sin is revealed. Adam and Eve were created as family to be in fellowship with God, yet God gave free will to Adam and Eve. As a result, they gave into temptation, trying to become as knowledgeable as God, and sinned against God. Their image became distorted and ushered in a family system that has the potential for good and bad, unity or disunity.

### **Family in the Old Testament**

The function of family systems is further evident in the Old Testament. Reflecting on a small sampling of family systems presented through some of the major characters in

Genesis gives support. The following relationships, though not exhaustive, show family systems: Cain and Abel, Noah's family, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers.

Thus, Genesis reveals the validity of family systems.

### **Family in the New Testament**

As one moves to the New Testament, the story of the Holy Family of Mary and Joseph and the birth and rearing of Jesus gives a wonderful example of obedience within a family system (Matthew 1:1-25; Luke 1:26-56; 3:23-38). The interrelationships are not fully developed, but one may surmise that both Mary and Joseph's genealogy and their obedience affect the development of Jesus.

Jesus and his twelve apostles are another example of a family system. The Gospels show the family relationships and roles of the twelve with Jesus and one another. Jesus' ministry brings about interrelation with not only the twelve but also with other disciples who followed him. Reading through the stories, this interaction is fraught with emotions, anxiety, and reactivity. Whether walking along the road, sitting in the Upper Room, riding in the boat and being tossed to and fro in a storm, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, or suffering at the Crucifixion, the family system was at work.

### **Church as Family Systems**

The establishment of the churches, that is, communities of the faith, by the apostles, displays the family of God and the church family. All the nuances and characteristics of family dynamics and interrelations, good and bad, are manifest. The interrelation of individuals within community makes up church as family systems.

Christianity is founded on relationship with Christ and relationship with others. Robert Banks discusses that Paul speaks of freedom of the Christian, a freedom of

“independence,... dependence,... interdependence” (25). This threefold freedom is both cyclical and fluid and necessary to be a complete disciple. Furthermore, the Spirit balances the process. Paul writes, “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (1 Cor. 3:17). Furthermore, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst” (Matt. 18:20), with him in the midst of “independence, dependence, and interdependence.” Banks further states that if one is in Christ, then one is in community. “Embracing the Gospel, then is to enter into community. A person cannot have one without the other” (27). Christianity is not a solitary relationship but rather one in community, and so Christians automatically embody a family system.

This community concept is what Jesus addressed when he prayed among his disciples. Jesus’ prayer as recorded in John 17 is paramount to Jesus’ declaration for community unified in him and one another in the body of Christ, a family system:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that *all of them may be one* [emphasis mine], Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also *be in us* [emphasis mine] so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, *that they may be one as we are one: I in them* [emphasis mine] and you in me. May they *be brought to complete unity* [emphasis mine] to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

As one can readily see, the story of the Bible is a story of the family of God. The interaction of the relationships between God and humanity and humanity and others is foundational to life. Each life lives within a family system and influenced by the system, whether biological family, blended family, the family of God, community, or church as family. No person is solitary, at least not by God’s design, and, therefore, each person plays a role or roles within a system. Therefore, completing a study of the effects of church as family systems with staff and leadership can be very revealing and

transforming for not only the individuals but for the leadership, staff, and church family as a whole.

### **Overview**

Chapter 2 provides the research literature review, which explains the problem and purpose for the ministry intervention. Chapter 3 fully discusses the methodology used in pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention and presents the research design in detail, all supported by previous viable research. Chapter 4 supplies the data collection and analysis of the various instruments used in the project. Chapter 5 provides an extensive discussion of the major findings pertaining to the research questions and their implications. This chapter also relates unexpected observations and submits recommendations to the broader community for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

#### **Purpose**

If members of the family system have a broader understanding of the whole system and its interrelation, the systems' function will improve. Friedman supports the argument that congregations who look at the whole of the system and each person's participation, the system more likely changes. Conversely, he declares, "When one part of that [family system] is treated in isolation from its interconnections with another, as though the problem were solely its own, fundamental change is not likely" (20). In order to have positive change in a situation, one must perceive from the system as whole rather than isolated parts.

This literature review provides a discussion of the background and important foundations from which stem the problem and purpose. I organized the review thematically. The major themes are church as family systems, example of Bowen family systems in action in Genesis, Wesley and family systems, family systems and leadership, family systems theory, recent studies in church-related family systems, and mixed-method explanatory design.

#### **Problem**

Rev. Beghtel-Mahle provided a seminar on church as family systems twice in the past ten years for clergy. The seminars were formatted as six 1 ½ hour sessions. They covered family systems concepts of self-differentiation, emotional triangles, sibling position, boundaries, anxiety, and reactivity. After each completed session, the participants took the new insights and understandings back to their lives and vocations.

We were encouraged to move toward application but had no tracking or follow-up to the effects of the new learning and practice on individual lives and ministry. Developing a process to measure and evaluate such effects in my local congregational leadership became intriguing (Begthel-Mahle).

Part of the underlying characteristic of family systems and understanding its process is the everyday presence of conflict. Conflict and its associated emotion affect how individuals, families, or churches function, whether good or bad. As G. Lloyd Rediger states, “Conflict is present and can be both useful and debilitating” (48). In order to be healthy, dealing with conflict in reputable ways is paramount. As Rediger further states, “Conflict is healthy because it helps keep communication open and honest.... It teaches us how to be a community of faith rather than an artificially homogenous group” (47). Thus, understanding conflict assists pastors and their congregations to be healthier.

One of the underlying emotions prevalent in conflict is anxiety, which has the potential to turn into anger. Unfortunately, sometimes anger becomes uncontrollable and inappropriate and harms, maims, or even kills. This process is termed the *reactivity* of an individual within or to a situation. A personal anecdote explains the process.

During a few of my past tenures as senior pastor at several congregations, I discovered one of the greatest revelations as a leader: How I react in any given situation as a leader affects congregational leadership. I discovered that my level of anxiety and reactivity improves or exacerbates a congregational situation. Exacerbation became very apparent in my last congregation. My elevated reactivity caused a snowball effect on the leadership’s functioning and became detrimental to the congregation’s health and well-being.

Understanding the *emotional unit or system* within a church and its leadership helps to reduce anxiety and improves functionality of the system. Daniel V. Papero explains, “The ability to see the family as an emotional unit or system [where] everyone plays a role ... [rather than] see the problem in another and to miss the part self plays” helps reduce anxiety in the environment (38).

Living within systems presents anxiety in relationships and affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. The same holds true with church leadership. Thus, developing methods to understand and apply concepts of family systems theory assists church leadership to become all God calls it to be. As Lawrence E. Matthews states, “I am convinced that the ability to grasp the [family systems] theory’s different way of thinking is directly related to a persons’ willingness to learn to think differently about him/herself” (434). Therefore, essentially the pastor, church leadership, and staff think differently about themselves through two foci: (1) understanding family systems concepts, and (2) praxis and evaluation of the concepts within the individual and the system.

### **Church as Family Systems**

At the outset when one speaks of the church as family systems, one needs to look at the understanding of the image of church as the family of God. In his book, John Driver investigates and categorizes the biblical images of the church in mission (139-40) and identifies one of the images as the family of God. He declares, “Jesus is the immediate source of the family image for the early church’s understanding of its life and mission; indirectly, its roots are in the [Old Testament]” (142). Thus, Driver speaks of the family image in the Old Testament as one rooted in sociological or political perspective.



The interrelation and interconnection not only occurred within the individual family unit but also expand throughout tribes, clans, household, nation, and nations. He notes, “In ancient Israel, everyone belonged to a family. This was a foundational element in their identity as persons. Therefore, the family was the point of departure for defining community” (142). In defining the community, Driver then purports that Jesus changed the biblical family system from one of ancestry to one of unity in doing the “will of the Father” (143).

Driver later reflects that Jesus’ change of the family system rejected the commonly known true family of the time:

Three alternatives to the true family are explicitly rejected in the Gospel: the biological family (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35), the religious family (3:22-30), and the geographic political family (6:1-6)... In contrast to this, there is a fourth alternative: the messianic community made up of disciples of Jesus who do the will of the Father (3:13-19, 34-35; 6:7-13). (144)

The messianic community of family may have lost its flavor, especially in current times, yet Driver maintains that it may be the metaphor to use in time where family compositions are less and less the biological nuclear family. The interrelationships within the messianic family of God are apparent. The interrelationships are a living system of unity and foundational to the church as family system, a family unified about the will of the Father.

M. Robert Mulholland states that one experiences transformation in one’s life when one does not read Scripture for information but for formation (49-63). Thus, the study of the church as family systems from the biblical perspective not only brings increased knowledge but also should bring transformation of one’s understanding of the created family system of God’s design.

Even the establishment of the churches, communities of the faith, by the Apostles and especially Paul displays a concept of the family of God, the church family. All the nuances and characteristics of family dynamics and interrelations, good and bad, are evident. Accordingly, the faith community becomes a family system in itself. Rick Warren shares this thought in his popular book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Purpose #2 states, “You were formed for God’s family,” where Warren shares that a person connected in Christ understands that love really matters. This love provides a sense of belonging where people experience genuine life in fellowship together. As one reaches out to be healthy within the community, even when wronged, forgiveness and reconciliation may be realized more so than in any other family (119-67).

Furthermore, community describes family systems, especially in the church. Family systems are evident at every level in community. In the interrelation of individuals in community, whether in unity or disunity, many factors of family systems theory apply, so a short discussion on community is important.

In Ephesians 4, Paul speaks of the connectedness of the community being important to its growth and development. He reflects on how the body of Christ (family) connects with Christ and to one another systemically:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:11-13, 16)

Connection to Christ and to one another builds up the church family in love, thus, equipping the church for its work.

Ronald W. Richardson argues that connectedness in the congregation is rooted in Bowen family systems theory and in biblical anthropology. “In the biblical world, individual identity is nearly always derived in part from what he or she belongs to, whether it is occupations, places, families, or tribes.... [The same holds true for] Paul’s first Corinthian letter ... when he describes how we are a part of the body of Christ” (“Bowen Family Systems Theory” 381).

Community is a concept that Jesus proclaimed when he prayed among his disciples. Jesus prayed first for himself, then his disciples, then for all believers in him. Jesus’ prayer as recorded in John 17 is a declaration for community unified in him and one another as the body of Christ:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that *all of them may be one* [emphasis mine], Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also *be in us* [emphasis mine] so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, *that they may be one as we are one: I in them* [emphasis mine] and you in me. May they *be brought to complete unity* [emphasis mine] to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Jesus understood community and the importance of unity and prayed for unity to come to fruition within the community of the body of Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes of this concept of community as in and through Jesus Christ:

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this: We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. (21)

The church as family systems is not only community but also it is an ever-changing system.

Peggy Way relates that the composition of the family systems of the congregation is a mirror image of the various kinds of family systems who are members and constituents of the congregation. She points to the understanding of how the health of a congregation directly relates to the emotional health and function of the participating families. She also refers to “kinship families” from biblical to modern times as part of the chemistry of the congregation:

Various forms of kinship families make up our congregations. Sometimes we forget the great variety of forms, not only of the families living amongst us but also those presented in scripture. There are single person families like, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus. There are families experiencing difficulties, like Joseph and his brothers, or broken families seeking new life, like Naomi and Ruth. There are small families and big, extended families, multi-generational families and childless families. Moreover, family language is integral in faith understandings. God has been addressed as Father, and recently maternal images and names for God have been reclaimed. Many congregations speak of their membership as brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are frequently urged to regard Christians throughout the world as our sisters and brothers. (16)

Way thus speaks of a family language that multiplies beyond a biological family system.

Even though kinship does primarily refer to biological connection, a new approach to *kinship families* applies to congregations. It moves beyond the family composition of the nuclear family of a mother, father, and children or extended family. The kinship can relate to various forms of family for this day and age. However, even with this change, the care of families, whatever their composition, still requires understanding of the interconnection that affects the connectedness of the congregation, the *household of God*.

Craig Van Gelder discusses how the church is a dynamic body created to be vigorous and not static, thus always in flux or changing or morphing. He states, “The church is the creation of the Spirit ... [and] the ongoing creation of the Spirit. The church

is not static. Ecclesiology is not static” (42). Thus, the church by God’s design is a dynamic system.

Friedman confirms this understanding of a dynamic church family through his framework of family systems theory as a template to the family process in congregations. He shares the concept of homeostasis as assistance to understanding the problems of change within the congregation. Homeostasis helps detect answers to “the questions ‘Why now?’ ‘What has gone out of balance?’” (203). He argues that changes in the families of key leaders or in the congregational family will bring issues of imbalance. Friedman cites five changes that may affect the process of the church as family system:

1. Changes in the family of the spiritual leader.
2. Changes in the personal or professional lives of key lay leaders or other congregational members intensely involved in the issues that have arisen.
3. Changes in the long-term constituency of the [church].
4. Changes in the church family’s own professional leadership.
5. Changes in the *extended* [emphasis mine] family of the church hierarchy or the [church] system. (203-04)

Each of these changes has an effect on the dynamics of the church as family system that one affirms as non-static.

### **Example of Bowen’s Family Systems in Genesis**

The concepts of Bowen’s family systems theory arise in Genesis. Genesis 4 describes the story of Cain and Abel. Cain was the firstborn of Adam and Eve followed by his younger brother, Abel. Both Cain and Abel made sacrifices to the Lord. Cain was infuriated when God accepted Abel’s animal gift over Cain’s fruit gift. Cain’s anger overtook him, and he killed his brother, Abel. Cain was then banished by the Lord to a life of wandering, never having a home. This story reveals sibling rivalry, lack of

differentiation, and emotional cutoff to the extreme, producing hatred to the point of death.

Genesis 6-9 tells Noah's story. Noah was righteous before God and was chosen to save his family from a worldwide flood that would kill the evil that overran God's very good creation. In obedience to God, Noah built the ark on dry land and waited patiently for God to fulfill his promise of the flood. Noah cared for his family and ushered them into the ark to save them from the flood. The family systems within Noah's family were most functional, even though considerable details are absent. Noah's family system seems very stable and Noah seems quite self-differentiated.

Genesis 25-27 illustrates the story of Jacob and Esau. This relationship is another case of emotional triangles and sibling rivalry. Jacob's father, Isaac, loved Esau, the oldest son of Isaac, but his mother, Rebekah, loved Jacob. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob and his mother schemed to have the boys' father give Jacob his blessing that was due to his older brother, Esau. The emotional triangles and deception intertwined in the family system were very acute.

Genesis 37-50 explains the lives of Joseph, his father Jacob, and his brothers. Joseph was one of twelve sons. Joseph's father, Jacob, loved Joseph more than his brothers, and his brothers knew it. Joseph dreamed that he would rule over his brothers, and they hated him even more. The brothers disposed of Joseph and lied to their father about a wild beast killing Joseph, yet Joseph became one of the leaders in Pharaoh's house, and God blessed him. When his brothers came to him from their father, Jacob (Israel), they did not know who Joseph was. Joseph revealed himself to his brothers; Joseph forgave them of their wrongdoing.

One sees how the different actions and reactions of the Jacob and Joseph stories show the many faceted functions of family systems. The emotional triangles, self-differentiation, or lack thereof, and generational connections in these stories are evident. Family systems were apparent in Genesis and, in most cases, dysfunctional, but out of the dysfunction, sinful behavior, and raw hatred from selfishness, Genesis tells of forgiveness and reconciliation:

The two longest stories in Genesis concern Jacob (chps. 25-35) and Joseph (chps. 37-50). Both tell of families rent apart by fratricidal hatred. Both tell of the cost to both sides in these disputes. Both climax with moving scenes of forgiveness and reconciliation. (Wenham 29)

The relationships and interactions of Joseph, his father Jacob, and Joseph's brothers are a wonderful example of family systems dynamics.

### **John Wesley and Family Systems**

Wesley never coined the theory of family systems; however, a discussion with Dr. Anthony J. Headley of Asbury Theological Seminary reminded me that Wesley's work in establishing holy clubs, classes, bands, and societies emulated family systems (personal interview). In each of these groups of individuals gathered together to pray for one another, read Scripture, share experiences of the faith, hold one another accountable to spiritual disciplines, and go into the community to serve the poor. These were interactions among members and society where the actions of one affected the interactions of the others and were thus, systemic in nature.

Additionally, Headley relates in *Family Crucible* the presence of family systems in Wesley's life and ministry. Headley does a magnificent job in laying the template of family systems theory upon Wesley's heritage. He analyzes a genogram of four generations of Wesley's family. He speaks of multi-generational transmission of the

clergy vocation and the importance of education passed on through the Wesley family and Wesley's life and ministry in particular (73-79). He notes emotional triangulation among Wesley, his sister Hetty, and his father, Samuel, over Hetty's unacceptable behavior as an unwed mother. Headley points out how Wesley used triangulation as he preached a sermon, condemning his father's shunning of his daughter, Hetty, rather than speaking directly to his father (13).

Furthermore, Headley relates how Wesley's discussion on mental disorders was spiritually based but also systemic in nature. Headley points out, "Such thinking reflects systemic understanding of persons. Christians like others, are soul, mind, and body. Therefore, changes in one area could detract from one's spiritual life" ("Wesley on Depression" 9-10). Even though Wesley did not discover or use terms pertaining to family systems theory, one discovers the presence of family systems within his life and ministry.

### **Family Systems and Leadership**

With the affirmation of church as family systems being dynamic and morphing, the health of a congregation is very much dependent on the health of its leadership. Richardson discusses the healthiness of a church through its leadership. He returns to Bowen and Friedman's emphasis of the church as a family system rather than a group of isolated people and the importance for leadership to realize this process:

Every church is more than a collection of individual members. People in the church, as in any group, are intricately interconnected. They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members. Each person both influences and is influenced by everyone else. (*Creating a Healthier Church* 26)



Richardson believes imperatively that the family system of the church family must be understood in order to obtain a healthy church family.

Steinke reflects in *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* the importance of the *healthy* leaders being responsible for the care and stewardship of a system. The function of the organization is every bit dependent upon the health of the leadership:

Like healthy people, systems promote their health through “responsible and enlightened behavior.” The people who are most in position to enhance the health of a system are precisely those who have been empowered to be responsible, namely the leaders. They are chief stewards; they are the people who are willing to be accountable for the welfare of the system. (iv)

Steinke purports the importance of leadership being good stewards of the health and welfare of the church’s family system. Leaders have the power to improve the family systems’ health or not.

Steinke further addresses interaction within congregational leadership in his book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*. Continuing to draw upon Bowen and Friedman, Steinke shares his knowledge and experience of family systems within congregations during anxious times. He states the following as a foundation:

Influencing my thinking significantly is Bowen Theory, an understanding of what happens when people come together and interact, how they mutually influence each other’s behaviors, how change in one person affects another, and how they create something larger than themselves. (xii)

Steinke uses reflections on Bowen Theory and acknowledges the ongoing work of Friedman’s presentation of family systems toward understanding of congregations.

Steinke shares the importance of leaders understanding their presence, and how their functioning affects the activity of their congregations:

People vary considerably in how they address emotionally challenging events. On the lower (immature) side, people are *reactive* [original emphasis]. They blame more often; they criticize harshly; they take offense easily; they focus on others; they want instant solutions; they cannot see the part they play in problems. On the higher (mature) side, people are more thoughtful and reflective; they act on principle, not instinct; they can stand back and observe. They are *responsive*. Intent and choice characterize their behavior.

The leader's capacity to be in conscious control over (to respond to) automatic functioning (reaction) affects the well-being of the whole community. The leader's "presence" can have a calming influence on reactive behavior. Rather than acting to the reactivity of others, leaders with self-composure and self-awareness both exhibit and elicit a more thoughtful response. (*Congregational Leadership 1*)

Thus, the leader's ability to be a non-anxious presence within the congregation allows the leader to respond thoughtfully to a situation in a clear, reasonable manner rather than from emotional perspective.

Richardson picks up the thought of health and reactivity of the leadership and their effect on the emotional system. He shares the analogy of a balanced mobile:

Emotional systems are like delicately balanced mobiles. Any movement by any one part of the mobile, toward or away from the center of gravity, affects the balance of the whole mobile. This is most true of the parts closest to the top of the mobile (the leadership). (*Creating a Healthier Church 29-30*)

The reactivity of the leadership closest to the top of the organization has the most effect of the life of the emotional system. Thus, leadership has the responsibility to understand family systems and work toward reducing reactivity in a situation in order to maintain stability in the system.

James T. Gottwald further delineates this approach. Gottwald tests the need for self-care by the pastor in order to be a healthy leader in a congregation. He claims that pastors who work through the lens of family systems improve their leadership and provide a means of placing constraints on over-functioning as pastors and thus,

reclaiming one's Sabbath and one's soul. Gottwald's exploration results in proposing eight guidelines for the emotional work of the pastor:

- Nurture self-awareness
- Acknowledge a feeling for what it is
- Discern how to utilize the emotional energy
- Stay connected in appropriate ways
- Sabbath is necessary
- Seek out counseling when needed
- Some emotional issues will never be resolved.
- The need for salvation. (78-80)

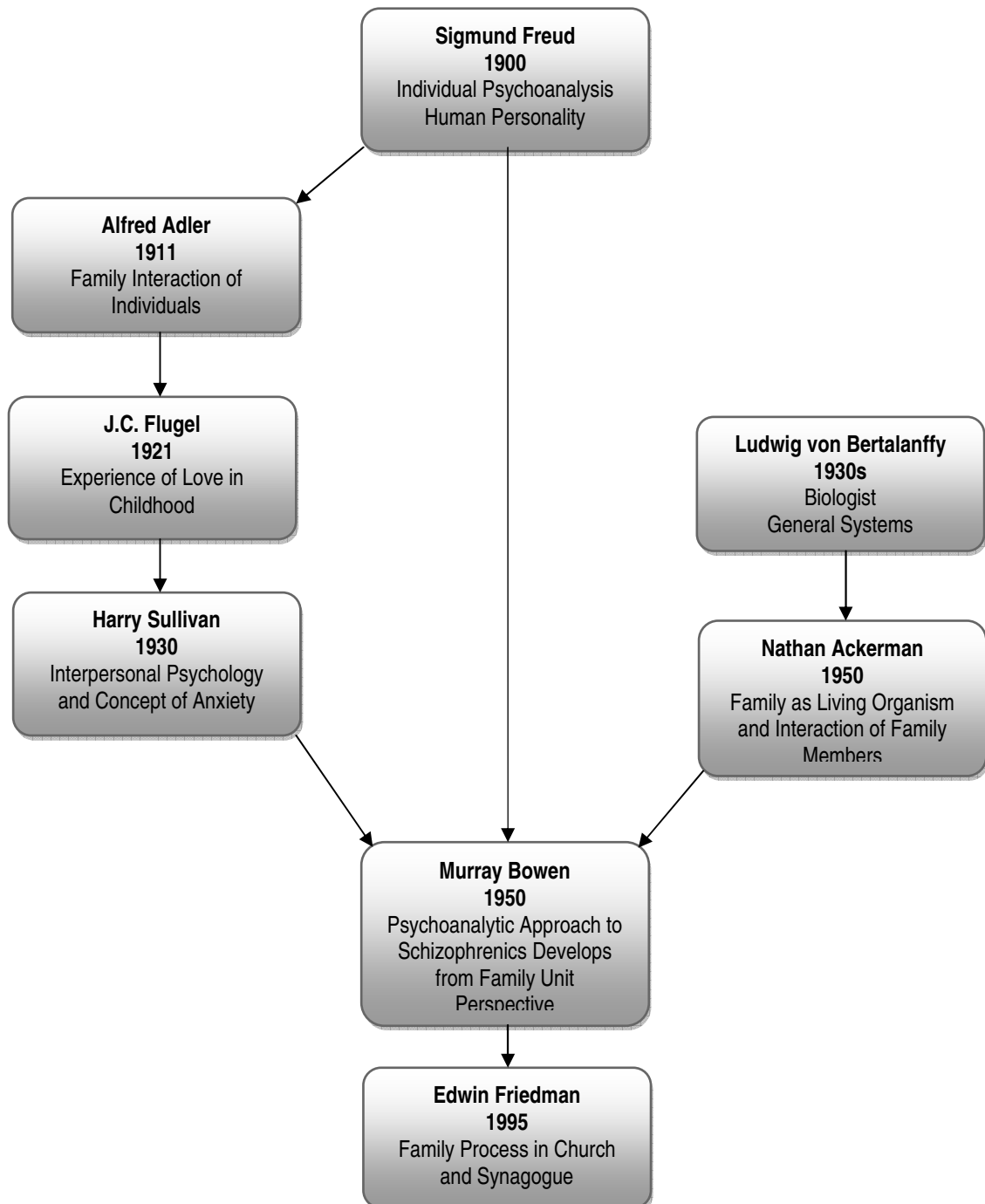
Gottwald declares the importance of how the pastor's self-care affects the reactivity of the pastor, thereby maintaining the balance of the organization. A pastor's reactivity is in direct relationship with the pastor's self-care; as the pastor's self-care improves, so improves the function of the family system.

Leadership and family systems require leaders to become observers of the emotional system of the church family. "As we learn to become good observers of the emotional system at work by our congregation and of who does what, when, where, and how, then we can even learn to predict what might come next" (Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* 38). As a result, "the ability to think systems offers the possibility that symptoms will be taken seriously, not as a problem, but as doorways into understanding the problem" (Matthews 435). Thus, thinking systems and observing through systems perspective improves the function of the congregation.

### **Family Systems Theory**

In order to understand family systems theory one must gain a foundational understanding of its development over the years. Furthermore, an understanding of several of the basic concepts of family systems theory is paramount to support the project design.

This historical overview presents the development in chronological order through various clinicians. Figure 2.1 provides a graphic of the historical development. Because systems have been in operation since creation, a full presentation of the development would be too exhausting. Therefore, the discussion of the historical development comes from the early 1900s through the mid-1990s.



**Figure 2.1. Historical development of family systems.**

## **Sigmund Freud**

In 1900, Sigmund Freud, a neurologist, introduced the practice of psychoanalysis whereby he believed the interpretation of dreams displayed the unconscious mind. He treated his patients with individual therapy to discover the meaning of these dreams; hence, he provided a major theory of the effects of the unconscious mind. Freud interpreted such dreams through the perspective of psychosexuality. Strong sexual drives, even in infancy, were linked to an individual's behavior. Treating the individual privately removed the individual from the influences of the family. Michael P. Nichols and Richard C. Schwartz summarize this understanding:

Freud's discoveries indicted the family, first as a breeding ground for childhood seduction, and later as the agent of cultural repression. Since the natural child is oriented toward pure pleasure, the family must stand for antipleasure.... Given neurotic conflicts were spawned in the family, it seemed only natural to assume that the best way to undo the family's influence was to isolate the family from treatment, to keep its contaminating influence out of the psychoanalytic operating room. (2)

Thus, Freud approached his therapy from the individual perspective and not as one being a part of a family system. However, in 1909, Freud conducted treatment of Little Hans through work with his father that pointed toward the development of family therapy (Bowen 286).

## **Alfred Adler**

Alfred Adler was a colleague of Freud's for eleven years but separated from Freud when Freud would not allow for challenge of some of his psychoanalytic theories. Because of his separation from Freud, Adler became known as a neo-Freudian, where he stressed "social relations rather than biological factors" (Ansbacher and Ansbacher 16). Adler was an individual psychologist who believed that the way one dealt with life was

based on the “the way the power of cooperation has developed in childhood” (Murchison 395). His main stance on psychological theory is that every person is born with inferiority. Either the person strives to overcome the inferiority and succeeds in their endeavors or the person lacks the desire to overcome the inferiority and develops an inferiority complex (Ansbacher and Ansbacher 24-27).

Adler also believed in the importance of parenting and birth order affecting the individual. He identified two basic styles of parenting—pampering and neglect. These methods affect the child in a family and may cause dysfunction of the child in his or her adulthood. Pampering may result in behavior that becomes outright rebellion against society for not meeting the pampered person’s needs. The result of neglect is that the child “has found society cold ... and will expect it always to be cold ... and thus be suspicious of others and unable to trust himself [or herself]” (Ansbacher and Ansbacher 369-71).

He believed birth order affected one’s personality and one’s behavior within the family group. Whether oldest, middle, or youngest child, certain behaviors seem inherent in the child’s birth order (Ansbacher and Ansbacher 376-82). Understanding the effects of birth order influences behavior, thus, Adler began to discover the interrelationship of each person within a family system.

### **John Carl Flügel**

John Carl Flügel was a psychoanalyst who practiced Freud’s theory, analyzing the identifying patients with the presenting problem as the chief subjects with which to work in treatment. “Flügel’s *Psycho-analytic Study of the Family* in 1921, supposed the family problems were to be treated with each individual alone.... [He] worked only with the

identified patient in sharp contrast with today's widespread conviction that the *family* [original emphasis] is the patient" (Wynn 51). However, Flügel acknowledges the greater influence family has on the individual:

Even on a superficial view it is fairly obvious that, under existing social conditions the psychological atmosphere of the home life with the complex emotions and sentiments aroused by, and dependent on, the various family relationships must exercise a very considerable effect on human character and development;... and the individual's outlook and point of view in dealing with many of the most important questions of human existence can be expressed in terms of the position he has taken up ... within the relatively narrow world of the family. (4)

Therefore, Flügel's understanding becomes seminal in the movement from strict Freudian individual psychology toward a sense of family systems where the person's interrelation with family members affects the person's life development and interaction.

### **Harry Sullivan**

Harry Sullivan was an American psychiatrist who was associated with the Chicago College of Medicine and Surgery in 1917. Sullivan developed the interpersonal theory of psychiatry whereby, as one matures from infant to adult, one's interactions with others affect the learning and behavior of the individual. He believed that social interaction was rooted in communication "between two or a few persons to involved problems of communication between larger aggregates of people" (Perry and Gawel xi). Sullivan began to discover as *participant observer* the impact of other interpersonal factors of communication on an individual's mental health, thus leading toward the sense of systems theory influence.

Sullivan borrowed three principles of biology from Seba Eldridge (Perry and Gawel 31-45):



[Namely]... communal existence, functional activity, and organization, [and declares] the fact that the living cannot live when separated from what may be described as their necessary environment.... Organisms live in continuous, communal existence.... Human life ... requires interchange with an environment which includes culture. (31-32)

Sullivan observed this interaction in the effect of anxiety in a mother on the anxiety in her infant as an observed interpersonal interaction between the two (Perry and Gawel 74).

How the mother responds to a situation, not even associated with the infant, transmits to the infant and his or her anxiety. This interaction develops into current-day family systems terms that the reactivity of the mother affects the anxiety and reactivity of the child.

Sullivan's interpersonal psychology of persons interacting with their environment affects who they are. The interconnection between Sullivan and his contemporary, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, is nonexistent. Neither refers to the other. However, Bertalanffy shares that the parallelism of various disciplines, for example, psychology, are congruent with his general systems theory. He states, "Parallelism of general cognitive principles in different fields is even more impressive when one considers the fact that those developments took place in mutual independence and mostly without any knowledge of work and research in other fields" (31). He speaks of scholars' work such as Sullivan's approach having a correlation to von Bertalanffy's general system theory (GST).

### **Ludwig von Bertalanffy**

Ludwig von Bertalanffy was a biologist who developed what became known as general system theory. General system theory "is the formulation of principles that are valid for 'systems' in general, whatever the nature of their component elements and the relations or 'forces' between them.... General system theory, therefore, is a general

science of ‘wholeness’” (37). GST may be defined as “a biological model of living systems as whole entities which maintain themselves through continuous input and output from the environment” (Nichols and Schwartz 591). GST shows the interaction of elements in relationship to one another. One element’s action produces a reaction, and the reaction produces another reaction.

L. von Bertalanffy’s ideas influenced “medicine, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, history, education, philosophy, and biology” (Nichols and Schwartz 101). His perspective was to approach life as a whole and treat it as such, with its interrelationships and patterns of behavior rather than individual parts. A relevant assertion was that not only did the living system and its parts affect one another, but the environment, composed of other systems, shaped the living system. Thus, the beginning understandings of systems involving other disciplines progressed.

### **Nathan Ackerman**

Nathan W. Ackerman professes the importance of treatment of families in the remedy of an individual patient. A person’s unconscious is not developed in a vacuum, that is, in isolation. So then, treating the individual within the context of family treatment is rational. This process is counter to Freud’s followers of treating individuals in isolation from their families and environment (Nichols and Schwartz 227-28). Ackerman’s statement on the interdependence of family members with one another and the environment is foundational:

Thus, family bonds are made up of a fusion of factors: biological, psychological, social, and economic. Biologically, the family serves to perpetuate the species.... Biologically, functions can be fulfilled only in an appropriate organization of social forces. Psychologically, the members of the family are bound by mutual interdependence for the satisfaction of their respective affectional needs. Economically, they are bound by mutual

interdependency for the provision of their material needs.... [The family] is a flexible unit that adapts delicately to influences acting upon it both from without and within. (16-17)

Thus, Ackerman argues that the clinician should study the family as a whole in order to understand the presenting symptoms of the identified patient or child (Nichols and Schwartz 20):

The diagnostic evaluation and therapy of emotional disturbance in a child, viewed as an individual apart from his family environment, is impossible. The proper unit for study and treatment is the child seen as part of the family, the family a part of the child. (Ackerman 24)

Ackerman's assertion signifies that the individual patient is part of a greater whole. He further declares that the emotional balance and interchange affect the homeostasis of the system:

Family relationships regulate the flow of emotion, facilitating some paths of emotional release and inhibiting others.... [T]he stability of the family and that of its members hinges on a delicate pattern of emotional balance and interchange. The behavior of each member is affected by every other. (23)

Ackerman's treatment of the individual patient improved the understanding of the effects of family system.

### **Murray Bowen**

Bowen family systems theory is a complex theory developed from 1954 through 1978. Bowen declares from the outset that family systems theory has been part of humanity for some time. The task of the theorist is discovery:

Family Systems Theory contains no ideas that have not been a part of human experience through the centuries. The task of the theorist is to find the minimal number of congruent pieces from the total bank of human knowledge that fit together to tell a simple story about the nature of man, or whatever other phenomenon he attempts to describe. (xiii)

Bowen process was one of discovery of the concepts to basic interrelationships of humanity that have been existent from the beginning.

Bowen was once a trained individual psychoanalyst but began to see from a family perspective as he treated schizophrenics and their family members. As Bowen proclaims “It is impossible to ignore the relationship system between family members” (104). A “larger family orientation” was evident in his clinical practice (106).

This evidence of the larger family orientation led to Bowen’s seminal research that began at the National Institute of Mental Health where he observed whole families of schizophrenic patients in daily life in a ward at the institute (xiv). Bowen developed the theory into eight primary concepts of understanding gained through observations and reflection during therapeutic sessions and years following. His work moved more towards general family therapy and away from more difficult mental disorders. Furthermore, in developing the concept of “family of origin,” Bowen used his own family of origin as a primary research source (xvi). In 1974, Bowen, in order to eliminate confusion of other systems theory and contrary to his dislike of proper names, reluctantly named his theory Bowen family systems theory or Bowen theory (xvii).

Bowen developed his theory from the premise that “the origin of mental illness was rooted in the psychology of the individual” rather than the “organic etiology” of Freud (Kerr and Bowen 19). Furthermore, even though von Bertalanffy’s GST did not directly influence Bowen, Bowen did claim parallels to the theories (Bowen 358). Bowen saw his theory as one pertaining to the “natural system” of family rather than one more mechanistic (Kerr and Bowen 24).

The family's ability to identify its emotions and how they interact with one another affects the family's emotional modus operandi and connectedness. Papero speaks to the importance of understanding the family's emotions: "The challenge of systems is to understand on an emotional level one's connectedness to family, society, nature, and the earth and to guide oneself responsibly within that awareness" (18). Bowen relates the concepts of family systems as a method of understanding family actions and interactions transmitted over generations:

[The family system] concepts describe some over-all characteristics of human relationships, the functioning within the nuclear family (parents and children), the way emotional problems are transmitted to the next generation, and the transmission patterns over multiple generations,... extended family and the ways family patterns are interlinked with the larger social systems. (306)

The family is thus a flowing, living system made up of individual organisms. The condition and functionality of the family is dependent on the individual members. In any given situation in life's work, the interaction of emotions at every point and level within the family, whether nuclear, extended, or societal, present themselves. As a simple example, one only engages in a political or religious discussion within a system and then experiences the influence, display, and reaction to the emotions. Thus, Bowen declares emotions are always present in any given situation. Genetics, family function, and family environment transmit the emotions of the system.

### **Bowen's Family Systems Concepts**

Bowen identifies eight concepts pertaining to family systems theory. The concepts are triangles, nuclear family emotional process, multi-generational transmission process, family projection process, differentiation of self, emotional cutoff, sibling

position, and emotional process in society. Bowen developed these concepts over the course of the 1950s and 1960s (xiv).

The following discussion limits itself to four concepts utilized in the family systems seminar project intervention. These four concepts are multi-generational transmission, sibling position, triangles, and differentiation.

### **Multi-Generational Transmission Process**

Bowen describes the concept of multi-generational transmission process as "... the over-all pattern of the family projection process as it involves certain children and avoids others and as it proceeds over multiple generations" (308). Multi-generational transmission process is the passing along of the family emotions from one generation to the other. The concept readily reveals itself through the development, interpretation, and dialogue of an emotional family tree (a genogram). The difficulties of the identified patient in the family are seen not just as the person's fault nor the family's fault but as the complex multi-generational sequence in which all family members are actors and reactors in the system. As genes are passed along from generation to generation, so is emotional reactivity. Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen argue that as the multi-generational family understands more concerning its history an improvement in family dynamics and function improve:

If criteria such as birth date, death date, cause of death, occupational history, educational history, health history, marital history, reproductive history, and history of geographical relocations are used to assess the overall life functioning of members of the same multi-generational family, differences in functioning of family members will always be found. (221)

Kerr and Bowen believe performing family of origin work with multi-generational elements provides a foundation for understanding individual behaviors and their effect on the system dynamics.

### **Sibling Position**

Sibling position is a concept whereby the order in which a child is born into the nuclear family develops “fixed characteristics based on the sibling position” (Nichols and Schwartz 369). Bowen adopted the research by Walter Toman in 1961 on sibling position. Bowen states, “Knowledge gained from Toman, as modified in this concept, provides important clues in predicting areas of family strength and weakness for family therapy” (308). Applying the insights of the role of sibling position is complex with many combinations in the full spectrum of associated characteristics. Evaluating sibling position can reveal aspects of personality of individuals and determine interrelations within family and society based on that evaluation. Sibling position can become somewhat a predictor of the family system function (Kerr and Bowen 315).

### **Differentiation of Self**

*Differentiation of self* is Bowen’s term for the foundational concept of the BFST: “It includes principles for estimating the degree of fusion between the intellect and emotions” (306). The term, developed into differentiation or self-differentiation, is the ability of a person to know who he or she is, especially in a stressful situation. It is the maturing of individuals to enter into anxious moments and be able to remain logical and in a non-anxious presence in the situation. Individuals have the ability to maintain their individuality and yet remain connected with the system. Differentiation is looking at the individual’s function within the family system lens. Differentiation is the ability to “be in

the world but not of it.... [Differentiation is] how ... we remain in good emotional contact with our family [system] and remain outside it..." (Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor* 67). Papero describes, "The development of the individual in the family is illustrative of the goal of remaining in viable emotional contact with the family yet retaining the ability to function with responsible autonomy" (47). Thus, differentiation of self, how one is able to be oneself and yet emotionally connected to the system is foundational to family systems theory.

### **Emotional Triangles**

The term emotional triangles "describes the way any three people relate to each other and involve others in the emotional issues between them" (Bowen 306). Emotional triangles are a primary method of interrelation within any system. As stated by Kerr and Bowen, "The triangle is the basic molecule of an emotional system. It is the smallest stable relationship unit" (134). Triangles occur when two people develop a relationship (good or bad), and one person emotionally draws another person into the relationship. In other words, if one person develops a difficulty in a relationship with another, either or both persons emotionally befriend a third party to their side, perspective, or position for bolstering or support. These triangles are part of the nature of human beings (134). Emotional triangles may connect with one another throughout a system and readily transfer through the system. The theory of emotional triangles helps persons discover "*what* and *how* and *when* and *where* [original emphasis] are facts about a relationship that can be observed" (134) and bring understanding of the inter- and intra-workings of the system. With triangles being the basic unit of the emotional system, a relationship



attempts equilibrium, especially in moments of increased anxiety (noting that anxiety readily produces healthy or unhealthy triangles).

### **Edwin Friedman**

Friedman was a family therapist and ordained rabbi who purports that emotional connectedness is not only within the nuclear family and extended family but also between families within a church and the church as a family. Friedman's study, teaching, consulting, and therapeutic practice lends credence to the application of family systems theory to churches. Friedman's work concurs with Kerr: "Organizations or institutions [churches] in human society can be thought of as extensions of families. Families spawn people that work in them, and the organizations usually exist to support the survival and well-being of people and their families" (9).

Friedman helps church leaders support their well-being and the well-being of the families in their congregations and the congregation as a whole. His book is the result of working with church leaders, especially clergy, in discovering the cause of their stress and methods to deal with the stress in ministry. Friedman speaks of the emotional forces behind stress in ministry:

Clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of gender, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in any one of them can produce symptoms in the others, and increased understanding of any one creates more effective functioning in all three.

(1)

So as clergy better understand the emotional forces within their own lives, their own family, the families of their church, and the church family, the functionality of the system improves.

Friedman develops his teaching into four major sections: (1) family theory, (2) families within congregations, (3) congregation as family system, and (4) personal families of clergy. His presentation makes a circle back to the importance of individual leaders understanding their own family systems and how their own reactivity and function affects their leadership in the broader sense of church as family. The result of Friedman's teaching, consultation, and clinical practice helps those such as Richardson, Steinke, and Beghtel-Mahle extend the knowledge base further toward church as family systems and congregational leadership in the stressful, anxious crisis moments of church life.

### **Recent Studies in Church-Related Family Systems**

The following discussion chronologically presents recent studies in church-related family systems published from 1990. The discussion is not exhaustive and not one study reveals the connection of leadership and family systems understanding. However, some of the parts of processes from several dissertations apply to the project of the effects of family systems and church leadership. The following discussion lends support for the purpose of the study presented by this dissertation.

In 1990, Richard R. Neil completed a study with six elders in the Presbyterian (USA) session that was composed of a pre- and post-intervention attitude survey. The intervention was composed of two six-hour workshops and eight 1½ hour meetings that taught seven family systems concepts to gain new perspectives and understanding of belonging in a family system. However, Neil's study revealed no significant change in attitudes of the participants. He discovered rather a resistance to family systems process and much anxiety over dealing with conflict (132). Even though Neil believed his study

failed and seemed ineffective, he suggests that the study be limited to three family systems concepts (137). His overall recommendation was not to duplicate his process but to build upon the experience (138).

Neil provides a possible template for church as family systems seminar proposed in this dissertation but reduces it down to a total of ten hours. Limiting the seminar to three or four concepts of family systems, in conjunction with biblical foundation and team-building exercises should accomplish the task.

In 1994, Boyd M. Sawyer designed a project to develop leadership skills using Friedman's understanding of family systems. Sawyer used the congregant's genogram and discussion of the history of the church member interrelationships in developing the leadership of himself as a local pastor. He discovered the history of the church through various cottage meetings. He also used a self-selected sample of the church's adult choir for the project. The project seemed incomplete and Sawyer did not identify variables. Sawyer found that family systems approach to leadership can have a positive effect on leadership, but to see the results takes more time, effort, and patience. Sawyer did an adequate job in evaluating the history of the local congregation he served and in using the genogram; however, the leadership practices seemed disconnected from the population and sample.

In 1996, James G. Nunn completed an extensive project to explore the relationships between perceptions of family system and spiritual well-being. His literature review provides a full spectrum of psychological, theological, and spiritual studies. An extensive discussion on the Trinity was foundational to the theological perspective. "Just as the essence of Trinitarian theology is relational, so also the intrinsic

nature of family life is relational” (81). Nunn sees Trinity’s family system as a foreshadow and model for the nature of family systems.

Nunn gave particular emphasis to Beaver’s model and administered the Self-Report Family Inventory (SFI) and Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) to evaluate the effect spirituality has on the family system. He discovered “positive correlations between perceptions of family system and perceptions of spiritual well-being” (Abstract). Nunn’s discovery infers that spiritual well-being not only positively correlates with an individual’s family but also with an individual’s leadership function in the church.

In 1998, Paul D. Lawson did a study combining centering prayer with systems theory to improve the function and health of a church environment. He discovered how a congregation’s health is relative to the relationship interaction of individuals. He declared that centering prayer can reduce anxiety, and, coupled with systems theory, congregations become healthier.

In 1998, Robert P. Shoesmith completed a study using a sample of leadership teams from four separate American Baptist congregations. The purpose of the study uses systems theory to “bring a more holistic understanding and approach to congregational issues and develop a systems model for their church [AB church] through participation in a systems analysis workshop” (1-1). Shoesmith had successful results for the sample population. He evaluated and reflected using his purpose statement broken into segments. A systems self-discovery questionnaire adapted from an existing questionnaire and a new questionnaire was applied to the sample leadership teams.

Shoesmith had three sessions with the sample group. He used two questionnaires completed by the participants in the first session. He compiled and analyzed the

questionnaires, and then sessions two and three were completed. He utilized written and oral evaluations of the participants that brought the following conclusion:

The change from the linear mind set to systemic thinking process requires a metanoia—conversion experience for many. And it may also require a personal or congregational crisis and the failure of the linear approach to make openness to such a shift of mind possible for some. (5-6)

Thus, Shoemith discovered the necessity of a conversion, a change of one's mind-set, toward systems thinking and practice.

In 1999, William D. Coker completed a study to affirm that when leadership views its congregation through family systems perspective, the congregation becomes spiritually renewed. This extensive study included a completed evaluation with a full year of practice of family systems concepts. Coker combined parlor meeting's evaluation of the function of the church with a training seminar of the elders of the church. The elders completed a Congregational Systems Inventory both pre- and post-intervention while Coker evaluated the self-differentiation of himself as pastor.

The major findings of the study were as follows:

- Family systems processes reduced anxiety and produced a sense of enjoyment in meetings;
- Self-differentiation of the pastor and being a non-anxious presence helped the congregation work through conflict and reduce the potential for new conflict; and,
- Understanding of emotional triangles and determination of the elders not to participate in triangles and direct people to deal directly one-on-one in their difficulty with another brought about resolve.

George Parsons and Speed B. Leas present an evaluative process for understanding a congregation's family system. In their book *Understanding Your*

*Congregation as a System: The Manual*, they discuss the usefulness of administering the “*Congregational Systems Inventory (CSI)*” to staff and leadership of a congregation. They declare that the use of this tool and evaluation of the findings help leadership to understand their family systems process of dealing with change. They argue that the CSI “is particularly useful when congregations are coping with numerical growth,... numerical decline,... anticipating a building or capital campaign,... moving through a pastoral transition,... preparing long-range planning,... anticipating staff changes,... recovering from an organizational trauma” (vii-viii). Therefore, Parsons and Leas’ approach identifies the necessity of congregations understanding their coping and leadership processes before entering into major change events in the church.

The authors proclaim that effective churches have conflict and tension, but how they healthily process the conflict and tension affords the outcome and growth of the church and its leadership.

Patrick J. Ducklow completed an extensive narrative study, presenting theology, psychology, and Bowen family systems theory in dealing with chronic church conflict. Ducklow used a self-selected sample of senior pastors from several denominations in Vancouver, British Columbia, that declared they either were in the midst of a chronic conflict of two years or more or previously pastored a church with chronic conflict.

Ducklow provided a one-day coaching seminar to participants along with pre- and post-seminar protocol interviews. The pre-seminar protocol provided narrative from the participants concerning their church’s chronic conflict situation, while the post-seminar protocol utilized differentiation scale, non-anxious presence self-report, metaphoric

description of the participants' involvement in the conflict, and strategies of detriangulation used by the participants (208-14).

Ducklow, by his own admission, states that the study was not empirical in nature but narrative. He also admits to some deficiencies in the study; however, the development of his interview form, differentiation scale, and evaluation form for the seminar lend to the development of the same for this project. Ducklow's sample teaching outline on "Emotional Triangles" and "Line of Differentiation" (221-28) informs two of the concepts selected for this project's intervention. Furthermore, Ducklow's "Glossary: Terms Used in Family Systems Theory" provides a wonderful handout of definitions for the participants of the intervention's seminar.

In 2002, Michael B. Palwelke explored and evaluated the development of a leadership-training program that would equip new and existing leaders to think, learn, and function systemically in the context of the local church. Palwelke used ninety leaders from four congregations as the sample for the intervention that was comprised of a seminar, questionnaires, and evaluations. His major findings were "the most significant value: the participants were given a new systems paradigm for viewing organizational design, health, and operation.... For these principles to be truly embraced by the leaders of ... other churches it will be required that the senior leader further deepen the training as well as continuously promote, explain, and apply the concepts introduced" (209). Palwelke confirms the need for senior leadership to function through and teach family systems continuously to their constituency.

### **Mixed-Methods Explanatory Design**

This project used a mixed-methods explanatory design for research, using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative instruments. As Tashakkori and Teddlie summarize, “Mixed method studies are those that combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study or multi-phased study” (18). Furthermore, the explanatory design portion presents a synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative data to show a change in understanding, practice, and/or behavior of participants after participating in the intervention.

Additionally, the design was primarily a “parallel/simultaneous mixed method design, [where the data was] collected and analyzed in complementary manner” (Tashakkori and Teddlie 47). Each of the instruments explains the design.

The *pre-intervention interview form* quantified the demographics of the participants while open-ended responses added to each participant’s baseline of understanding and to the sample group as a whole.

The *seminar session evaluations* provided data for effectiveness of the seminar, helpfulness of various teaching methods used in the seminar, and meaningfulness of the particular concept to life, leadership, and service. General comments provided qualitative data of insights, understandings, or knowledge gained from the seminar session that helped the participants better serve as a part of their families, FUMC, church staff, or church leadership.

The weekly *family systems reflection guides* provided qualitative data concerning the prevalence of the four family systems concepts of differentiation of self, multi-generational transmission, sibling position, and triangulation in the participants’ family



life, life of the congregation, work, or church leadership for the previous week.

Furthermore, the reflection guide provided a weekly awareness of emotion triangles working in the participants' family, church, staff, or church leadership.

The *focus group discussion* provided additional qualitative data concerning the affective changes in emotions, feelings, and behaviors in the persons' interrelationships across the family systems spectrum of life, leadership, staff, and congregation as a whole.

As one can see, the instruments provided a plethora of data that assisted "the researcher to capitalize on the strengths of each method ... [and] look at [family systems in life, church, staff, and leadership] from a variety of perspectives, for more comprehensive understanding" (Wiersma and Jurs 276). The mixed-methods explanatory design fits the research of this project.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The historical overview describes a cursory development of family systems through the threads of Freud's individual psychoanalysis, Adler's family interaction of individuals, Flugel's experience of love in childhood, Sullivan's interpersonal psychology, von Bertalanffy's general systems theory, Ackerman's family as living organism, and interaction of family members. Bowen braided these threads into his family systems theory.

Friedman, a student of Bowen, realized that Bowen's theory had viable application to churches and synagogues beyond the family of origin or extended family. Friedman applied the theory by looking at the interweaving of three family systems at work in the church: the individual family unit in a congregation, the aggregate of these family units functioning as a church family, and the effects of family of origin and

current family of the pastor of the congregation. If one understands these three facets of this systemic intermingling, one will be a better pastor and leader and help the church function through the perspective of family systems.

A discussion on church as family system reflects on community, unity, and relationship with Christ and with others. Jesus understood systems through community and prayed for unity within the family of the apostles, disciples, and all believers. Bonhoeffer declares that belonging to Christ and one another was the simple foundation of community. The church as family system is dynamic and ever changing, going out of balance and striving to obtain and maintain homeostasis.

Leadership can become more functional and efficient with the understanding of family systems theory concepts. Richardson and Steinke provide a new understanding of the health of the leadership of a church and how it affects the health of the congregation. The more the leaders, especially the pastor, are able to be a non-anxious presence in the midst of conflict, the better they are at bringing stability and movement toward homeostasis. The leaders have the responsibility to be good stewards of the welfare of the church system.

The literature also provided the foundation for applying family systems theory to church leadership. Each of the recent studies gave witness to the theory's effect on various situations in a church setting. The studies included attitude, leadership skills, spiritual well-being, combining centering prayer with systems theory to improve the function and health of a church environment, a systems model of leadership, spiritual renewal, dealing with chronic church conflict, and thinking, learning, and functioning systemically in the context of the local church.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact that the understanding and application of the three family systems theory concepts of multi-generational transmission, sibling position, and emotional triangles had on the differentiation of self of the individual participants, the affective change of behavior in relationships among the individual participants, the church staff and leadership, and on the congregation sample of First United Methodist Church (FUMC) Paulsboro, Texas. Furthermore, the study ascertained if the new insights and practices helped participants to fulfill Wesley's general rule to *do no harm* to others.

#### **Research Questions**

Four major research questions provided a guide to explore the purpose of this study.

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

What was the understanding or experience of family systems of the participants at FUMC Paulsboro prior to the family systems seminar?

Every church committee or board has a modus operandi that it functions within to carry out its duties and responsibilities. The operating practices are either formal or informal. Regardless of what congregation with which a new pastor connects, a learning curve of awareness is necessary to understand how the church's leadership fulfills its duties and responsibilities. Both quantitative and qualitative data gathered and reported

from the pre-intervention semi-structured interview (see Appendix D) and pre-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E) provided the answer to this question.

### **Research Question #2**

What cognitive changes occurred in the understanding and practices of the family systems of the individual participants of FUMC Paulsboro after participating in a family systems seminar and after two months reflection?

The ministry intervention consisted of a two-part process. First, thirty members and constituents of FUMC Paulsboro participated in a family systems seminar. The seminar consisted of sessions comprised of lecture, group discussion, exercises to evaluate the individual's family system and the church's family system, and times of devotion and prayer interspersed throughout. The seminars consisted for four sessions (see Appendix G). The first was a 3.5-hour session on a Saturday followed by three two-hour sessions each on the following Tuesday, Saturday, and Tuesday in the succeeding two weeks.

Second, the participants observed the new concepts in their daily lives for a total of sixty days from the start of the seminar. During this time period, the participants reflected and recorded discoveries and experiences of family systems in their families, staff, leadership, or congregation and completed a family systems reflection guide each week for eight weeks (see Appendix M).

### **Research Question #3**

What affective changes occurred in the participants as a result of this new understanding of multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, sibling position,

and differentiation of self after the family systems seminar and after two months of reflection?

The elements of the seminar and reflections made an impact on the participants and subsequently affected the relationships of the participants' families, staff, leadership, and/or congregation. The session evaluations (see Appendixes L, M, and N), pre/post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E), and family systems weekly reflections (see Appendix R) provided qualitative and quantitative data and information concerning this impact.

#### **Research Question #4**

How have the new insights and practices helped the participants fulfill Wesley's general rule to *do no harm* to those with whom they interrelate in their family, leadership, staff, or congregation?

Some of the responses in the weekly family systems reflection guides (see Appendix M) and responses and discussion in the focus group (see Appendixes L and N) provided data to answer this question.

#### **Participants**

The population was the congregation of FUMC Paulsboro as a whole, its leadership, and staff. The sample of the participants was convenience-based due to availability and willingness to participate. Each prospective participant received a project invitation letter (see Appendix A), explaining the purpose of the project and the importance of his or her participation in the same. Of the 138 households invited via mail, and a general announcement from the pulpit for two Sundays, thirty people agreed to participate.

At a project/dissertation pre-meeting (see Appendix G), participants received a reading of Ephesians 4:1-16 concerning the body of Christ, a personal anecdote of family systems, and a basic overview of the project. A discussion followed concerning the participants' handout binders, assignment of participant number, pre-intervention semi-structured interview form (see Appendix D), project participation covenant form (see Appendix B), pre-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E), glossary of terms (see Appendix F), seminar syllabi (see Appendix G), session and weekly evaluation forms (see Appendixes H, I, J, and K), and instructions on use of *Survey Monkey*.

If the prospective participant agreed to participation, the individual and I signed a project participation covenant agreement (see Appendix B). Each participant received a random four-digit identification number between 4000 and 4999 inclusive from "Random Integer Generator."

### **Instrumentation**

The project used a mixed-methods explanatory design, including six research instruments that provide both quantitative and qualitative data: (1) pre-intervention semi-structured interview, (2) congregational systems inventory, (3) pre-intervention questionnaire, (4) seminar session participant's evaluation, (5) post-intervention questionnaire, (6) family systems reflection guide, and (7) focus group questionnaire. Each of the instruments were compared to proper questionnaire research design utilizing Mildred L Patten's book *Questionnaire Research*. Further review occurred during pretesting.

### **Pre-Intervention Semi-Structured Interview**

The participant completed a semi-structured interview at the pre-meeting using the form in Appendix D as a guide. The interview guide included demographic and grand tour questions and single yes/no items in order to gain a baseline concerning the family systems of the prospective participant. Gathered information from the interviews was thematically categorized.

### **Pre-Intervention Questionnaire**

The pre-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E) was the *Differentiation of Self Inventory* (DSI) developed by Elizabeth A. Skowron and Myrna L. Friedlander in 1998. This DSI portion was originally forty-three statements rated by the participant on a six-point Likert scale. The DSI provided data for not only the individual test participant's differentiation of self. It also assesses "four dimensions of differentiation" as four subscales: emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others (214). Each subscale is a factor of one's differentiation of self.

In 2003, after utilization of the DSI by experts in family therapy, Skowron and Thomas A. Schmitt revised the DSI to include forty-six statements rated in the same manner. They reported their revised findings and improved reliability and validity. The pre-intervention questionnaire contains the revised DSI (221-22).

**Validity.** Validity of the DSI portion of the pre-intervention questionnaire was high as reported by Skowron and Friedlander. The DSI validity was higher after revision of the inventory with improvement on fusion with others subscales (Skowron and Schmitt 238).

**Reliability.** The reliability of the DSI used as published by Skowron and Friedlander, and later revised and tested by Skowron and Schmitt, was high. Richard Charles presents the comparison of eight empirical research articles published in the 1990s where Bowen family system theory concepts were tested. Charles declares that the purpose, research questions, and results had many strengths and no weaknesses (287-88).

Peter J. Jankowski and Marsha Vaughn utilized Skowron's DSI as one of their instruments when they explored the relationships between an individual's interpersonal functioning, perceived spirituality, and selected spiritual practices. They espouse that differentiation of self and spiritual development positively correlate as one exercises certain spiritual practices (82). They conclude that spiritual practices do affect differentiation of self, even though other factors that may affect differentiation of self need research (94).

For the purpose of this project, the forty-six item DSI-R underwent local evaluation by five laypeople to evaluate it for clarity and consistency.

### **Seminar Session Participant's Evaluation**

Each participant evaluated each session of the seminar using the seminar session participant's evaluation (see Appendixes H, I, J, and K). The evaluation forms were researcher-designed and based on evaluations utilized by William Harvey Jenkins, Jr., Coker, and Ducklow. The evaluation provided both quantitative responses on a six-point Likert scale and qualitative responses from open-ended questions. The evaluations were reviewed immediately following their completion. Information or suggestions gathered from the evaluation comments provided adjustments in the process of succeeding sessions.



### **Family Systems Reflection Guide**

Each participant completed a weekly family systems reflection utilizing Appendix M as a guide. The data was categorized into themes.

### **Post-Intervention Questionnaire**

After completion of a sixty-day practice and reflection term, and either at or after the focus group, participants completed a post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix E). The questionnaire contained the same forty-six statements rated on a six-point Likert scale as previously completed by the participant prior to the intervention. Both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were entered into a spreadsheet for comparison and analysis.

### **Focus Group**

A focus group gathered affective data concerning participant opinions, emotions, and feelings that were not previously gained using questions in Appendixes L and N. The hosts provided a brunch for the group and, after a few introductory words, a devotional, and opening prayer. The facilitator then led the “funnel-based” focus group through a series of eight questions where the designed questions moved from a broad perspective to a more narrow and focused perspective (Morgan 41) and used question structure guidelines developed by Richard. A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey (43-46).

The focus group was for every participant in the project; however, only eleven participants attended. Each person responded to the first discussion question in order to open the discussion and help every other person feel comfortable in the group (Morgan 49) even though the participants had been together during the seminar sessions. The responses were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed along with notes taken at the focus

group. Furthermore, those who were unable to attend the focus group were asked to complete the focus group questionnaire (see Appendix N) used in the focus group. Furthermore, the written responses were added to the transcription of the focus group in a color code for correlation and ease of identification of the responses from both sources for gathering the affective data.

### **Variables**

The *independent variable* was the project intervention comprised of (1) family systems and leadership seminar with three sessions and (2) sixty days of reflection.

The study produced two *dependent variables*. First was the individual's change in function in leadership of FUMC Paulsboro measured by interviews, questionnaires, evaluations, and reflections. Second was the overall change in the function of the leadership of FUMC Paulsboro as measured by the DSI, questionnaires, evaluations, and reflections.

The *intervening variable* for this project was mortality with six possibilities:

- *Nonparticipation*—Nonparticipation occurs when prospective participants decide not to participate due to the nature of the project or the amount of time necessary away from their normal daily routine.
- *Loss of motivation to stay in the program*—Loss of motivation to stay in the program occurs when some of the participants who agree to the program may lose interest in the process at any point.
- *Person moving*—person moving is the possibility that some participants may move from the area between selection and completion of the project. Information and data gathered to the point of disenrollment are reflected in Chapters 4 and 5.

- *Self-reflection avoidance*—Self-reflection avoidance is the possibility that persons in the sample may decide that self-reflection is too difficult, challenging, or threatening for the individual. Self-reflection avoidance could occur at any point prior to or during the project.
- *Poor seminar presentation/process*—Poor seminar presentation/process refers to teaching methods that I use may not provide the best opportunity for learning and application of family systems concepts
- *Participant learning style*—Participant learning style refers to a participant's primary learning style that may not be met in the process of the seminar presentations and interactions.

### **Data Collection**

Each participant functions within a family system, so gathering basic demographic information of age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, graduate and post-graduate majors, occupation, and marital status was part of the development of the understanding of the family system. Furthermore, a person's role in the church and length of time associated with FUMC added information for the church family system. Data was categorized, evaluated, and correlated using categories to assist in the data reduction.

After the collection, categorization, and correlation of the data, general themes became evident and identified for the evaluation process.

After the evaluation of the data, identification of relationships of the general themes were established and correlated with their effects on the participants' functionality within the leadership and staff.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis occurred after gathering all of the quantitative data provided by various instruments utilized in the study. James Clark, PhD, provided assistance with development and analysis of the pre/post-intervention questionnaire and comparisons of the same. Furthermore, seminar session evaluations, pre-intervention semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, and weekly family systems reflection guides were completed using Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey provided initial basic quantitative analysis of data.

Qualitative data analysis occurred through review, organize, and categorize open-ended responses to particular questions and the transcript of the focus group discussion as pertinent to answer the four research questions. Find and replace function of *Microsoft Word and Excel* provided the information on word searches to provide general themes of qualitative data.

### **Ethics**

In order to protect the rights of privacy for each participant, we signed a covenant of confidentiality outlining the use and disposition of all written and electronic material concerning the individual participants. All materials were secured at my home office and my laptop computer until publication of the dissertation at Asbury Theological Seminary.

### **Anonymity Assurance**

Each participant received a random four-digit identification number. The participant affixed the number to each instrument completed. The number system allowed for anonymity of names. The names used in the data reduction process or in data

reporting and evaluation, or other times in this dissertation, were changed to protect the individual.

The name of the congregation, First United Methodist Church Paulsboro, is fictitious in order to help protect the persons in that congregation who were part of the project and dissertation.

### **Data Reporting**

Chapter 4 reports the findings and Chapter 5 discusses the major findings from the data, maintaining participants' anonymity. Reporting of the data and major findings of the dissertation were provided to all the participants after the dissertation defense approval and final publication.

### **Disposition of Materials**

After completion and publication of the dissertation by Asbury Theological Seminary, I gathered all written materials secured at my home office. Each participant received all rightful original written materials after completion and publication of the dissertation. If the participant did not want the subject materials, the said materials were shredded.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the project intervention. One hundred, thirty-eight households (that included at least one adult) of active members or constituents of FUMC Paulsboro received an invitation letter to participate in the project (see Appendix A). Furthermore, the congregation received a general invitation to participate from the pulpit for the two preceding Sundays of the project start. Thirty adults responded to the invitation. Of the thirty respondents, twenty-one attended the pre-meeting. However, all thirty participants completed the semi-structured interview form (see Appendix D), and pre-intervention questionnaire (DSI; see Appendix E) and signed the covenant form (see Appendix B) prior to the first seminar session.

Those who did not attend the orientation missed the interaction with the other group participants. The absent individuals missed the dialogue concerning the purpose and process of the project and the questions and answers shared. Fielding the questions and providing the introductory information made gathering of basic information more convenient for all of the attendees and the facilitator.

Each participant received a project binder that contained the project schedule, the pre-intervention interview form and demographics, the seminar session syllabi, the seminar session evaluation forms, the weekly reflection guide forms, and a glossary of terms. Participants received other handouts during the seminar sessions.

Each participant had twenty-two tasks to complete. The tasks included attending the pre-meeting, attending four seminar sessions and a focus group, along with

completing the interview form, covenant form, pre-intervention questionnaire, four seminar session evaluations, eight weekly family systems reflection guides, and a post-intervention questionnaire.

The completion of each task was consistent until the fifth week when the seminar sessions finished along with four weekly reflections. At that point, participation dropped (see Table 4.1). The average completion of all the tasks was seventeen (79 percent). Only four participants completed all the project tasks, while two dropped out approximately halfway through due to illness and/or death. Furthermore, one discontinued after eight tasks due to surgery, and one, after ten tasks, due to work requirements.

As noted earlier in Chapter 3, the main intervening variable was *mortality*. From the beginning of the intervention to the final focus group, certain mortality occurred. First, was *withdrawal* due to one participant becoming seriously ill with cancer and dying during the course of the project and the person's spouse withdrawing at the same point. Second, *loss of motivation to complete* was a possibility with two participants as their participation waned. Third, *loss of motivation to participate in reflection and/or recording of reflections* occurred with individuals as the project progressed toward finality. At each step a few seemed to lose interest and did not complete the assigned tasks. Furthermore, several did not complete the weekly reflection guides. Fourth, *self-reflection avoidance* may have been the matter for two individuals as we began to reflect on our own differentiation of self, multi-generational transmission, sibling position, and emotional triangles.

**Table 4.1. Project Task Completion Rates**

Meetings/Seminars								
	Pre-meeting 9/9/2010	1st Session	2nd Session	3rd Session	4th Session	Focus Group		
<i>n</i> completed	21	23	26	26	24	20		
% completed	70	77	87	87	80	67		
Surveys/Evaluations/Reflections								
	Pre-Intervent'n Quest (DSI)	Interview Form	Covenant Form	1st Session Eval	2nd Session Eval	3rd Session Eval	4th Session Eval	Post-Intervent'n Quest (DSI)
<i>n</i> completed	30	30	30	28	29	28	25	19
% completed	100	100	100	93	97	93	83	63
	Reflect 9/25 2010	Reflect 10/2 2010	Reflect 10/9 2010	Reflect 10/16 2010	Reflect 10/23 2010	Reflect 10/30 2010	Reflect 11/6 2010	Reflect 11/13 2010
<i>n</i> completed	25	20	25	21	21	18	18	16
% completed	83	67	83	70	70	60	60	53

The following discussion includes data for description of the participants, general seminar finding, and data pertaining to each of the four research questions. Each section includes a report of data, critical analysis of data, and interpretation of findings.

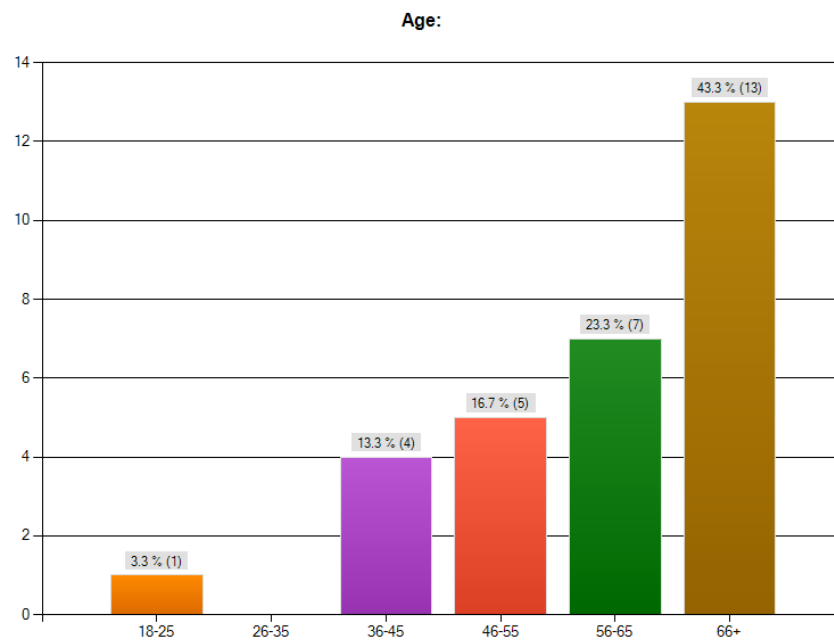
### **Description of Participants**

This description of participants of the project includes basic demographics comprised of age, educational degree completed, marital status, current employment, years associated with FUMC, and primary role in FUMC.



## Report of Data

Figure 4.1 provides the composition of the thirty participants according to *age*. The greatest participation, thirteen (43.3 percent), was people at age 66+, with seven (23.3 percent) at age 56-65, five (16.7 percent) at age 46-55, four (13.3 percent) at age 36-45, none at age 26-35, and one (3.3 percent) at age 18-25.



**Figure 4.1. Age (N=30).**

The participating group's *gender* breakdown was twenty females (66.7 percent) and ten males (33.3 percent). Their *ethnicity* comprised of twenty-eight European-Americans and two Native Americans.

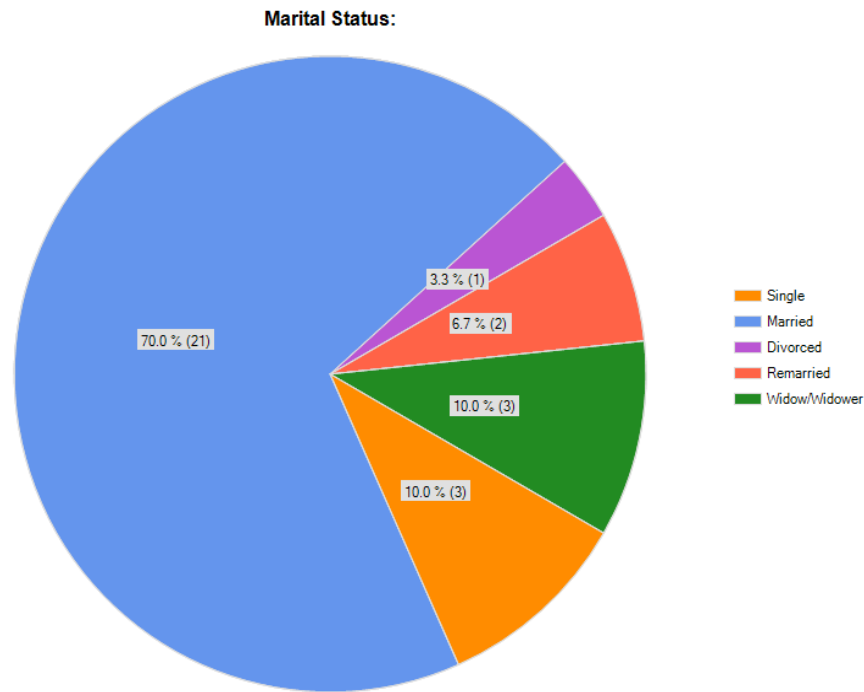
Table 4.2<sup>1</sup> provides the educational level completed by the participants. No participant had less than a high school diploma. The group of participants were well educated and spanning the full spectrum of accomplishment with the majority (87 percent) receiving education beyond a high school diploma. A simple majority (57 percent) received a bachelor's degree or higher.

**Table 4.2. Participant Educational Degree Completed (N=30)**

<b>Degree Completed</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
High school	4	13
Vocational/Technical	2	7
Some college	4	13
Associate	3	10
Bachelor	11	37
Master	5	17
Doctorate	1	3

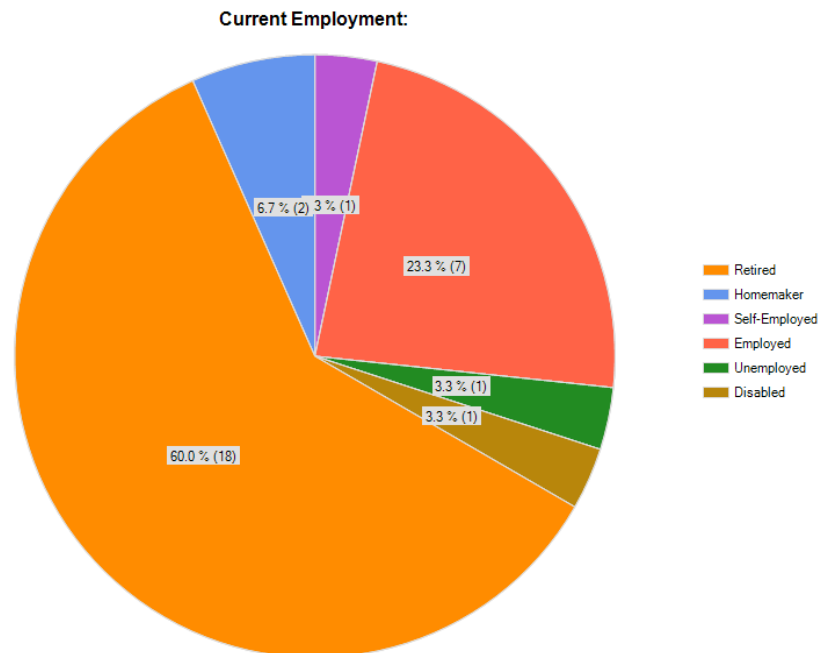
Figure 4.2 indicates that the majority of participants were married (21 or 70.0 percent). The second greatest number was single or widow/widower with three participants (10 percent) each. The remainder of the participants' marital status was remarried (2 or 6.7 percent) with one (3.3 percent) divorced.

<sup>1</sup> The original questionnaire provided educational levels in increments of <12 years, 12 years, 14 years, 16 years, graduate, and post-graduate. Each participant verified his or her completed level of education via e-mail after the project completion to clarify the information provided in Table 4.2.



**Figure 4.2. Marital status (N=30).**

Figure 4.3 shows that the greatest number of participants, eighteen (60.0 percent), was *retired*, while employed was the second greatest number at seven participants (23.3 percent). The remainder of the participants was two homemakers (6.7 percent) and one self-employed/unemployed/disabled (3.0 percent) each.



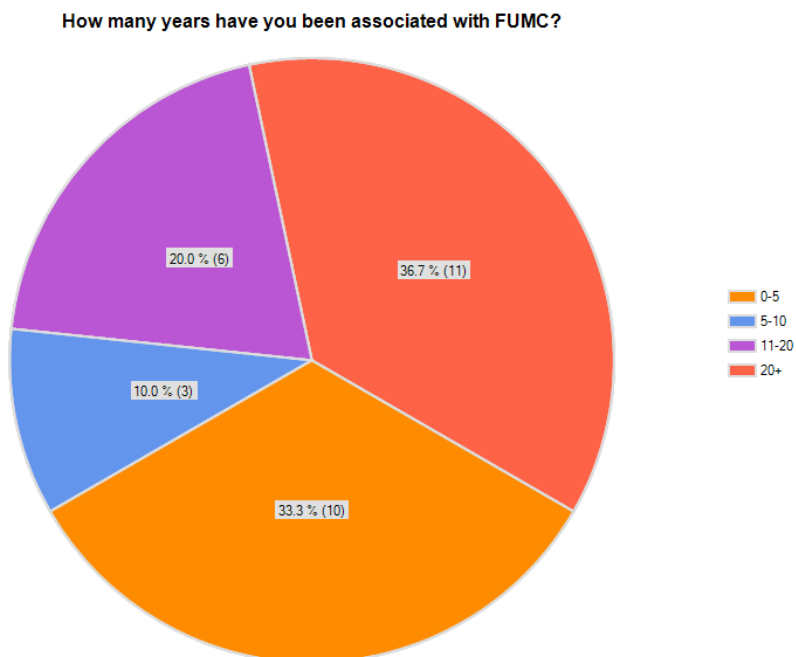
**Figure 4.3. Current employment (N=30).**

The *primary occupation* of the participants varied, but a large concentration was nine teachers (27 percent), three nurses (10 percent), two engineers, and one each (3.3 percent) for the remaining occupations listed (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. Primary Occupation**

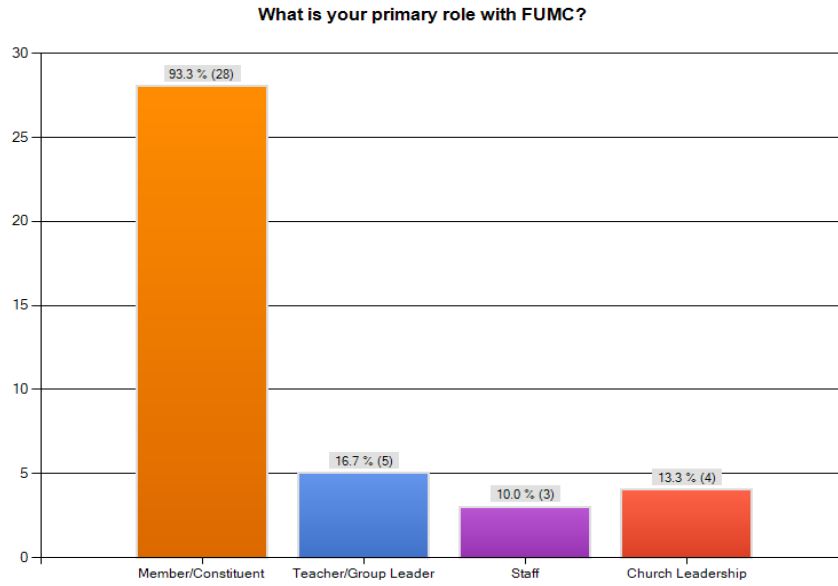
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>n</b>
Teacher	9
Nurse	3
Engineer	2
Administrative assistant	1
Accountant	1
Children's director	1
College student	1
Corporate executive	1
Electrical manager	1
Public administrator	1
Human resources	1
Occupational therapist	1
National product manager	1
Police officer	1
Software development director	1
Sales	1
Soil conservationist	1
Telecom manager	1
Youth director	1

Figure 4.4 displays a breakout of the *years associated with FUMC Paulsboro* as eleven (36.7 percent) at 20+ years, ten (33.3 percent) at 0-5 years, six (20.0 percent) at 11-20 years, and three (10.0 percent) at 5-10 years.



**Figure 4.4. Years associated with FUMC (N=30).**

The *primary role of the church* was confusing because people were able to select more than one role. Persons were able to mark more than one category, so that a member/constituent could also be part of the leadership or staff. In Figure 4.5, the member/constituent number of twenty-eight participants (93.3 percent) was correct in that two of the staff were not members or constituents. Of the thirty participants, twelve (40 percent) serve in a church leadership or staff capacity.



**Figure 4.5. Primary role with FUMC (N=30).**

### Critical Analysis

The general demographic of the group consisted of age, gender, ethnicity, education, and employment, which seemed representative of the general population of FUMC. Additionally, the retired people who seemed to participate more readily in the activities of the church to which this project fell, was representative of the retired people's participation in the life of the church.

The *project participants* were highly invested in the project. From the first task to the completion of the last weekly family systems reflection, the participation rate was 79 percent. The completion of tasks had a definite decrease after completion of the seminar sessions, but only four participants resigned from the project completely about halfway through. The focus group revealed some of the other possible causes of the decrease were finding time to complete the surveys, repetition of responses, dealing with the same

family systems situation each week, and not wanting to reflect on negative situations. Even with these difficulties and resignations, the overall participation was viable.

The demographic data of *age*, *ethnicity*, and *gender* is representative of FUMC Paulsboro as a whole. The majority of the congregation consists of individuals 66+ years of age, 94 percent European-American, and 67 percent female. Even though generalizability may not apply to other congregations due to the limitation of the sample, the demographics do represent this congregation well.

Another factor that seems to represent the congregation well is the number of participants who are retired (60 percent). This factor may have helped the participation level for the project due to the retired participants' availability.

The project initially planned for leadership and staff as participants. However, only 40 percent of the participants were either staff or leadership while the remainder were members or constituents.

The intervening variable of *mortality* contributed to the loss of data; however, in spite of the withdrawal, loss of motivation to complete, loss of motivation to participate in reflection, or self-reflection avoidance, only eight people did not follow through on their covenant. A 73 percent participation/completion rate was superb, suggesting a commitment and a desire to learn and recognize some of the basic family systems concepts and perspectives applicable to the individuals and their relationships within their families, work, church family, and society as a whole.

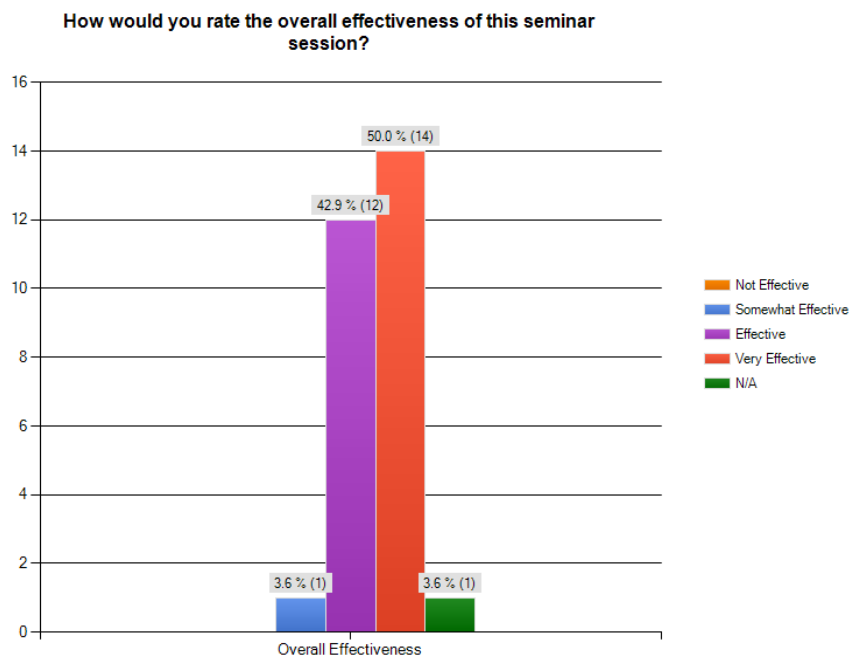


## General Seminar Findings

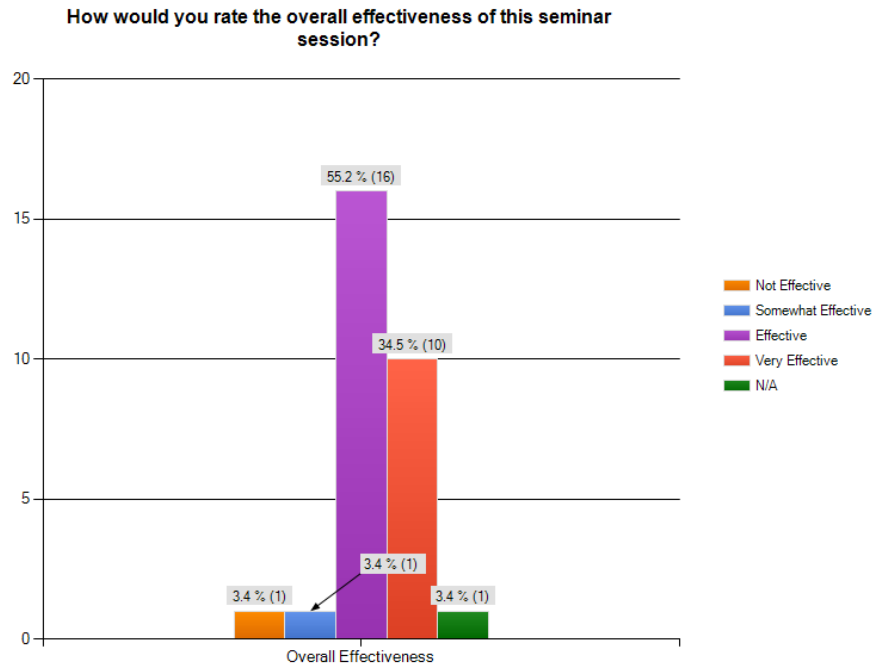
The general seminar findings provide statistics rating the effectiveness of seminar sessions, the meaningfulness of seminar sessions, and the usefulness of the seminar information.

### Report of Data

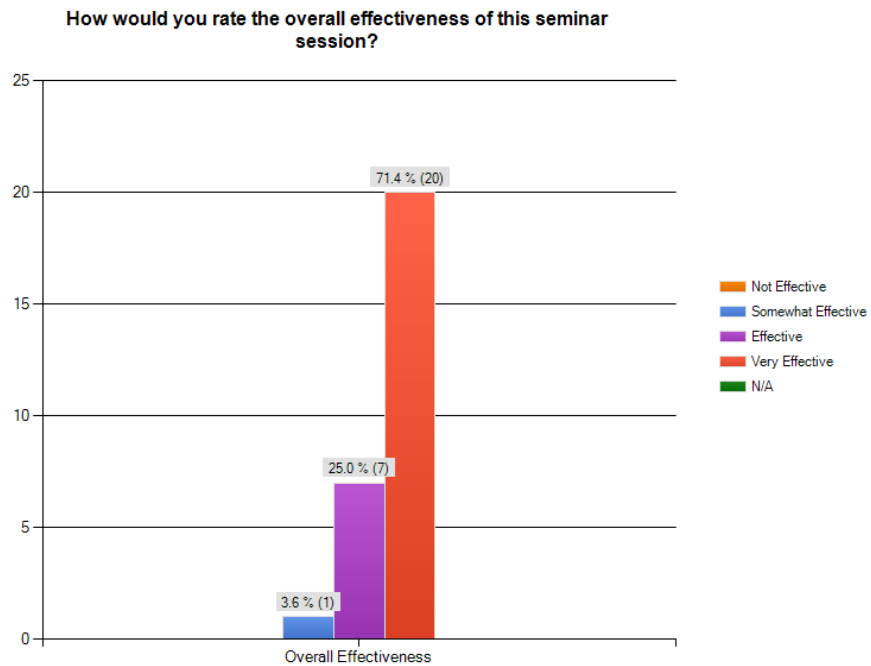
Each participant evaluated the effectiveness of each seminar session. If the person was unable to participate in the seminar session, he or she had the opportunity to listen to a video/audio recording of the presentation and group discussion. Session two had some technical difficulties in the recording so that one person who relied on the recording evaluated the effectiveness of the seminar session as “not useful.” Figures 4.6 through 4.9 chronologically display the effectiveness of each seminar session.



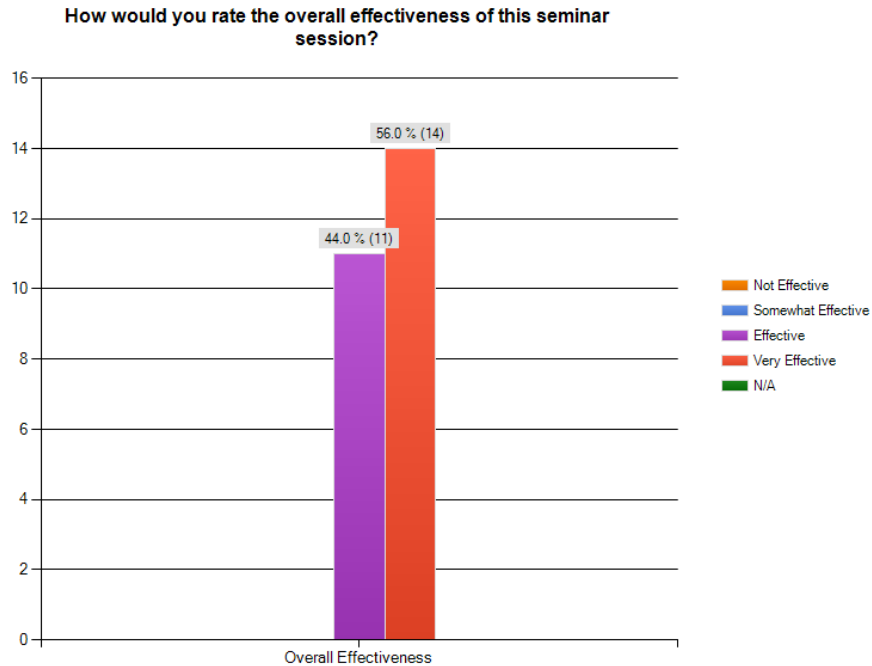
**Figure 4.6. First seminar session effectiveness (N=28).**



**Figure 4.7. Second seminar session effectiveness (N=29).**

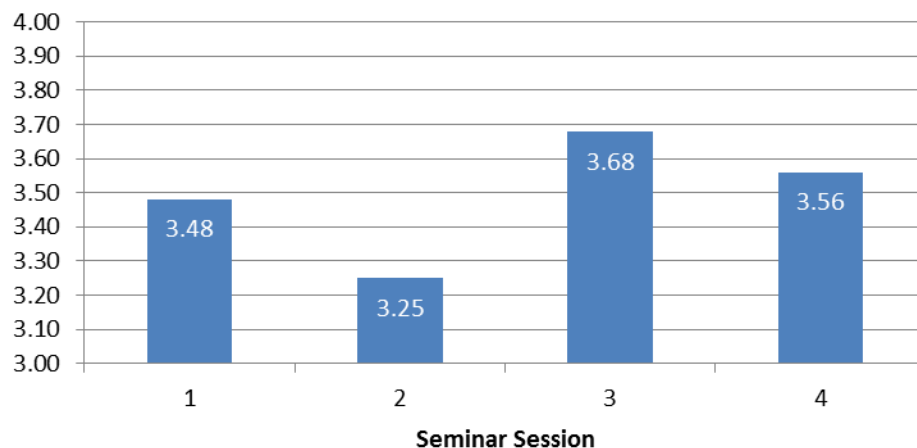


**Figure 4.8. Third seminar session effectiveness (N=28).**



**Figure 4.9. Fourth seminar session effectiveness (N=25).**

The average overall effectiveness of all the seminar sessions combined was very positive with 95 percent effectiveness or better. Figure 4.10 provides a comparison of the mean averages of each of the seminar session. I calculated the mean average for each session by assigning values of 1-4 to not effective through very effective, respectively, then totaling the values and dividing them by the number of participants responding. Thus, the comparison indicates that the second seminar session concerning multi-generational transmission was the least effective while the fourth session concerning emotional triangles was the most effectiveness.

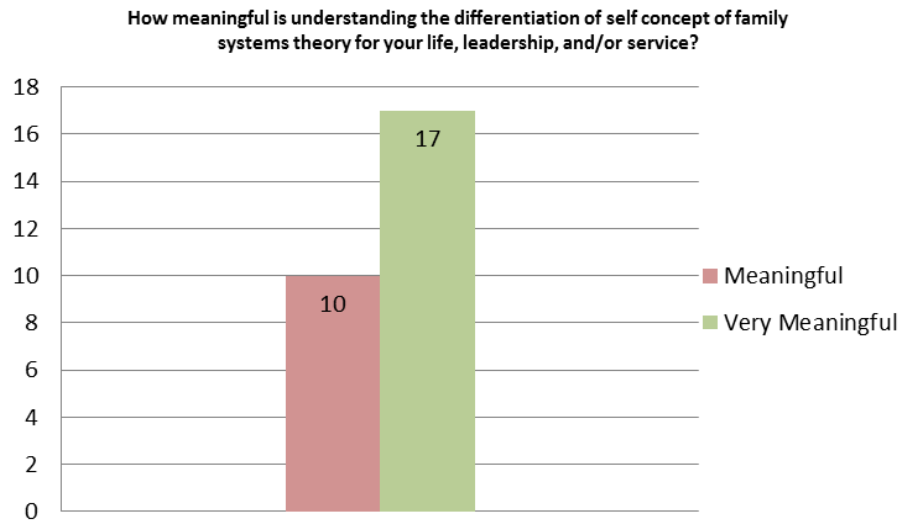


**Figure 4.10. Seminar session effectiveness (mean average)**

Participants evaluated the *meaningfulness of the family systems concept* presented at each of the seminar sessions was evaluated. The first seminar session covered reactivity/anger, scriptural concept of family systems, historical development of family systems, and the concept of differentiation of self. Participants rated each concept in the in their lives, leadership, and/or service on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from not meaningful (1) to very meaningful (4). Figure 4.11<sup>2</sup> reflects all of the participants responded with either meaningful or very meaningful. Only one participant indicated not applicable because of that person's absence from the session and not able to listen to the session online due to technical difficulties.

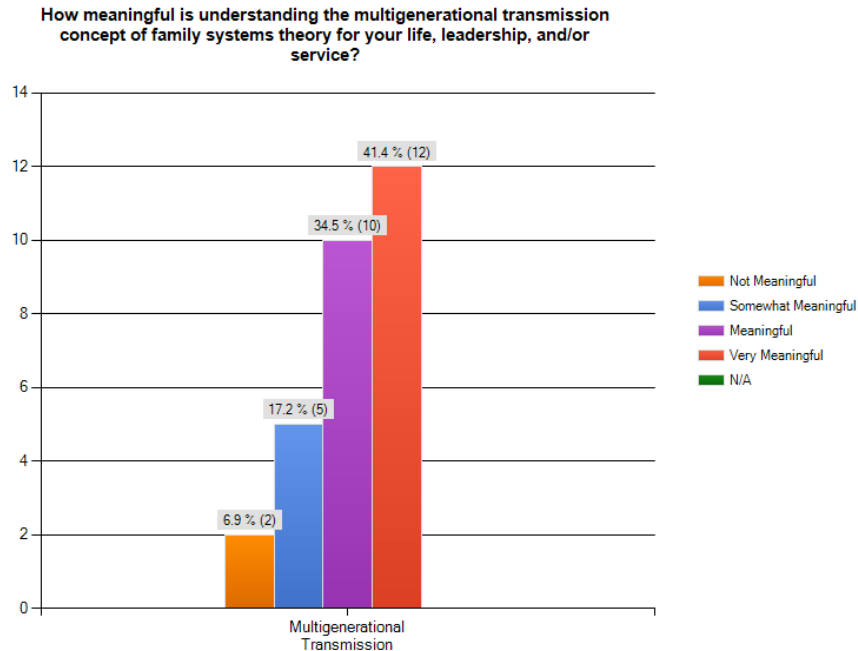
---

<sup>2</sup> The original graph produced by Survey Monkey indicated four concepts covered during the first seminar session of which differentiation of self was a the primary concepts. Therefore, this graph indicates only meaningfulness of differentiation of self, so that it better compares with the other three session's primary family system concepts (see Figures 4.11 to 4.13).



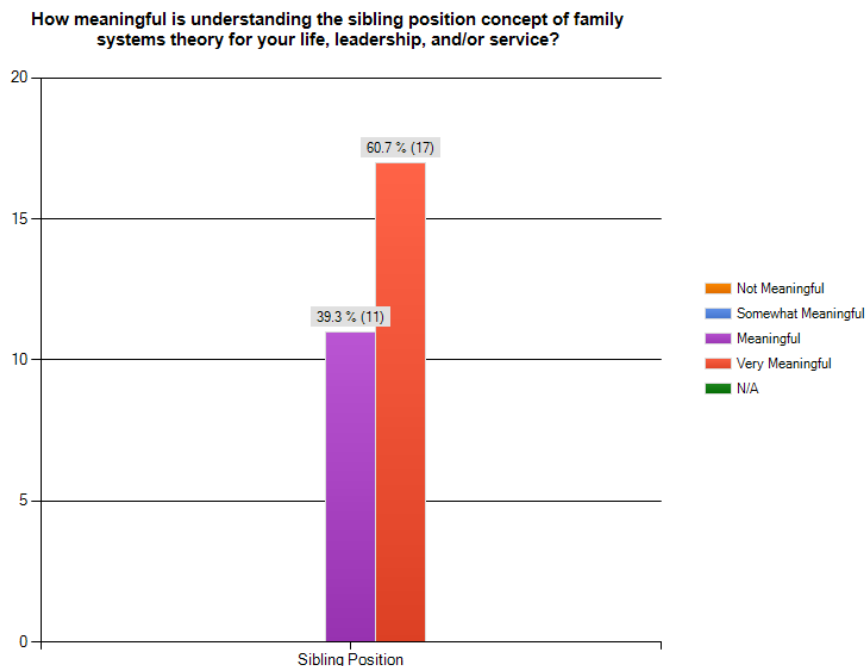
**Figure 4.11. Meaningfulness of first seminar family systems concepts (N=28).**

The second seminar session introduced and described multi-generational transmission (see Figure 4.12). The participants (N=29) rated the meaningfulness of multi-generational transmission as not meaningful (6.9 percent), somewhat meaningful (17.2 percent), meaningful (34.5 percent), and very meaningful (41.4 percent).



**Figure 4.12. Meaningfulness of second seminar family systems concept (N=29).**

The third seminar session introduced and described *sibling position* (see Figure 4.13). The participants (N=28) rated the meaningfulness of sibling position as meaningful (39.3 percent) and very meaningful (60.7 percent). Participants enthusiastically shared their genograms that they completed as homework. They participated in a *family sculpting* exercise that Dr. Terry Parsons uses with various groups to study family system dynamics (see Appendix G, third seminar session). Parsons learned the process while under tutelage by Virginia Satir to provide a visual description of a person's family system (Satir 250). One participant selected other participants and placed them in particular postures and spacial distances to describe her family system.

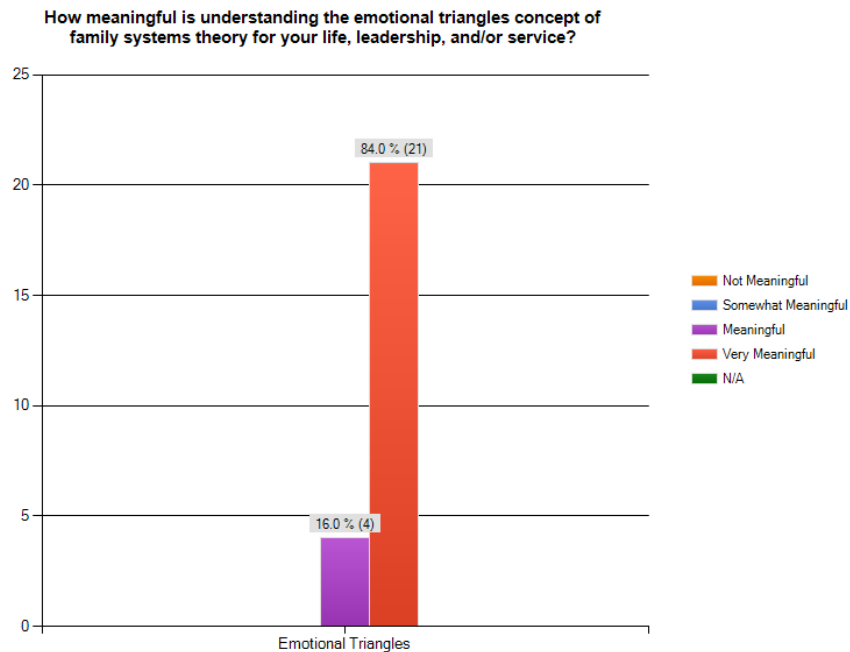


**Figure 4.13. Meaningfulness of third seminar family systems concept (N=28).**

An additional visual exercise helped participants understand sibling position. Participants were instructed to stand shoulder to shoulder in the order of the basic sibling position along a line of continuum from oldest to middle to youngest child in their family. Then a description of some of the general characteristics of associated sibling positions was represented as participants stood in groups or individually along the line of continuum (Hoopes and Harper 206-13).

The fourth seminar session discussed the concept of emotional triangles (see Figure 4.14). Emotional triangles were the most meaningful of all the concepts covered throughout the seminar. Participants had no difficulty in understanding this concept. They saw the concept in their individual lives in their work places, in their church committees,

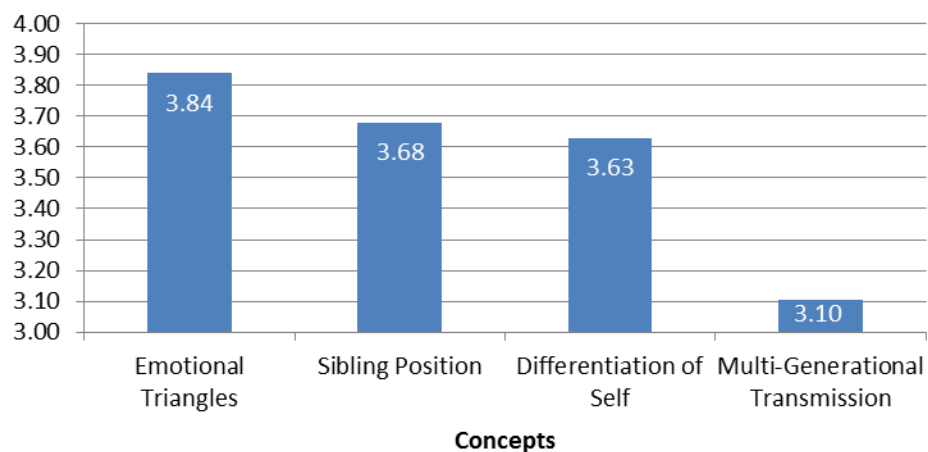
and in the working of the staff. The weekly family systems reflections provide more data concerning this concept in the responses to the research questions.



**Figure 4.14. Meaningfulness of fourth seminar family systems concept (N=25).**

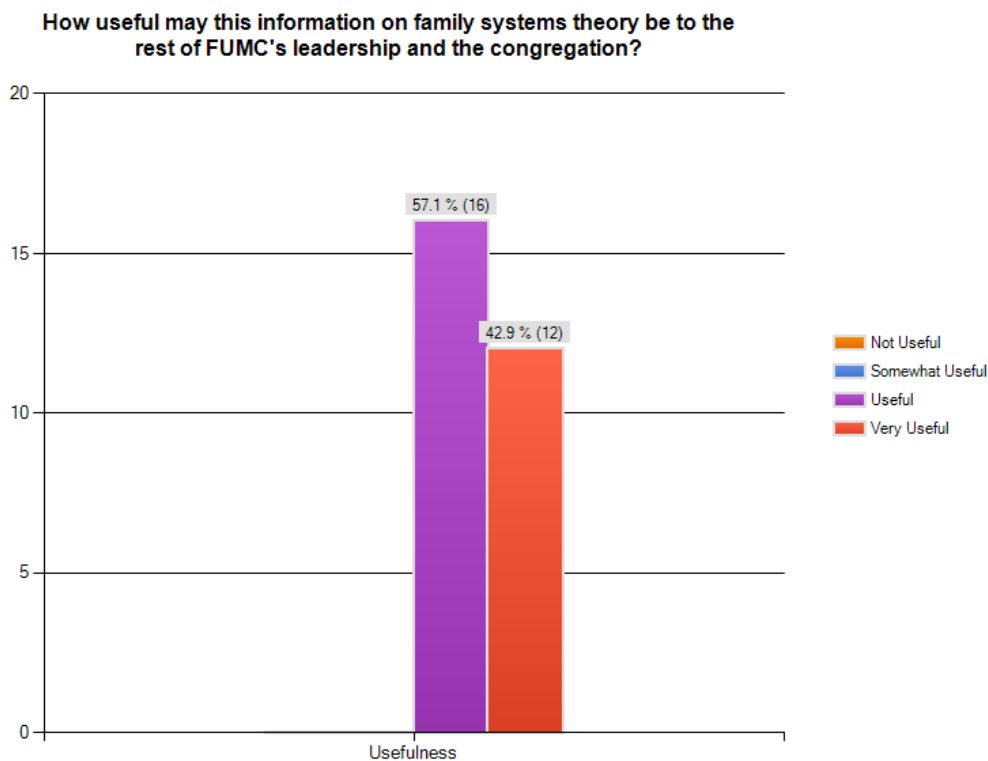
Figure 4.15 compares the mean average of the meaningfulness of each of the four family systems concepts presented. The chart presents in the most meaningful to least meaningful concepts in order from left to right. The concept of emotional triangles was 19 percent more meaningful to the participants than the concept of multi-generational transmission. The concepts of sibling position and differentiation of self were similar in meaningfulness according their mean average. The four concepts' mean average of meaningfulness was 3.56 on a 4.0 scale.





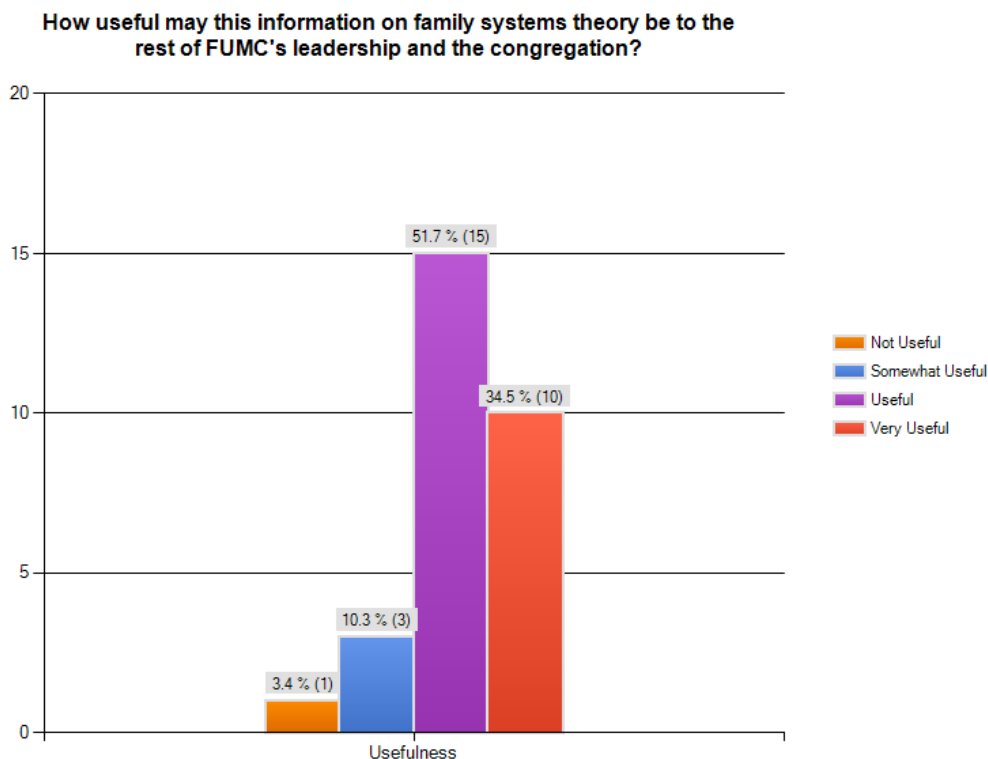
**Figure 4.15. Concept meaningfulness (mean)**

Figures 4.16 through 4.19 displays the participants' opinion of the *usefulness of the information shared in each seminar session to FUMC's leadership and congregation* (see Appendix D). The first seminar session expressed 100 percent useful or greater rating (see Figure 4.16).



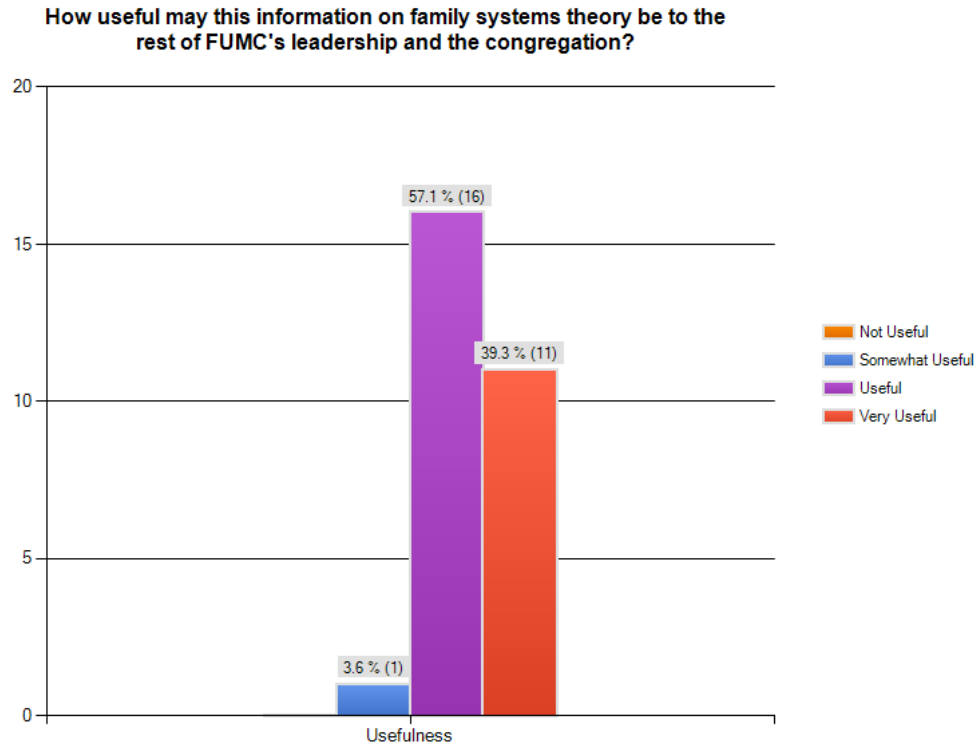
**Figure 4.16. Usefulness of first seminar session information to FUMC's leadership and congregation (N=28).**

The second seminar session presented a larger spread of the usefulness of the information (see Figure 4.17). One person felt that the seminar was not useful, while the remainder of opinion was three participants (10.3 percent) somewhat useful, fifteen participants (51.7 percent) useful, and ten participants (34.5 percent) very useful.



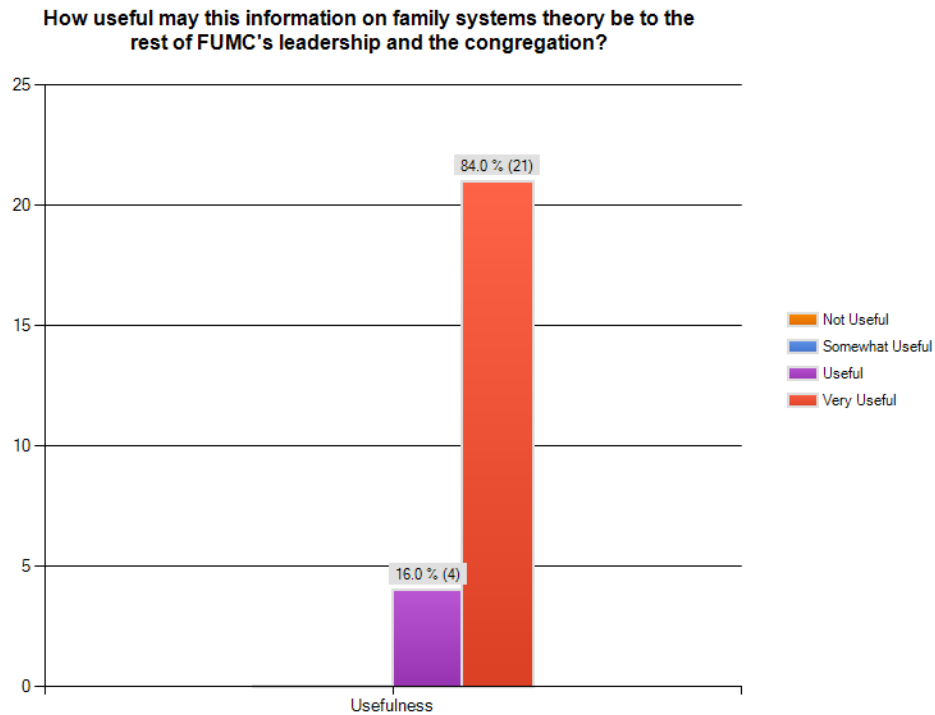
**Figure 4.17. Usefulness of second seminar session information to FUMC's leadership and congregation (N=29).**

The participants declared the third seminar session as useful for the rest of the leadership and congregation in the following ratings (see Figure 4.18). One person indicated somewhat useful while sixteen participants (57.1 percent) indicated useful and eleven participants (39.3 percent) declared the seminar very useful for the leadership and congregation.



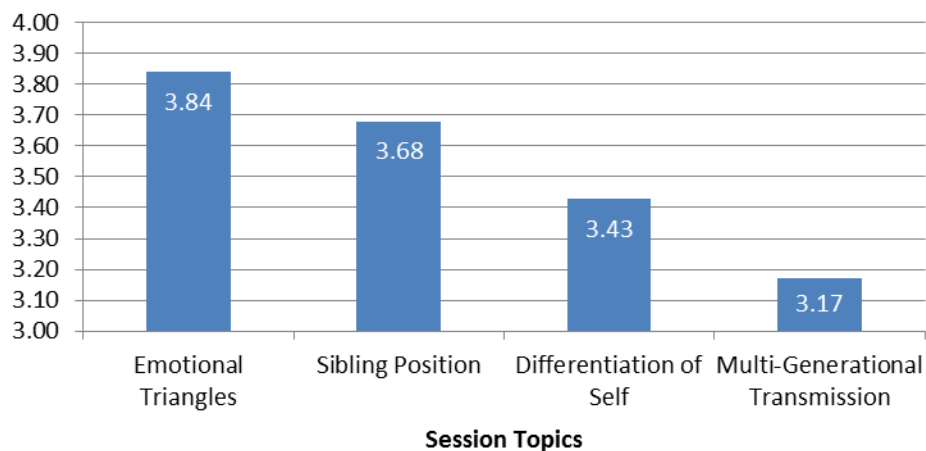
**Figure 4.18. Usefulness of third seminar session information to FUMC's leadership and congregation (N=28).**

The fourth session (see Figure 4.19) had the greatest usefulness rating of the seminar with four participants (16 percent) stating useful and twenty-one participants (84 percent) stating the seminar session as very useful.



**Figure 4.19. Usefulness of fourth seminar session information to FUMC's leadership and congregation (N=25).**

Figure 4.20 indicates the mean average for each of the concepts' usefulness for FUMC's leadership and congregation. The chart shows that each of the concepts is important. Even though the difference between emotional triangles and multi-generational transmission was 19 percent, the mean average of 3.53 for all four concepts usefulness validates the participants' perception of the usefulness of the family systems concept for the leadership and people of the congregation.



**Figure 4.20. Session usefulness (mean) for FUMC's leadership and congregation.**

### Critical Analysis

The *seminar sessions' effectiveness* was rated at 95 percent or better by the participants that support the viability of the process and presentation of the concepts.

Each of the *family systems concepts* presented were either meaningful or very meaningful to the participants. Each participant gained a new understanding and/or identified what they had already experienced. Out of all the concepts, twenty-one participants (84 percent) rated emotional triangles as very meaningful. This meaningfulness bore out in the persons identifying triangulating situations in their family, work, church committees, and in society, as related in the weekly family systems reflections.

Overall, the project participants believed the information in the seminars would be *useful to the church leadership and congregation* as a whole. Again, the fourth seminar of emotional triangles peaked as the highest usefulness rating of all the seminars.

## **Interpretation of Findings**

The high participation in the seminar relates the desire to want to learn and be aware of the family systems in life. Furthermore, the consistently high participation rate in the seminar sessions verified the meaningfulness of family systems to the individual's life. It helped them to begin to see their life from a systems perspective rather than a linear perspective.

The concepts learned were meaningful in evaluating one's own life and understanding others' lives from the systems perspective. Furthermore, understanding lives comprised of emotional triangles gained high interest. Trying to keep the triangles from being destructive, not to be triangulated or to de-triangulate, became a reflection theme in the weekly reflections.

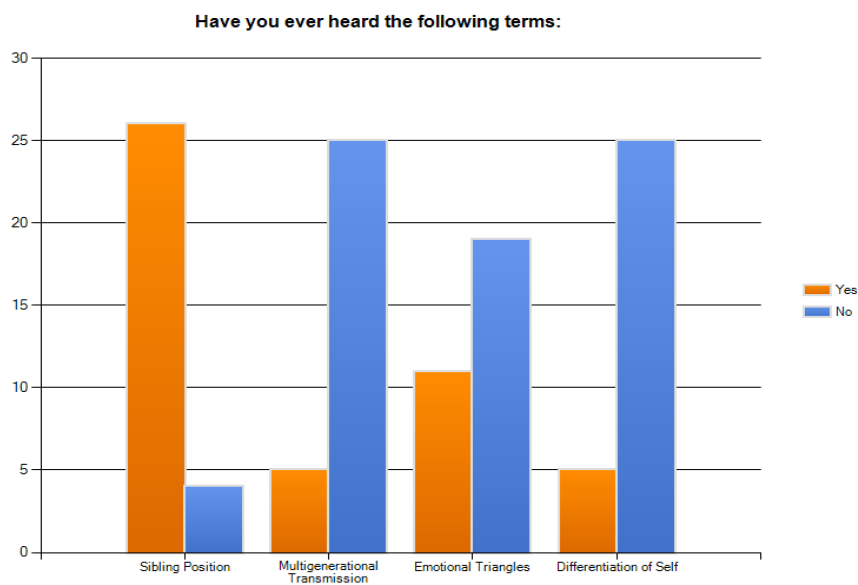
The high effectiveness of the seminar sessions and the meaningfulness of the family systems concepts affirmed the importance of the family systems concepts taught to church leadership and the congregation. For the participants to see the application to the church leadership and congregation as a whole, opens a window for better understanding of the church family.

### **Research Question #1**

What was the understanding or experience of family systems of the participants at FUMC Paulsboro prior to the family systems seminar? Each participant completed a pre-intervention interview questionnaire that provided data to answer this question. The data contained demographics and open-ended questions pertaining to the participants' exposure to family systems theory.

## Report of Data

Responding to the question of *hearing or exposure to family systems* twenty-three participants (76.7 percent) had no exposure to family systems theory, while the other seven participants (23.7 percent) did have exposure to family systems at some point in their lives. Figure 4.21 indicates the comparison of those who had heard and those who had not heard family systems terms of sibling position, multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, or differentiation of self. As expected, the bar chart indicates the majority of the participants were not familiar with multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, or differentiation of self. However, twenty-six participants heard the term sibling position.



**Figure 4.21. Exposure of heard of family systems terms.**



Furthermore, participants provided some of their basic understandings of family systems by answering the open-ended question, “When you hear the term family systems, what comes to your mind?” The eighteen responses (54 percent) fit into one of the following categories:

- Nuclear family,
- Extended family,
- Family dynamics,
- Society,
- Church family,
- Personal interactions,

Only seven of the participants (21 percent) noted having any exposure to family systems theory through some reading, education classes, or counseling. However, nine teachers in the project group (27 percent) probably had exposure of similar family systems concepts through human growth and development courses in their undergraduate courses in education and teaching.

Participants responded with what expectations they had in participating in the seminar. Nine participants (27 percent) had no answer while the other twenty-one (63 percent) responded. Some of the relevant expectations expressed were:

- “Learn how we relate to each other based on our individual experiences and development based on prior situational dynamics from work, school and “groups” we are in”;
- “More understanding of how I personally relate to other people and their individual styles”;

- “Better insight regarding family dynamics and relationships personally and for the body of the church”;
- “Smoother interaction with loved ones and close friends in church and perhaps business too”;
- “Learn to better interact with all groups (family, church, social, etc.)”;
- “Help facilitate unity within the church with knowledge acquired”;
- “Learn about family systems theory; see how family systems can be applied to a church congregation; learn about myself.”

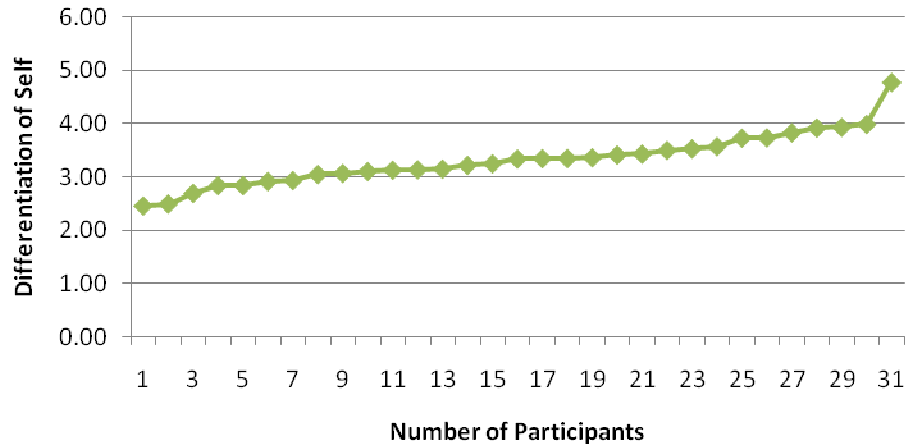
These responses of expectation indicate the general desire to interrelate better within nuclear and extended families, work settings, and church family. Most of the respondents either identified or implied they wanted to improve their own understanding and behavior. Furthermore, several in the group being teachers may not have made the connection with their previous exposure to similar concepts under different terminology in education curriculum.

Each participant completed the DSI as a pre-intervention questionnaire. The questionnaire was a previously tested, valid, and reliable instrument developed by Skowron. Table 4.4 presents the calculated data of the DSI for each individual (N=30). The DSI column indicates the participants’ differentiation of self indicator.

**Table 4.4. Pre-Intervention Questionnaire (DSI, N=30)**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>DSI</b>	<b>Participant #</b>	<b>DSI</b>
4298	2.46	4414	3.35
4167	2.49	4706	3.35
4642	2.70	4226	3.37
4522	2.84	4132	3.42
4653	2.84	4595	3.43
4776	2.92	4192	3.50
4358	2.94	4938	3.53
4435	3.07	4554	3.58
4774	3.11	4742	3.73
4732	3.13	4371	3.74
4709	3.14	4619	3.84
4403	3.15	4447	3.92
4205	3.22	4238	3.94
4124	3.25	4897	3.99
4825	3.34	4103	4.78

The range of results of the DSI was from 2.36 to 4.78 on a scale of 1 to 6 with a higher number indicating more differentiated individual self-reports (see Figure 4.22). The mean average was 3.33. Twenty-two of the thirty participants fell in the range of 3.0 to 3.99, which was the mode average of the continuum. The interpolated median average (3.34-3.35) falls close to the mean average. At the extremes, participant #4298 was the least differentiated of the group while participant #4103 was the most differentiated person on the continuum prior to the study. Furthermore, #4103 was almost a whole point above the next most differentiated participant (see Table 4.4).



**Figure 4.22. Pre-intervention questionnaire (DSI) data (N=30).**

### Critical Analysis

Each of the participants had been exposed to family systems throughout their lives; however, their awareness of the terms and concepts seemed obscure except for a cursory understanding of sibling position/birth order. This data provided an elementary foundation as a starting point.

The pre-intervention DSI provided the baseline for each individual's differentiation of self indicator. Other than this baseline, nothing was relevant revealed at this point.

### Interpretation of Findings

The data from research question #1 provided the following findings:

- The level of awareness of family systems theory and concepts was low or obscure, except for the participants' recognition of sibling position in a cursory manner.
- The differentiation of self indicator calculated from each individual's pre-intervention questionnaire (DSI) indicates the individuals who participated were not at

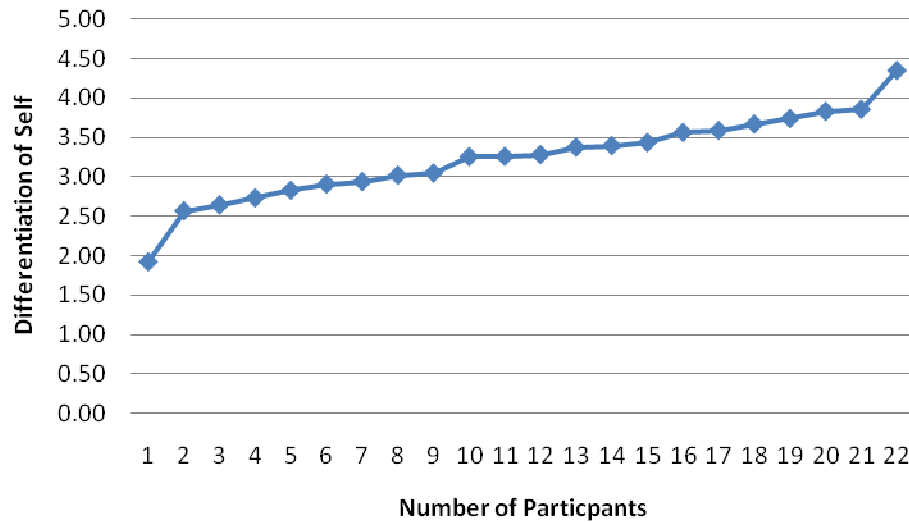
the extremes of the continuum. Additionally, the DSI provided a baseline for comparison post-intervention.

### **Research Question #2**

What cognitive changes occurred in the understanding and practices of the family systems of the individual participants of FUMC Paulsboro after participating in a family systems seminar and two months reflection?

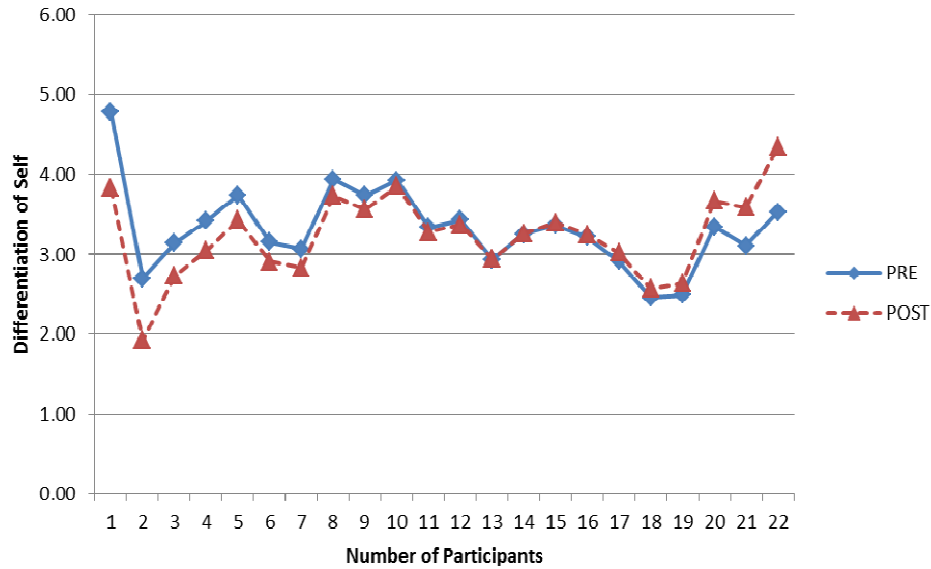
### **Report of Data**

Only twenty-two participants completed both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire. Figure 4.23 provides a plot of twenty-two participants (N=30) who completed the post-intervention DSI after the project. The two plotted lines did not indicate much difference in shape. However, the range of the DSI values was from 1.92 to 4.35 versus 2.36 to 4.78 on a scale of one to six with the higher number showing more differentiation in individual self-reports. Furthermore, the plotted lines show the majority of the individuals had a decrease in their differentiation rather than an increase after the project.



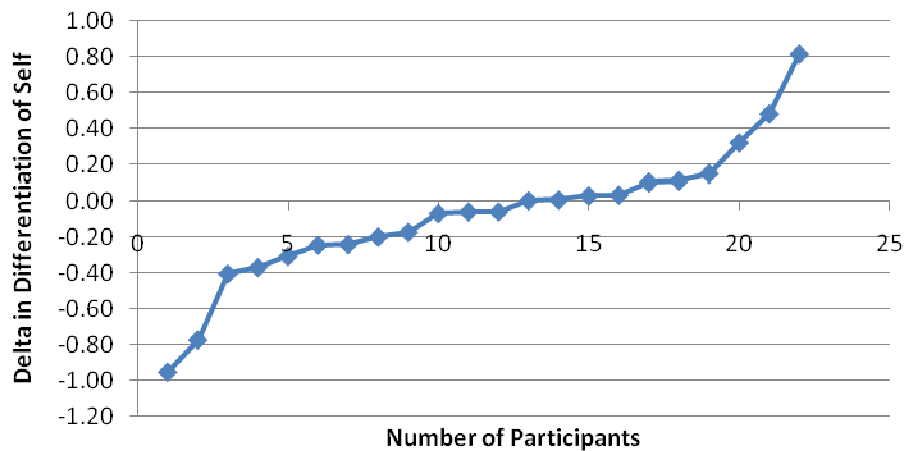
**Figure 4.23. Individual post-intervention questionnaire (DSI) data (N=22).**

Figure 4.24 provides both the pre- and post-intervention DSI comparison with the individuals' results juxtaposed. The data points are each participant's delta of DSI sorted from greatest negative change through greatest positive change. Thus, participant #1 had the most negative change in DSI (less self-differentiated), while participant #22 had the most positive change in DSI (more self-differentiated).



**Figure 4.24. Individual pre-post intervention DSI comparison (N=22).**

Figure 4.25 provides a graphic presentation of the change (delta) in individual DSIs for the twenty-two participants who completed both DSIs. The range of change is from -0.95 to +0.81. The chart indicates that the delta was negative for twelve respondents and positive for ten respondents. The delta indicates that DSI decreased for about 57 percent and increased for about thirty-eight percent of respondents.



**Figure 4.25. Individual delta of pre/post-intervention questionnaire (DSI, N=22).**

Even though the change of the DSI for the aggregate of participants seemed insignificant overall, some of the participants' DSI delta was relevant whether an increase or decrease. The analysis of the data revealed that seven of the individuals had changes in the delta in their DSI of 10 percent or greater (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5. Relevant Deltas of Participants**

<b>PART#</b>	<b>DELTA</b>	<b>% of <math>\Delta</math></b>
4642	-0.77	-29
4103	-0.95	-20
4709	-0.41	-13
4132	-0.37	-11
4414	0.32	10
4774	0.48	15
4938	0.81	23

Each of the seminar sessions provided insights from the participants. The more relevant insights were

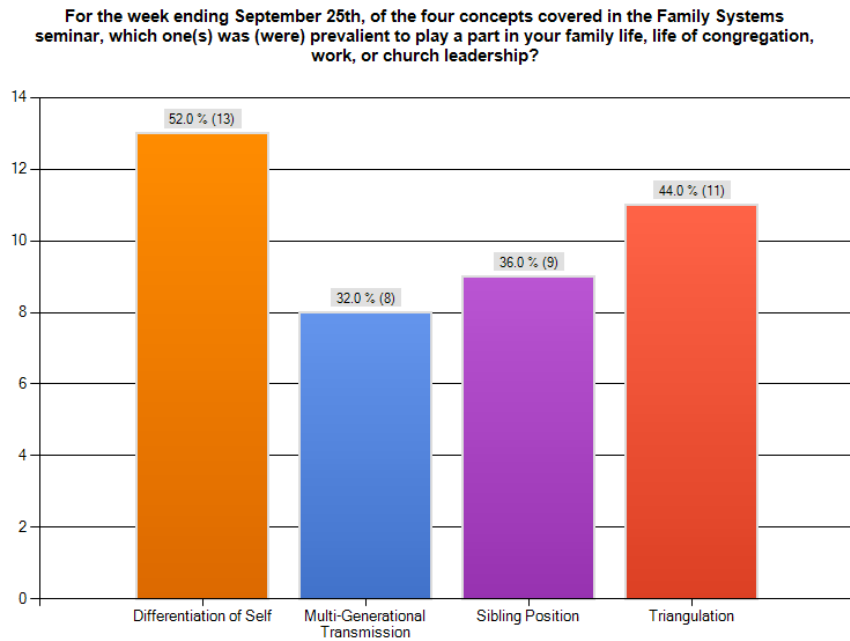
- “How relationships do matter in the workings of church committees”;
- “For a person to be an ‘I’ and remain connected to the ‘WE’ of a particular system”;
- “To actually view the church family as a family system”;
- “Understanding multi-generational transmission and the use of a genogram help an individual to break a negative cycle or trait that is passed along”;
- “Reviewing a genogram helped identify the reasons behind some of the family dysfunction”;



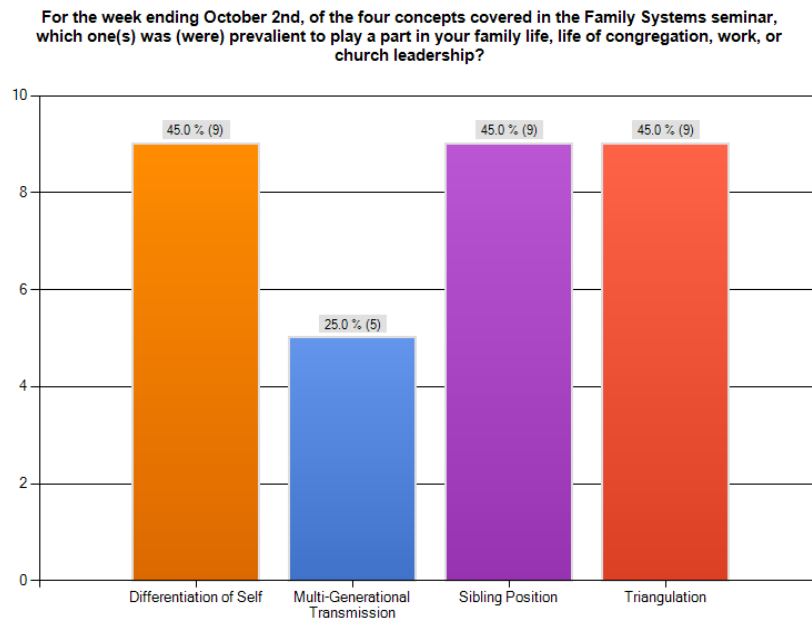
- “Adapting a genogram concept to a church to help the church understand its development and how it can improve its functioning”; and,
- “The greater understanding of systems theory gained the greater the mercy expressed.”

These statements expressed some of the broad-based cognitive understandings that participants applied through the remaining weeks of reflection. This knowledge helped them to see life from a family systems perspective. One person commented, though, “The concepts and understanding are very beneficial but the major task is to place them into practice and create a behavior modification.” Learning and understanding the concepts of family systems are of no worth without practice and a resultant behavior change.

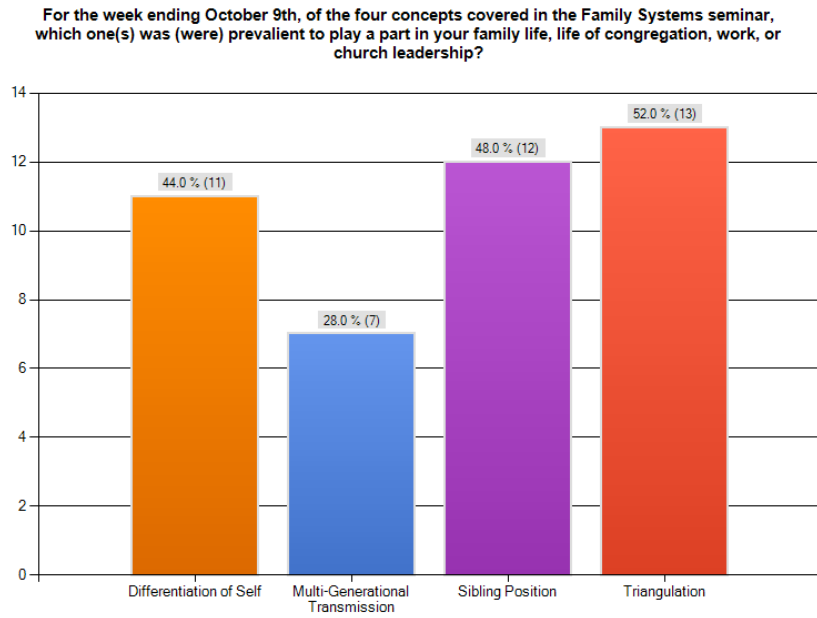
Figures 4.26 through 4.32 display the awareness the prevalence of a concept that each participant had for each week of reflection. Participants could select more than one concept for each week’s reflection. For all but one week, awareness of differentiation of self was most prevalent in respondents’ life. By the second week of reflection the participants gained knowledge and understanding of all four basic concepts presented. Looking at each of the figures in chronological order, one discovers a decline in the number of participants who responded to the reflections. By the last reflection, only sixteen (53 percent) completed the eighth week’s reflection.



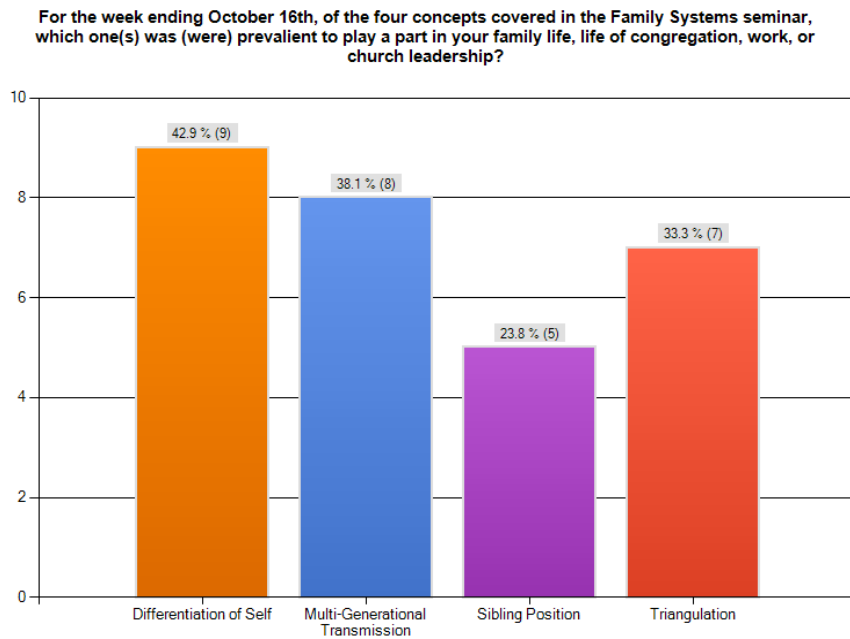
**Figure 4.26. Prevalence of family systems concepts week one (N=25).**



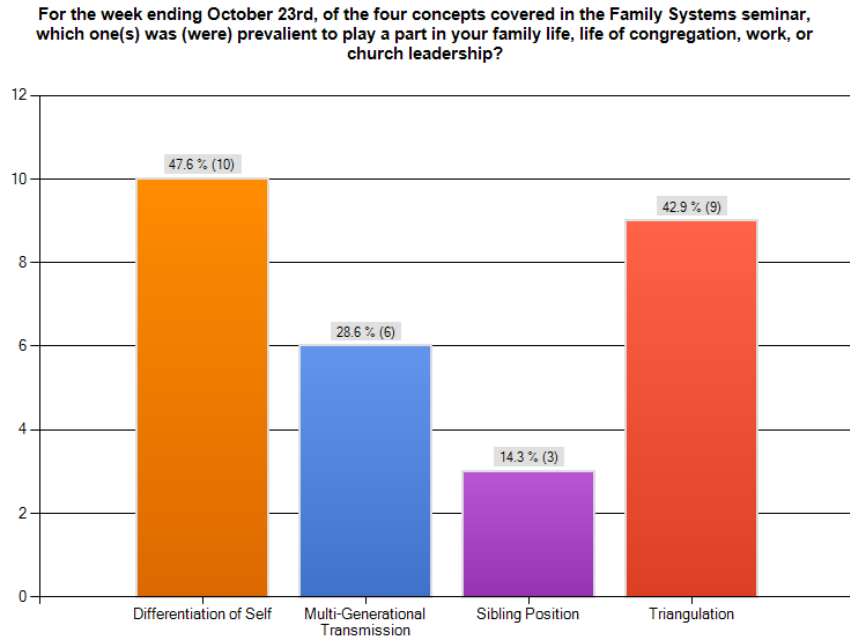
**Figure 4.27. Prevalence of family systems concepts week two (N=20).**



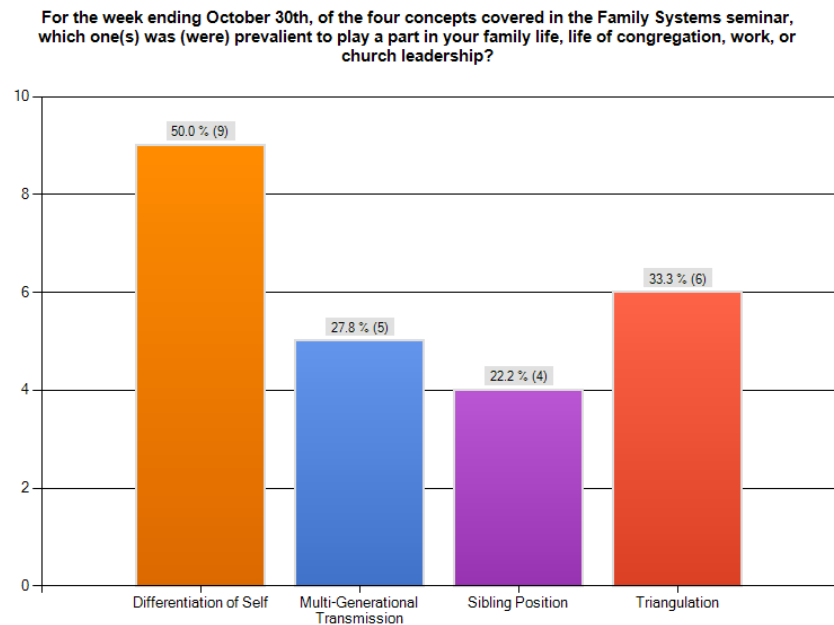
**Figure 4.28. Prevalence of family systems concepts week three (N=25).**



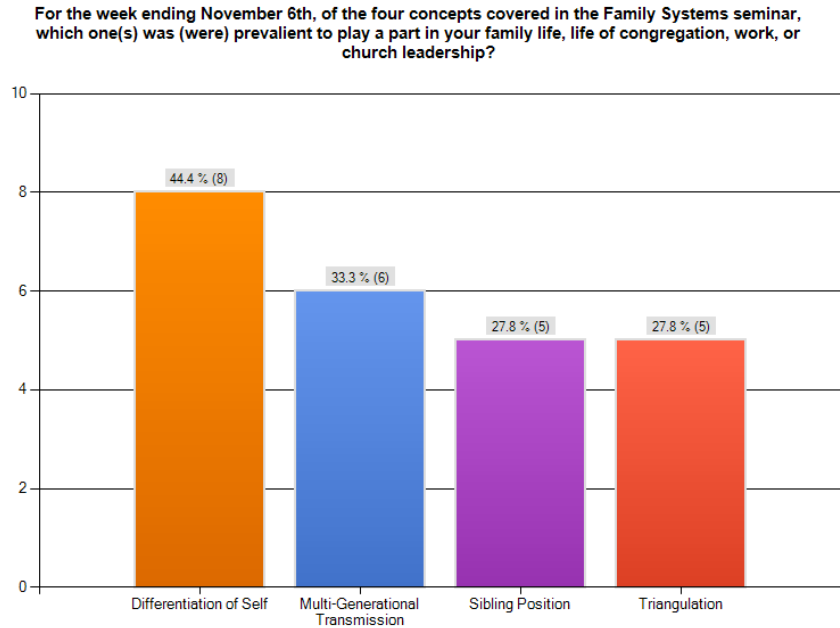
**Figure 4.29. Prevalence of family systems concepts week four (n=21).**



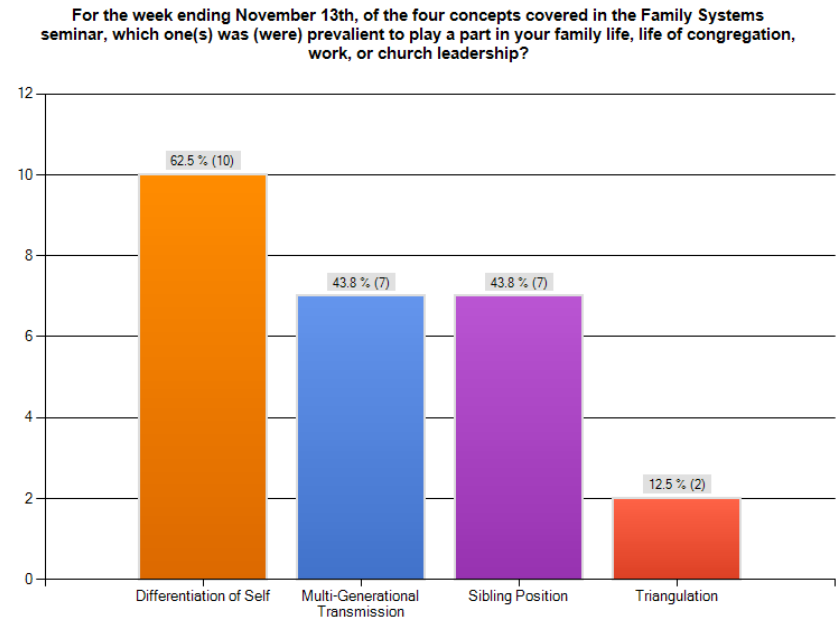
**Figure 4.30. Prevalence of family systems concepts week five (n=21).**



**Figure 4.31. Prevalence of family systems concepts week six (n=18).**



**Figure 4.32. Prevalence of family systems concepts week seven (n=18).**



**Figure 4.33. Prevalence of family systems concepts week eight (n=16).**

Between a low of 42.9 percent and a high 62.5 percent of the people saw differentiation play out in their lives, work, or leadership. In six of the weeks, differentiation of self had the highest awareness.

Even though the level of engagement and discussion was high with the group in the second seminar session concerning sharing one another's genogram, *multi-generational transmission* remained the lowest awareness response rate of the four concepts.

*Sibling position* had a high level of interest and discussion. However, sibling position seemed to be low on awareness except for weeks two and three. This low response may have been from a growing sense of stereotypical reservations that arose among the group. Several of the elderly persons no longer had living siblings and had difficulty applying this concept to their lives. One person stated, "I don't have any siblings remaining." Thus, sibling position had cursory influence on participants' reflections.

*Triangulation* awareness ranged from 12.5 to 52 percent with four of the weeks above 42 percent rate of awareness. Evidence indicated a dramatic decline in selecting triangulation in the last three weeks of reflections. Some of the respondents related that they had difficulty with triangulation because it seemed to be a negative concept and thus avoided references to triangulation.

Overall, though, the awareness of each of the concepts was enlightening for each of the participants and helped them to think from family systems perspective in their family, life, work, church, and society.

The *weekly reflections* of the presence and function of emotional triangulation revealed desires of a few of participants to modify behavior because of their new awareness of family systems:

- “To be more understanding of where people come from”;
- “Able to use the knowledge in my work and home relationships”;
- “Recognized my role in a triangulation”; and,
- “Transmitting positive generational knowledge to the next generation.”

These four comments disclose the participants’ desire to change their behavior. The comments further allude to the importance these individuals’ place on the responsibility they have for their own behavior within the family system.

### **Critical Analysis**

The post-intervention DSI indicates only slight changes in the participants’ value compared to the pre-intervention DSI. Twelve participants (57 percent) had a decrease in their differentiation of self. As noted earlier, the three factors to cause this anomaly, increased awareness, less care in response to the post-intervention DSI, and effects of point in time and space of the inventory possibly influenced the outcome. The minor changes may indicate a slight change in behavior, but overall the DSI did not provide any relevant findings.

The interaction in the seminars sessions was very active. Participants shared in the discussion in each session. When discussing multi-generational transmission, individuals seriously completed that tasking of developing their own genogram. Each individual gained a new perspective of the influence of multi-generational transmission and sibling position in a family system. The excitement of this discovery came in observing the

individuals share their genograms in small groups and one individual proclaiming that he broke a three-generation negative cycle of alcoholism in his family. Another person revealed that he saw the genogram as a tool to apply to the history of a congregation.

The information discussed in the seminar sessions caused one individual to declare that the “greater understanding of family systems the greater one could express mercy.” Furthermore, several related the following concerning the seminar:

- “This seminar has made me so aware of every part of my life.”
- “This really works in more facets of life than I expected.”
- “I am amazed at how much family systems are saturated in our everyday lives.”

After completion of the four seminar sessions, the awareness of family systems theory and concepts prevailed in the participants’ lives:

- *Differentiation of self*—Even though the post-intervention questionnaire (DSI) delta seemed insignificant, the participants’ awareness of differentiation of self in daily life was prevalent. Each week the majority of the individuals saw this concept in action.
- *Multi-generational transmission*—In addition to the major interaction among participants concerning their genogram during the discussions on multi-generational transmission, prevalence indicator of this concept in the weekly reflections was the lowest for the project. Some of the respondents saw this concept emphasized in a negative sense rather than positive. However, one participant commented to the contrary, “The importance of transmitting positive characteristics and behaviors to each generation as a key element to family system health.”



- *Sibling position*—Sibling position effects on family system seemed also low due to stereotypical reservations of the participants even though one stated, “The sibling position concept was very informative and quite fascinating!” Nonetheless, understanding sibling position became a positive effect as a few of the participants shared their genograms. One declared, if “[you] evaluate your family tree and determine if you can pass on good behaviors or break bad behaviors in future generations “ will be positive. Conversely, two the elderly still had difficulty relating to the concept because they had no living siblings.

*Triangulation*—Emotional triangulation plays a major part in the theory of family systems, yet for several of the group age 66+, this concept was negative for them. One person was able to relate instances of triangulation in church committee and staff meetings each week. He expressed how he dealt with the triangulation, by either de-triangulating or not triangulating from the outset: “Becoming more aware of where triangulations and immaturity played into work situations. Able to stop some triangulation. Back away. Changing my response and not participating in the situations. [Stating], ‘That’s not been my experience.’”

The reduction of the reflection response to 53 percent indicated a loss of motivation to continue to reflect on the effects of family systems on daily life and an individual’s behavior. As noted earlier, the mortality rate increased due to several factors concerning self-reflection through repetitiveness of questions or situations in participants’ lives.

## Interpretation of Findings

The data from research question #2 provided the following findings. First, the comparison of the DSI results indicated an insignificant change in behavior. Any change between pre- and post-intervention questionnaires was minute whether decrease or increase in differentiation of self. Not only for previously suggested reasons, but possibly using the instrument in this manner was insufficient or the project did not contain enough length of time between completing the instruments.

As noted earlier, the majority of the participants (57 percent) had their DSI decrease. A few possible interpretations may apply to this unexpected anomaly. First, as people gained more understanding of family systems, they may have come to a more viable awareness of their responses in the DSI, which resulted in their more feasible DSI position. Second, the persons may have responded with less thought or care, which affected the DSI in both the positive and negative deltas. Third, the effects of a point in time and space inventory may have influenced the results in both a positive or negative manner.

Second, the seminar sessions provided a new awareness of family systems and helped participants interact with others through the family systems perspective.

Third, applying the concept of multi-generational transmission and development of a genogram for the history of a local church may assist the church in discovering its roots and identifying the *negative* transmissions, thereby breaking the negative cycle.

Fourth, an increased understanding of family systems in one's life suggests an increased expression of mercy, working towards fulfilling Wesley's general rule to *do no harm*.

Fifth, family systems theory has been active in each person's life, but the new awareness helped label and conceptualize life's interrelationship in a meaningful and helpful manner. Each person's new awareness helped recognize that his or her own differentiation of self, multi-generational transmission, sibling position, and triangulation, as well as for the same for others. For example, the participants learned to maintain an "I-position" and stay connected with the system is one of the ultimate goals to reach. They began to use multi-generational transmission for positive behavioral change. They applied genogram development not only to their families, but suggested application to other systems such as local congregations. They understood the typical behaviors of the roles played by sibling position and the effects it has on behavior in other social settings.

Sixth, emotional triangles are a common experience in life. We were created to interrelate with one another and we develop emotional triangles to help cope with life's experiences. However, the participants began to identify destructive emotional triangles and started to learn how to avoid the triangles or to de-triangulate from situations. "I learned that a triangle situation can very quickly divide friendships and lead to people on a team taking sides against one another." Emotional triangles are a part of life, however, can be very destructive to relationships.

### **Research Question #3**

What affective changes occurred in the participants as a result of this new understanding of multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, sibling position, and differentiation of self after the family systems seminar and after two months of reflection?

## Report of Data

The open-ended questions in the family systems weekly reflection guides and focus group provided affective changes in behavior. Table 4.6 presents the culling of data of individual behavioral change revealed by self-reporting of individuals. The table displays the words or phrases used in the weekly reflections and focus group reduced to four concepts in behavioral changes in the individual participants.

First, references to self-awareness included *awareness* of the participants' differentiation of self, role of multi-generational transmission and sibling position in the participants' lives, and the participants' identification and participation in emotional triangles. Self-awareness also included the participants' ability to see each interrelationship from family systems perspective and the part or role he or she played in the system involved.

Second, references to *improved listening* contained the participants' insights of taking the time to listen to others' opinions, positions, and ideas, with less judgment and more openness. In addition, this theme included listening to other persons' thoughts pertaining to the situation or relationship, such as, the person's sibling position, and multi-generational transmission, and that the person was created in the image of God. Furthermore, the participant listened for the indications of unhealthy or destructive triangulation.

Third, participants shared references to *improved relationships*. These relationship included siblings, coworkers, nuclear and extended family, plus references to committees or people in a participant's neighborhood. Furthermore, the emphasis on the improved relationship was from the participant's perspective and actions.

The fourth concept of *openness* referred back to the other three themes along with open-mindedness. Few people related that they gained and improved ability to “see the other person as the image of God,” which helped produce an openness of mind and heart.

Table 4.6. Culling of Data from Weekly Reflections and Focus Group

Concept	Weekly Reflections	Supportive Words Focus Group
<b>Self-awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of self</li> <li>• Improved differentiation of self</li> <li>• Aware of needed work on self</li> <li>• Understanding of myself</li> <li>• Aware of who I am</li> <li>• Aware of shortcomings</li> <li>• A lot to work on</li> <li>• Aware to not fuel destructive triangulation</li> <li>• Aware of what is important to do in life</li> <li>• Aware of family values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eye opening</li> <li>• Awareness of self</li> <li>• Awareness of responses</li> <li>• Awareness of concepts</li> <li>• Awareness to avoid destructive situations</li> <li>• Awareness of triangulation</li> <li>• Awareness of participation in triangles</li> </ul>
<b>Improved listening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen more closely</li> <li>• Listening to all view points</li> <li>• Listen with support</li> <li>• Listen without reacting</li> <li>• Just listen</li> <li>• Learned to listen</li> <li>• Listen to higher source</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better listener</li> <li>• Listen with acceptance 'Ears of grace'</li> <li>• Listen with heart</li> <li>• Listen more speak less</li> </ul>
<b>Improved relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mend relationships</li> <li>• Communication positively reinforcing relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Roles</li> <li>• Things affecting relationships</li> <li>• Sibling position and triangulation effect on relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Openness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-minded</li> <li>• Eye-opening</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More open to people</li> <li>• More open in discussion</li> <li>• More open in interactions</li> <li>• Open minded</li> <li>• Eye opening</li> </ul>

## Critical Analysis

The behavioral changes in the individual listed in Table 4.6 relate to being in control of oneself. Some of the changes were an improved awareness to improved behavior. Some of the participants took their responsibility of actions and reactions seriously, moving closer toward being a non-anxious presence in critical situations. To accomplish these tasks, respondents shared the need for improved listening, open-mindedness, and ongoing need for change in oneself.

Changes in relationships look outward in an understanding and accepting manner. Participants related learned behavioral practices, such as, appreciating the strengths of others, seeing others as an image of God, gaining patience with others, and being more open in discussions and interactions. Participants also learned not to manipulate, nor take sides, in order to de-triangulate or diffuse an anxious situation and improve relationships. One participant stated, “You have to work at family systems every minute of the day.” Participants accomplished these behaviors within their family, work, church staff, and/or leadership.

These behavioral understandings and changes again accentuated Wesley’s rule to *do no harm*. They also directed the attention of participants during the seminars to more toward the One who exhibits the ultimate of differentiation of self, Jesus Christ. Repeatedly throughout the seminar, a phrase such as “to be more like Jesus” as one’s goal was couched as Jesus being the most differentiated individual ever. He is the individual to follow.

The focus group revealed feelings some of the participants experienced in the process. First, they revealed the feelings of enlightenment of the individuals in learning

the new concepts and discernment that helped develop a new perspective of looking at life situations. As one summarized, “My changes have been subtle. I didn’t even realize that my frustration levels were lessening, until confronted with situations that once would have precipitated either anger or at least angst.” Second, they exhibited the feelings of improved self-confidence by the individuals as they reflected on their family system and on their system interactions in their work environment, church family, committees, and staff. Third, they shared that the person feels a calm attitude and reduced anxiety due to knowledge about oneself and others, coupled with a better understanding of the continuous interactions. Fourth, several individuals expressed the feeling of anger during the process. One reason was due to regret for not learning family systems concepts earlier in life to improve the person’s family system. A second reason was the participant changed her/his behavior but the rest of the system remained unchanged. A final reason was the individual was tired of reflecting on negative situations in life.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The best way to interpret the findings from research question #3 is through the flow chart in Figure 4.34. As participants gained knowledge and understanding, they produced both cognitive and affective changes within the participant. The cognitive and affective changes produced a new attitude and behavior, which in turn helped them to *do no harm*.

This natural flow may effectively produce a change in interrelationships in families, work, church staff and leadership, and in the congregation as a whole. Thus, the goal to become more like Jesus Christ is more achievable.





**Figure 4.34. Process of change.**

#### **Research Question #4**

How have the new insights and practices helped the participants to fulfill John Wesley's general rule to *do no harm* to those with whom they interrelate in their family, leadership, staff, or congregation?

#### **Report of Data**

The participants at the focus group related the following responses to focus group question #6, "How has/will what you learned and practiced ultimately assist you in doing no harm?":

- "Improve self-reflection and introspection,"
- "Take responsibility for one's own behavior and reactivity,"
- "Exercise intentional listening of others,"
- "Quickening of the tongue, thinking before speaking,"
- "Graceful acceptance of another person,"
- "Not being judgmental,"
- "Have greater compassion for everyone,"
- "Looking beyond the immediate situation or presenting problem,"
- "Making informed decisions,"
- "Do not engage in destructive triangles," and,

- “The greater understanding of systems theory gained, the greater the mercy expressed.”

### **Critical Analysis**

Even though *do no harm* was not prominent throughout the project, the qualitative data from the focus group suggests the potential for the individual participant to *do no harm* in interrelationships with others. Additionally, one participant, who was in a major role of leadership, implied doing no harm in a few weekly reflections. He stated:

- He avoided getting involved in a triangulation in a committee meeting.
- When triangulation occurred in another committee meeting and tempers flared, he redirected the discussion back on course and dispelled the anxiety.

Another individual shared a reflection about her experience in a work situation in which she utilized her new awareness of family systems that alludes to her and her colleagues trying to *do no harm*:

There was a situation (as often happens) where it would have been easy to get into the middle of an argument, one which did not actually involve me. Working on the principles of self-differentiation, I was able to maintain objectivity and allow others the space, and the respect, to express themselves calmly and coherently. It would have been easy to jump right in and throw fuel on the situation, but by realizing that wouldn't be productive, I could instead say 'I understand your point of view to be such and such, is that correct?' and then turn to the other party and say the same thing. This kept me from inserting an opinion, and it gave the other two ladies the chance to (a) hear themselves, and (b) clarify themselves, while encouraging them to think reasonably about the conflict. The conflict isn't yet resolved, but the viewpoints are better understood by both parties and are being considered till a later scheduled time.... I avoided very tempting triangulation.

The statements of the focus group responses and the individual reflections provided by the participants suggest a change of behavior, and may point specifically to *doing no harm*.

## **Interpretation of Findings**

Even though the phrase *do no harm* only showed forth in the question of the focus group, the phrase was implied. If one synthesizes the statements above, one finds a process of behavior that suggests fulfillment Wesley's general rule *do no harm*: "[u]ncharitable or unprofitable conversation; ... [d]oing to others as we would not they should do unto us. Doing what we know is not for the glory of God..." (United Methodist Book of Discipline par. 103). Thus, the learned and changed behaviors fulfilled Wesley's general rule.

When one takes responsibility for one's own behavior, through intentional listening, self-reflection, and introspection, it will lead to quickening the tongue and thinking before speaking. This behavior allows for informed decisions and acceptance of another's ideas and feelings without being judgmental but rather with graceful acceptance. The process also allows for one to look beyond the immediate situation or problem, preventing one from engaging in destructive triangles and resulting in greater compassion in society as a whole.

## **Summary of Major Findings**

The following is a summary of the major findings of this study.

### **New Awareness and Transformed Perspective**

The level of awareness of family systems was low at the start of the study mostly due to the terms and concepts being obscure, yet, the awareness increased as participants learned, reflected, and interrelated over the study period. The awareness moved beyond the participants' families and into interrelationships at work, with church staff and leadership, in the congregation, and in society as a whole. Moreover, the new awareness

from the information, discussion, and reflection of family systems for the eight-week study transformed the participants' perspective on interrelationship. Individuals began to use the lens of family systems in all areas of their lives.

### **Multi-Generational Transmission and Genogram**

The concepts of multi-generational transmission and development of a genogram revealed a wealth of information for the majority of the participants of the study. By study's end, a few of the individuals believed one could apply the concepts to other organizations such as the church.

### **Emotional Triangles**

The presentation, discussion, and reflection on emotional triangles played a major part in the study. Participants understood that emotional triangles were a way of life, and they began to work with them in a positive manner. Furthermore, they began to learn how not to participate in destructive emotional triangles.

### **Do No Harm**

With the family systems perspective becoming a part of their lives, participants realized that applying the perspective helps fulfill Wesley's general rule to *do no harm*.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Major Findings**

The discussion for each of the major findings of this study includes evaluation and interpretation through the three lenses of personal observation, literature, and biblical/theological foundation. Included are comments on how each finding informs the practice of ministry.

#### **New Awareness and Transformed Perspective**

Awareness of family systems over the course of this study had a definite increase. Participants learned new terms and concepts and readily identified them in their lives. Furthermore, their awareness began to permeate not only the participants' families but also their interrelationships in work, church staff and leadership, congregation, and society as a whole. Thus, participants began to use the lens of family systems in all areas of their life.

When the participants first arrived at the orientation meeting prior to the seminar, some seemed a bit reluctant to participate. I had the sense that some felt obligated to answer the invitation to participate in the project because I was their pastor. Others came because their spouses told them to participate. Some wanted to be a part of the project in order to help me obtain the doctor of ministry degree.

After presenting the process in the orientation meeting, and the first seminar session, most of the participants' motivation began to change. One individual was doubtful and skeptical about the seminar stating that, "he did not see the purpose of the project nor was he receiving anything out of it." Thankfully, after the fourth session on

emotional triangles a new awareness occurred in his life. He stated that “everything began to make sense.” At the focus group, he further related, “God is not finished with me yet,” and he has “a lot of work to do” on his own attitude and behavior. On analysis, this individual’s DSI was at 3.0 on a 6.0 scale at the start of the project and it remained exactly 3.0 at post-intervention (see Figure 4.24, p. 103). His DSI had no change either direction.

Not only did the recorded data of the evaluations and reflections reveal a change in awareness, but also between seminar sessions, and even now, at this writing three months later, participants relate family systems in general conversation at church and in committee meetings. The new awareness is what Papero relates as the challenge of systems, “The challenge of systems is to understand on an emotional level one’s connectedness to family, society, nature, and the earth and to guide oneself responsibly within that awareness” (18). The participants met the challenge of understanding their connectedness in the family, with the staff, with the leadership, and within the congregation.

As stated in Chapter 2, Steinke speaks of healthy leaders being responsible for the care and stewardship of the family system. A major portion of building this responsibility in a healthy manner is by one gaining a new awareness of the function of family systems within one’s life, family, and church family. Consequently, the new awareness may bring transformation of behavior, which, in turn, influences the rest of the system.

As one reads the Gospel accounts, Jesus’ teaching and interaction was to transform humanity from the inside out. All that he said and did produced a new awareness and a potential for changed behavior. This awareness and transformation has

its foundation in the Great Commandment. “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt. 22:37-39). Furthermore, the new awareness and transformation may produce the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17:20-23, that his followers may become one in unity with Christ and one another as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one.

The natural process of new learning is producing awareness and, at times, transformation of one’s perspective. Therefore, one’s perspective changes as awareness and transformation occurs through the application of family systems theory. The awareness and transformation of perspective provides a behavioral modification that improves the function of the ministry of the church. This major finding supports the theory and work of Friedman, Richardson, and Steinke with the church as family systems.

If leadership, staff, and members/constituents of a church gain a new awareness of family systems and apply the awareness to see through the lens of family systems in their interrelationships, then the systems in which they function would become less reactive, especially in times of crisis. Thus, the pastor facilitating such learning and awareness benefits his or her congregation’s leadership, staff, and members as a whole. As Richardson notes, “People in the church ... are intricately interconnected.... Each person both influences and is influenced by everyone else” (*Creating a Healthier Church* 26). The new awareness produces transformed perspective that will help the people gain a better understanding who they are, how they interact.

## **Multi-Generational Transmission and Genogram**

The majority of the participants' understanding of the concepts of multi-generational transmission and development of a Genogram provided new insights into their respective family systems. By study's end, a few of the individuals believed the concepts could apply to other organizations, especially the church. One stated in the focus group that multi-generational transmission prevailed in her mind as she saw "that as a part of [her] contacts with other people."

During the second seminar session, students seemed mediocre when receiving the information on multi-generational transmission. After presenting the genogram tool in conjunction with the multi-generational transmission, students developed an interest, especially when I explained my own genogram to the students. As one stated, "I broke the cycle" of behavior passed down through three generations. When the students received instructions to develop their own genogram following the session, they became more intrigued.

At the start of the next seminar session, after a review, the students gathered into small groups of four or five to take a turns sharing their own genograms. I observed and listened to the students describe their genograms to their small groups. They not only had feelings of excitement, joy, and sadness shared as they presented, but the listeners in the group were moved and captivated, some to tears, as they listened to the presenter. The students shared their stories, which were healing for each of them.

Kerr and Bowen argue that as multi-generational family understands more concerning its history the greater the potential for improvement in family dynamics and function (221). As a person develops and analyzes an individual genogram, that person



discovers patterns of behavior that pass down through the generations of the family. The information gathered and the understanding gained assists the individual pass on the positive behaviors and break the cycle of negative behaviors. The work on self that one performs in multi-generational evaluation is not to provide an excuse for behavior but to inform the individual of necessary behavioral change. Thus, the person discovers why and then answers the *what now* question through his or her behaviors and interrelationships.

Friedman relates the importance of understanding the extended family and how that understanding affects a person's behavior not only in the individual's own family, but also within the church family (31). Richardson notes the importance of those sitting around a table at a committee meeting bringing with them interrelationships or connections with their families and with other family systems that influence the committee members' interaction. The more the members understand this dynamic the better the opportunity to function in a non-anxious manner (*Creating a Healthier Church* 36). Multi-generational transmission and development of a Genogram is, therefore, very important to the health of the individual and to her or his interrelationships.

Multi-generational transmission has been present with humanity since creation. Original sin is a basic multi-generational transmission inherited from the Fall of Adam and Eve. If one reads the Old Testament from the perspective of family systems, one cannot deny the concept of multi-generational transmission playing a major part in the behavior of the characters in the stories. The passing on of the emotional processes are easily recognized.

As a leader, staff person, or congregant, the more one works on and evaluates one's genogram or works on family of origin the more that person will understand the process of multi-generational transmission of family and how it affects their interrelationships, actions, and reactions with others.

This major finding supports the work of Friedman, Richardson, and Steinke on church as family systems. The more the people in the congregation and the leadership and staff are able to work on their family of origin the more differentiated they become, giving potential to break a negative family cycle and potential for improved interrelationships.

If pastors take the time to share insights on multi-generational transmission and help leaders and staff work on their own genogram and discuss them, the result may be improvement in the interactions, and the system will move towards greater health.

### **Emotional Triangles**

The fourth seminar session's discussion affirmed that emotional triangles are foundational to the participants' lives. The participants became very interested in the concept of emotional triangles and gained the ability to identify them in daily life situations. When sharing stories of normal everyday situations within family, staffs, committees, Sunday school classes, work, or society, participants became fascinated with the commonality of triangles. Participants readily recognized the effects of triangles on interrelationships and their negative impact on the function of the system involved. One participant related in the focus group that triangulation prevailed "because we have so much of it in our dealings in church meetings and other meetings in society. It's even evident in the evening news/politics." Another succinctly stated, "Triangulation-it's all

around me.” In addition, participants readily detected how they were triangled or they triangled other persons into a situation.

One participant saw the reflections on emotional triangles as a negative process. Consequently, that person was unable to reflect on the concept of emotional triangles in that person’s interrelationships due to her negative perspective. However, other than the one individual, understanding and identifying emotional triangles benefited each participant. Seeing the triangles beyond the immediate or extended family and into each organization that contained interrelationships became very beneficial. Emotional triangles were alive and well everywhere.

As identified by Friedman, “The basic law of emotional triangles is that when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will ‘triangle in’ or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another” (35). The most common situation occurs when two connected people have a disagreement and one of the individuals seeks out the comfort or approval of a third person and tries to have that person side with him or her.

One of the key examples of a dysfunctional triangulation develops when a person has a certain opinion concerning a situation. When the person relates that opinion with a leader of the church and does not receive agreement, the person goes on a *fishing expedition*. The person goes around trying to recruit people to the person’s side of an issue by asking questions such as, “You didn’t think the sermon this Sunday was very good, did you?” If the angler got a bite, the person would proceed with further information in the manner to build a case against the first individual and a triangulation occurs. If the angler does not get a bite, the angler goes to another fishing spot looking

for another person to triangle. The analogy is an example that may apply to many negative or dysfunctional triangles.

Several of the participants related such experiences in their committee meetings or small groups and in their own families. Becoming aware of such a process helped the individuals identify their involvement in triangulation and helped the individual to avoid the destructive triangle or to reposition/de-triangulate from such a situation. Richardson supports the importance of this awareness:

“There are no simple techniques for dealing with triangles. The basic and most important thing is to recognize their presence and to understand what they are about – what drives them and what is going on with the people when they are in a triangle” (*Creating a Healthier Church* 139).

Fortunately, the participants’ new awareness of the life consisting of emotional triangles assisted most of them to reposition or de-triangulate from destructive triangles.

If one reads the many accounts in Scripture concerning the interrelationships of the characters one readily discovers the impact of both positive and negative triangles. They were, are, and will be a way of life. How the triangles build up rather than tear down relationships is of paramount importance.

God created humans to be in relationship with him and with one another. However, when those relationships take on the individual’s will rather than the will of God, they become distorted, destructive, or abusive. Thus is the way of emotional triangles. When emotional triangles function to bring unity, as Christ prayed for his believers to be in unity, then develops a bond that builds one another and strengthens the body of Christ.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are members of the Body of Christ and called by Jesus Christ to be in unity with him and one another. Their lives are comprised of relationships

with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as their ultimate example. Emotional triangles are part of this unity with Christ and with one another. The task is for leaders, staff, and members of the church to understand and identify the emotional triangles that make up the interrelationships and work towards the interrelationships being positive, edifying triangles that unify the lives of Christians. Awareness of the emotional triangle process is imperative to the ministry in order to promote this unity. It requires self-control, especially in very anxious times, in order to accomplish the goal, yet, the promise of Scripture holds true: “God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7, NCV). Thus, with God’s power of love and self-control we take a deep breath in those anxious times attempting not to overreact in interrelationships.

Therefore, the more aware of emotional triangles and their power the better one is able to contend with them. Pastors, leaders, and staff of congregations should take steps to covenant with one another not to succumb to negative, unfruitful triangulation that destroys the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Such practice will enhance unity of the church.

### **Do No Harm**

As the participants’ new family systems perspective became part of their lives, participants’ application of the perspective aided the individuals in fulfilling John Wesley’s general rule to *do no harm*. Over the course of the project, even though not specifically evaluated through the seminar sessions nor the weekly reflections, participants made comments concerning their behavior in their interrelationships with others during the focus group. One related doing no harm by “recognizing situations

especially triangulation and put a lock on [my] tongue and I don't have to respond to this right now." Some reflected how they observed triangulation operating in a very destructive manner. Some reflected how persons tried to triangulate them in some of their church committee meetings. Some reflected how they found themselves not taking a stand and being involved in triangulation or creating an unhealthy triangulation themselves. Some reflected how they became frustrated and upset when they were trying to change their own reactivity but others in their family system in their family or a church meeting did not want to change.

When they reflected on their genogram and the process of multi-generational transmission, participants identified behaviors that caused harm within their families. Additionally, participants shared how their new awareness of family systems revealed how their behavior, or the behavior of others, was harmful to those in relationship with one another. In each of these cases, the persons either identified or alluded to behavior that harmed others. However, as one person reflected, "I really feel more aware and thoughtful of people around me and feel I have been more patient with them. I have felt myself reaching out and saying how I felt to several persons." Furthermore, "The more and more we see each person as the image of God it changes our behavior." Thus, this awareness led participants to rethink their behavior and attempt to *do no harm* to others.

Consequently, Job's discussion on *Three Simple Rules* is fitting. Job succinctly states the importance of the first rule to *do no harm*. He purports that choosing to *do no harm* contains a commitment not to gossip but to speak the truth, not speak unfavorably, not falsify the facts, and not belittle others. Thus, to do no harm runs contrary to these inherent characteristics of harmful or destructive behavior.

Furthermore, Job relates that this rule may be an answer to Jesus' prayer to be one in Christ in John 17:11 (13). Thus, the goal of understanding and practicing of family systems within not only families but within the leadership and the church family as a whole brings about doing no harm. The participants had not fully arrived or fully sanctified into doing no harm; rather, the participants made small steps of doing no harm to the children of God.

The family systems seminar and reflection helped the participants not to devour one another (Gal. 5:15) as they may have done in the past. The information of family systems and its effect on relationships did fulfill Wesley's simple rule to *do no harm*.

This discussion warrants a caution, that at times one's inaction in a situation causes harm. When a person chooses not to act or intervene in a situation as intent not to do harm, his or her inaction may become harmful. The inaction or indecision results in complacency or negligence. Thus, ignoring the issue or situation may do harm.

Likewise, the person, even though she or he may not be in a life or death situation, may experience somewhat of a "bystander syndrome." In a given situation, such as a committee meeting, a committee member becomes very disparaging and harms those in the meeting or outside of the meeting, while other committee members sit around the table and take no action or no response to the behavior, thus causing more harm.

One of the goals of the practice of ministry is to *do no harm*. If pastors, leaders, and staff of congregations, and the congregations themselves as a whole were to become somewhat aware of the family systems perspective and marry it with Wesley's general rule to *do no harm*, one can only imagine how the world would change. To understand a person's story and influences on his or her life and the lives of others, to look through the

lens of multi-generational transmission, emotional triangles, sibling position, and improvement of one's differentiation of self, one can only imagine the transformation that will occur in a person's life or a family system as a whole. Practicing ministry in this manner will move God's children into unity in Christ.

### **Implications**

Several implications arise out of the results of this study. First, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge. Although this project had shortcomings, it contributes to the validity of the effects that understanding and practicing family systems theory has on the behavior of individuals and the function of the system. This project provides additional proof of the positive transformation that may occur through application of family systems.

Second, this project contributes to further research of family systems within leadership, staff, and congregations. A similar project would be interesting if it required participation of leadership and staff of a congregation and may provide clarifying data supporting the importance of family systems thinking and practice. Possibly, a similar project of longer duration with a longer evaluation period would provide more viable data.

Third, the project was originally set for the leadership and staff of the church, but due to difficulties in the leadership and timing issues, the project participation extended to congregants. However, the seminar sessions would be most beneficial if presented in a two-step process. The first step would encompass the leadership and staff of the church in order to enhance the understanding of family systems as applied to their lives, leadership, and congregation. The second step would provide similar information to the congregation



as a whole through the Sunday service and/or Sunday school venues. Development of a curriculum would be necessary for the process to succeed, but since Christ calls the staff, leadership, and congregation toward unity, the two-step process provides the possibility of meeting this call.

### **Limitations**

The study had several limitations that affected the results and findings. Therefore, the things I would do differently in the study pertain to length of the seminar, reflection period, self-reporting, completion of weekly reflections, focus group development, use of *Survey Monkey*, and analyzing qualitative data.

The *length of the seminar* rushed the presentation of material covered. Covering each of the four concepts and other ancillary topics in a more thorough process would afford the opportunity for participants to grasp and apply the material. A college semester framework or extended periods for each topic over a weekend or in a retreat setting would improve effectiveness. Availability of more time for small-group discussion of the concepts needs increasing.

The *reflection period* was too short for proper reflection of the information and practices that participants learned and applied. A six-month reflection period with a once-per-month focus group may be more advantageous to evaluate awareness and behavioral modifications.

*Self-reporting* always has the potential of the respondent not answering truthfully or accurately. Some respondents will self-report from the perspective of what the person desires to be or not be rather than what is current reality. The more truthful the responses are, the more viable the data.

Many of the participants had difficulty with completion of the *weekly reflection guides* due to same questions or topics broached each week. Some of persons saw their responses to the questions as negative and declined answering them. Additionally, more teaching should have occurred in methods to record happenings and experiences such as journaling or keeping a diary.

Research and development of the *focus group* was not as thorough as it could have been. More research and practice should have preceded the actual development and completion of the focus group for this project. More time for review and shaping of initial questions, preparation of possible follow-up questions, establishment of rules for the focus group, and research and practice of facilitation of focus groups would improve results and provide more in-depth affective data for the project (Morgan 52-53).

*Survey Monkey* made quantitative and qualitative data collection easier. Survey Monkey provided simple graphs of quantitative responses that were easy to analyze and compare. A spreadsheet developed by James Clark, PhD, calculated and analyzed the DSI data.

*Analyzing qualitative data* was more difficult even though downloading the data on spreadsheets made for easier access. Collection of the data occurred immediately after completion of an instrument, yet analysis as soon as possible would have made for an easier process of completion of the dissertation.

### **Unexpected Observations or Outcomes**

A few unexpected observations and outcomes occurred in this study in the areas of interactions over genograms and sibling positions, transformation, DSI delta results, death of a project participant, and impatience with others.

**Impact of Staff or Leadership as Participants in the Study**

The twelve (40 percent) leaders/staff of FUMC Paulsboro involved in the study influenced the study (see Table 4.3, p. 77). This influence surfaced when the leaders reflected on the presence of triangulation in their interrelationships. A number of the leaders related the prevalence of triangulation during meetings or casual discussion concerning church people, leaders, and the congregation.

**Impact of the Number of Educators as Participants in Study**

The occupation with the highest number of participants in the study was educator. The nine educators (27 percent) who participated may have affected the study in a positive manner (see Table 4.3, p. 77). First, the educational level of the educators reinforced their desire for ongoing learning opportunities. Two of them had postgraduate degrees so they were able to relate with my undertaking of the study. Second, my pastor/teacher relationship as researcher alluded to a natural affinity of the importance of gaining new knowledge and understanding. Third, even though some of the educators did not relate their exposure to family systems concepts, they brought with them similar concepts from their learning of human growth and development. Each of these points provided a positive impact on the study. The educators may have started at a different foundation from the other participants; however, each of them experienced growth in their lives and their interrelationships.

**Interactions over Genograms and Sibling Positions**

The seminar session that presented multi-generational transmission included the teaching on the development and use of a genogram. The participants developed their own genogram as extensively as they desired and were encouraged to share them with

one another in a small group. The interaction among small group members was very enlightening to all involved. Observing the participants who listened to a presenter in the small group revealed engagement, interest, and concern. Observing the presenter of the genogram produced a catharsis as he or she shared the deep understanding of family systems relationships beyond a family tree toward a social connection.

One participant came to me and rolled open his genogram. He stated, “Look at my genogram. My great grandfather was an alcoholic. My grandfather was an alcoholic. My father was an alcoholic. And I am not an alcoholic.” With a loud voice of excitement he added, “I broke the cycle of multi-generational transmission!” Such is the power of genograms, multi-generational transmission, and sibling position for one’s life.

### **Transformation**

One individual came into the seminar somewhat skeptical with a sense of questioning its validity and application to his life. Over the course of time, his mind-set moved toward, “I have a lot do.” on my life’s interrelationships. The person questioned the discussion and presentation of the material both verbally and mentally. He tried to grasp the information presented at each of the seminars; however, a definite positive shift occurred in his understanding during the third seminar on emotional triangles. He became very engaged when triangulating situations were shared as examples of the concept. By the time of the focus group, the individual shared in passing how “he had a lot of work to do” and “God was not finished with him, yet.”

### **DSI Delta Results**

I did not expect the DSI results to show a decline in the majority of the participants’ differentiation-of-self indicator. Again, the decline I surmise was due to the

participants' new awareness which caused them to read and respond to the statements in the DSI in a different manner. The validity is questionable when using the DSI as an instrument in the manner of a pre/post-invention tool.

### **Death of Project Participant**

Chapter 3 addressed the intervening variable of mortality with several possibilities of participants resigning from the project. Even so, it was much unexpected that one of the participants would die suddenly in three weeks from brain cancer. The participant's husband also resigned from the project. In spite of this unexpected outcome, the three weeks of her illness were seen as a time for the church family to interrelate with her, her husband (a project participant) in very authentic ways. One of the participants succinctly grasped family systems during this time in a weekly reflection:

All the upheaval surrounding [Joe and Sarah] has been a study in family systems. Certainly, there has been plenty of emotional mayhem, and at times "reactivity" has made dealing with the information difficult for all of us. However, their [Joe and Sarah] own maturity, self-differentiation, has provided a centering point that has helped many, family and friends alike, deal in a more faith-filled way.

The participant's reflection captures family systems and *do no harm* in a faithful, insightful manner that is instructive.

### **Indicators of Enmeshment within Leadership**

One of the difficulties that arose in the project development at FUMC Paulsboro was enmeshment within the leadership. I would surmise that enmeshment caused many of the leaders not to participate. A pastoral change after a fifteen year tenure of the previous pastor created some difficulties in the leadership's willingness to work with me as their new pastor. Persons in individual Sunday school classes dominated some of the

committees. Furthermore, the some of the current and former leadership would not embrace the church's mission to to reach out to new people in the community.

Some of the former leaders were the informal leaders of the church. Their enmeshment with their friends and Sunday schoolmates, in some cases forcing a decision between friendships or the church, became a large influence in their lack of participation in the project. The enmeshment also affected the ability of individuals to gain the courage or more courage to stand, or to be more self-differentiated to stand for the life of the church. This factor is one more reason to provide family systems information and discussion with a church staff and leadership very early on in the pastor's tenure and to move towards new unity in Christ.

### **Impatience with Others**

Several of the participants expressed having impatience with others with whom they interrelated who were not aware of family systems. They found it frustrating and difficult interacting with them, and when they attempted to share the new understanding the other person would try to understand.

### **Recommendations**

First, I recommend the presentation of a similar seminar early in the tenure as pastor of congregation and make it part of the required leadership training and development. This recommendation could apply to any local congregation, but for pastors in the United Methodist Church this recommendation would occur at the beginning of the annual change in church leadership after the pastor arrives at a new appointment. After initial training at that point, then the seminar should occur on an annual basis for the new leadership and refresher training for existing leaders. The

existing leaders could provide excellent examples of family systems in action to the new leadership.

Second, after training the leadership and staff, I recommend that the congregation be taught family systems through teaching opportunities in Sunday sermons, during Sunday school, and/or midweek studies. A curriculum would need development; however, the new awareness could help the congregation build unity.

Third, I recommend a pastor may want to guide the leadership and/or congregation into development of the congregation's own genogram. This exercise assists the leadership in identifying both negative and positive multi-generational transmission characteristics for the congregation and leadership. The process would also help the leadership/congregation to break the negative cycles and bolster the positive cycles.

Fourth, I recommend a pastor may want to invest more time discussing the four family systems concepts during the seminar sessions. After presenting the concepts, insure sufficient time for group discussion of each of the concepts. Providing small-group discussion time of real situations from participants' lives or anonymous case studies would benefit the understanding and application of the concept and therefore, bolster behavioral change.

Fifth, I recommend the extension of the project reflection period. Rather than eight weeks of weekly reflections, performing a monthly focus group would be more advantageous to perform would allow for more extensive reflections during a six-month period.

## Postscript

This postscript delineates the study's effect on my life and ministry. I will describe how I am different and how my ministry has changed because of this dissertation process.

### How I Am Different

First, providing the seminar on family systems reinforced and validated its importance not only for those who participated but also for me. Each time, whether in counseling session or as now, teaching situations, family systems thinking and perspective becomes more prominent in my life and ministry.

Second, the reinforcement of family systems assists me to become the non-anxious presence in times of high anxiety in life, staff, leadership, and church family. I am not always the non-anxious presence in some situations, but God has used the understanding of the process and perspective of family systems to help me have better emotional self-control, to be less reactive in situations. I am also aware that I have a long way to go in this transformation and, thankfully, God is not finished with yet.

Third, when I combined the insights of family systems in leadership and my ministry in the church with Wesley's general rule to *do no harm*, the question, "Will this do harm?" precedes my decisions and actions.

Fourth, the process of the project and dissertation taught me the wonderful process of seeing a problem, reviewing the historical and literary foundations pertaining to the problem, and then make informed decisions or processes for the subject problem. The process began transforming my *modus operandi* in problem solving from making quick uninformed decisions to informed decision making.



## How My Ministry Changed

The completion of the project confirmed for me the high importance family systems play in the life and ministry of the pastor, staff, leadership, and congregants. I also affirmed my need for teaching these basic concepts to persons within the church, especially the leadership and staff. The teaching of family systems should be mandatory rather than optional in order to serve on leadership or on a church staff. Arranging the teaching and awareness of family systems as part of leadership development and training in the local church should be a priority in my ministry.

The completion of the project further identified the need for improvement of my own differentiation of self and that God is not finished with me, yet. I discovered that I should take inventory on ways I may have harmed others in the past and move forward in fulfilling Wesley's rule to *do no harm*.

Even though I have opportunities to teach in the church as part of my calling as a pastor, I truly enjoyed leading the seminar sessions. It was very rewarding to see people's lives change. One person commented after the third seminar session, "Thank you professor!" In addition, presenting the information, working on my own genogram, and explaining triangulating situations helped me reevaluate my family systems process, reinforce being a part of the body of Christ, and fulfill Wesley's General Rule to *do no harm*.

All the while in my life and ministry, my prayer is one written anonymously on the reverse side of a bookmark associated with Job's *Three Simple Rules*:

Teach us today  
to do no harm,  
to do good,  
and assist us

so that we  
may stay in  
loving relationship  
with You  
and our neighbor  
Help today  
to be an answer  
to another's prayer  
so that we may  
be one of Your signs  
of hope in the world  
You love.

This prayer is a simple prayer of hope, encouragement, and challenge as I thankfully embark on a new ministry journey for the sake of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. The project has been the culmination of many hours of research and reflection that leads to hope for God's people. It provides a sense of hope of God's presence now and for eternity. "Trust the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). In the Lord's leading within family systems is such hope.

## APPENDIX A

### PROJECT INVITATION LETTER

Dear (name):

For the past several years, I have been a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY. I completed all my course work in 2007, but due to many circumstances, it has been difficult to complete the project and dissertation. The project and dissertation are the last requirements to complete in order to achieve this professional degree.

The project and dissertation is A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS APPROACH TO THE STAFF, LEADERSHIP, AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PAULSBORO (name changed for anonymity). Since my sample of participants in the project are members of the staff, leadership, and people of First United Methodist Church, I am asking you to participate in the project.

The following is an overview of the requirements of the participant:

- Attend a project pre-meeting to understand the project and process.
- Individually enter into covenant to complete the project.
- Participate in a Family Systems Seminar with sessions on the following dates:
  - **September 9, 6:30 – 8:30 pm**      Project Pre-meeting  
*(Overview of Project and Process)*
  - **September 18, 8:30 am – 12 noon**      First Seminar Session  
*(Intro and Self-Differentiation)*
  - **September 21, 6:30 – 8:30 pm**      Second Seminar Session  
*(Multi-Generational Transmission)*
  - **September 25, 8:30 am – 10:30 am**      Third Seminar Session  
*(Sibling Position)*
  - **September 28, 6:30 – 8:30 pm**      Fourth Seminar Session  
*(Emotional Triangle)*
  - **November 13, 8:30 – 11:30 am**      Focus Group and Celebration
- Continue to reflect on the effects of the seminar until 60 days past first seminar (reflections will be submitted once per week).
- The project lasts 60 days from the start of the first seminar session.
- Receive a report of findings and implications in a future presentation to the participants of the project upon my graduation from Asbury Theological Seminary.

Understanding who we are and whose we are through a better understanding of family systems in our life, work, and family improves our differentiation of self. This

improved understanding enhances our interrelationships as the people, staff, and leadership of FUMC and thus, improves our response to God's "mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." I appreciate your assistance in this study and look forward to our time together in education, research, and experience.

**Please RSVP, at [jackwallace@whitesborofumc.org](mailto:jackwallace@whitesborofumc.org) or 214-212-6090 by Tuesday, September 7, 2010 in order for materials to be ready for the project overview presentation. There is NO COST to the individual. Couples may attend. Also, notify me if you need childcare for any of the sessions.**

Grace and peace,

Jack Wallace  
Pastor, DMIN Student

## APPENDIX B

### PROJECT PARTICIPATION COVENANT AGREEMENT

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

I, \_\_\_\_\_, covenant with Rev. Jack Wallace and the project participation group to participate in the A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS APPROACH TO THE STAFF, LEADERSHIP, AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PAULSBORO.

We agree to work together in

- Completing a pre-intervention questionnaire
- Participating in a Family Systems Seminar comprised of four seminar sessions and one Focus Group/Celebration session.
- Participating in discussions, role plays, and worship associated with the seminar sessions.
- Completing seminar session evaluations.
- Be engaged in reflection of concepts learned over the course of 60 days from the start of the first seminar session.
- Completing a post-intervention questionnaire.
- Participating in Focus Group/Celebration session.

All questionnaires, evaluations, and interview information will remain anonymous and stored in a bank safe-deposit box. After Asbury Theological Seminary publishes the dissertation, the participant will receive his/her original project materials if desired. If not, then I will shred subject materials.

Due to unforeseen circumstances or personal reasons the person signing this covenant may opt out of the project at any point.

---

Signature of Participant

Rev. Jack Wallace

Pastor, DMIN Student

**APPENDIX C**

**SEMINAR REMINDER E-MAIL**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is a friendly reminder of the upcoming First Family Systems Seminar Session you agreed to participate in is on Saturday, September 18, 2010, at 8:30 a.m., in Sonrise Center at FUMC (Paulsboro, fictitious name). This seminar will include a brunch.

Looking forward to your participation.

Grace and peace,

Jack Wallace

Pastor, DMIN Student

**APPENDIX D**

**PRE-INTERVENTION FAMILY SYSTEM**

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORM**

Participant ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

When you hear the term family systems, what comes to your mind?

Yes No

Have you had any exposure to family systems theory?

If yes, where and/or how?

Have you ever heard the following terms:

- Sibling position
  
- Multi-generational Transmission
  
- Emotional Triangles
  
- Differentiation of Self

If you participate in the Family systems seminar, what would be one of your expectations of knowledge or experience?



Discuss the basic process and covenant.

Do you have any questions?

OVER

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Please place an "X" in the appropriate block.

Age:    18-25       26-35       36-45       46-55       56-65  
 66+

Gender:       Male                       Female

Ethnicity:       Native-American    European-American    Asian-American

Latino-American    African-American

Education completed :       Less than 12 yrs    12 yrs    14 yrs    16 yrs

Graduate       Post-graduate

Marital Status:

Employment:

Occupation:

---

Single

Retired

Married

Homemaker

Divorced

Self-employed

Remarried

Employed

Widow/Widower

Unemployed

Disabled

How many years have you been associated with FUMC?

0-5    5-10    11-20    20+

What is your primary role with the church?

Member/Constituent

Teacher/Group Leader

Staff

Church Leadership

## APPENDIX E

### PRE/POST-INTERVENTION QUESTIONNAIRE

PARTICIPANT # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Differentiation of Self Inventory

These are questions concerning your thoughts and feelings about yourself and relationships with others. Please read each statement carefully and decide how much the statement is *generally true* of you on a 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very*) scale. Circle the appropriate number in **black ink**. If you believe that an item does not pertain to you (e.g., you are not currently married or in a committed relationship, or one or both of your parents are deceased), please answer the item according to your best guess about what your thoughts and feelings would be in that situation. Be sure to answer every item and try to be as honest and accurate as possible in your responses.

	Not at all true of Me					Very true of Me
1. People have remarked that I'm overly emotional.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I have difficulty expressing my feelings to people I care for.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I often feel inhibited around my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I usually need a lot of encouragement from others when I start a big job or task.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him or her for a time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I want to live up to my parent's expectations of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I wish that I weren't so emotional.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person.	1	2	3	4	5	6

12. My spouse/partner could not tolerate it if I were to express to him/her my true feelings about some things.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. When my spouse/partner criticizes me, it bothers me for days.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. When I am having an argument with someone, I can separate my thoughts about the issue from my feelings about the person.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I'm often uncomfortable when people get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I feel a need for approval from virtually everyone in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. At times, I feel as if I'm riding an emotional roller coaster.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. There's no point in getting upset about things I cannot change.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I'm concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. I'm overly sensitive to criticism.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I try to live up to my parent's expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. I'm fairly self-accepting.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. I often feel that my spouse/partner wants too much from me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. I often agree with others just to appease them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. If I have had an argument with my spouse/partner, I tend to think about it all day.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. I am able to say "no" to orders even when I feel pressured by them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. When one of my relationships becomes very intense, I feel the urge to run away from it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. Arguments with my parent(s) or sibling(s) can still make me feel awful.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. If someone is upset with me, I can't seem to let it go easily.	1	2	3	4	5	6

31. I'm less concerned that others approve of me than I am about doing what I think is right.	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. I would never consider turning to any of my family members for emotional support.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. I often feel unsure when others are not around to help me make a decision.	1	2	3	4	5	6
34. I'm very sensitive to being hurt by others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. My self-esteem really depends on how others think of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. When I'm with my spouse/partner, I often feel smothered.	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. When making decisions, I seldom worry about what others will think.	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. I often wonder about the kind of impression I create.	1	2	3	4	5	6
39. When things go wrong, talking about them usually makes it worse.	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. I feel things more intensely than others do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
41. I usually do what I believe is right regardless of what others say.	1	2	3	4	5	6
42. Our relationship might be better if my spouse/partner would give me the space I need.	1	2	3	4	5	6
43. I tend to feel pretty stable under stress.	1	2	3	4	5	6
44. Sometimes I feel sick after arguing with my spouse/partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
45. I feel it's important to hear my parents' opinions before making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
46. I worry about people close to me getting sick, hurt, or upset.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: Skowron and Friedlander, rev. 2003.

## APPENDIX F

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Each participant received a copy of this glossary for reference for both the project intervention and later.

**Anxiety** (or “heightened reactivity”). Defined as the response of the person (or organism) to real or imagined threat but in family systems theory has the broader understanding of heightened reactivity. Anxiety may be acute (short-term) or chronic (passed through the family system for generations). Anxiety is heightened by “secrets.” Anxiety often results in the togetherness pull within the organization and increased rigidity in boundaries.

**Basic self.** The core of the person including his values, purpose, thoughtfulness as well as emotions and automatic parts. Considered to be the person of the person. Often referred to as the principled part of the person or his inner guidance system. It is considered non-negotiable in that it is not given up to a relationship nor is it added to by a relationship. The basic self is considered to have non-permeable boundaries. It is distinguished from the pseudo-self or the functional self.

**Boundaries.** An abstract delineation between parts of a system or between systems, typically defined by implicit or explicit rules regarding who may participate and in what manner.

**Bowen theory** (or “Bowen natural systems theory” or “family systems theory”). Bowen family systems theory is a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. This is a theory originated by Dr. Murray Bowen that understands present situations in terms of part relationships or family histories. It understands the family as a single emotional unit composed on interlocking relationships existing over many generations. It suggests that individual behavior is intimately related to the functioning of one’s original family (“family of origin”). The theory attempts to move beyond cause-and-effect thinking to a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple causative factors that interact across time to produce problems or symptoms. The theory is applied to various communities, including churches, schools, businesses that adopt “family” as its metaphor for its organization.

**Chronic conflict.** Conflict that has lasted two years or longer manifesting in one or a multitude of conflict issues or presenting problems. Chronic conflict is not simple cause-effect conflict. Rather, it is a condition of anxiety that exists in the system of the organization such that it has a life of its own.

**Coalitions.** Coalitions relate to inclusion and exclusion in emotional triangles.

**Conflict.** Conflict is where “seemingly incompatible elements exert force in opposing or divergent directions” (Heitler 5). These forces evoke tension but not necessarily fighting.

**Conflict purposeful.** Organizational conflict that allows the organization or people in it to grow, solve problems more effectively, and counter-balance the homeostasis or inertia that most organizations develop is purposeful.

**Cutoff** (or “emotional cutoff”). The concept deals with the way people separate themselves from the past in order to start their lives in the present generation” (Bowen 300). It is the opposite of fusion and it relates to being unapproachable psychologically and emotionally. Cutoff is how some people deal with demands that are uncomfortable (“anxious”) to them. They withdraw or leave, emotionally or physically when life is too intense. They do so because they feel powerless in the encroachment of another.

**Detriangulate.** The course of action whereby one extricates himself or herself from the position of functioning as a mediator between others in an intense triangular relationship. To detriangulate is to resist the invitation to ally with one and against another (say with a father and against a mother).

**Differentiation.** (or “differentiation of self” or “self-differentiation” or “individuation”). This is the cornerstone and goal of Bowen’s family systems theory and relates to one’s self-definition in the midst of significant others. It has the practical result of being separate from others while being in connection with them. It means to define one’s response in the midst of emotional reactivity. It means to distinguish between emotion and reason. It is associated in family systems theory with maturity. Differentiation is never fully realized and is considered to be a process more than a goal.

**Disengagement.** A measure of family structure where rigid boundaries preclude closeness and involvement in the everyday concerns of shared life. Each member of the family system operates autonomously and distantly from each other.

**Emotions.** Emotions are understood to include a smorgasbord of automatic responses such as those driven by instinct, genetics, biology, and hormones as well as automatic feeling or sensory responses. Emotions also include fight or flight reactions and patterned reactions, which get set in the person over time with repetition.



**Emotional triangle.** An emotional triangle is a three-way relationship where each corner of the triangle can be a person, group, or family (as in criminal, police and victim; or father, mother and child). Emotional triangles serve to include two and exclude one and they tend to increase problems rather than solve them. There are good and bad triangles but in family systems theory they are considered mostly as unhelpful.

**Enmeshment.** Enmeshment refers to being too close in response to the togetherness urge and it relates to the control that someone may have over one's identity.

**Family emotional processes (or "nuclear family emotional processes").** This concept describes the "patterns of emotional functioning in a family in a single generation" that are "replicas of those in past generations and will be repeated in the generations to follow" (Bowen 429). Reactions to this family emotional process include; (1) reactive emotional distance; (2) physical or emotional dysfunction in one spouse; (3) overt conflict; (4) projection of problems onto one or more children.

**Family of origin.** Family of origin is the family in which one is born (or adopted) and grew up and includes extended family members or others who lived within the home or were significant.

**Family projection process.** The process by which "parental undifferentiation impairs one or more children ... within the father-mother-child triangle" (Bowen 298). The process revolves around the primary parent or caretaker of the child (usually the mother) and it results in emotional impairment of the child. The child that receives the projection will have difficulties differentiating. This will effect their interactions with their own spouse and/or children.

**Family Sculpting.** A technique used by Virginia Satir in family therapy where "People were invited to use others in the group to make a 'sculpture' that physically represented the relationships in the family. They were sometimes asked the sculpt 'how the relationships are at the moment' and 'how you would like them to be in the future'" (The Strengths Foundation).

**Fusion.** When emotion and reason merge such that the person has difficulty in distinguishing between the two. Fusion can be seen in any intense or primary relationship. Both persons in a fusion are intensely emotionally reactive to each other and experience a loss or gain of self in the relationship. In contrast, the highly self-differentiated individual derives the sense of self from within.

**Genogram.** Genogram is a multi-generational diagram in the form of a genetic tree showing the structure and emotional processes of a family. The genogram is used

by Murray Bowen to trace recurring and generational patterns. Many family systems therapists do a minimum of three generations in a family assessment (see McGoldrick and Gerson).

**Homeostasis.** Homeostasis defines the ability of a system to change or not change. Homeostasis is the inability of the system to change to external or internal factors. It has to do with the degree of “stuckness” in the system. It is the preference for sameness or security vs. the risks of a new definition.

**Identified person or patient.** The family member with the presenting problem or symptom in an anxious family system (e.g., the rebellious teenage son of distant and untrusting parents).

**Maturity (or “emotional maturity”).** The goal of family systems theory is greater differentiation from the pressures of group norms. To focus on and, in some measure achieve, one’s personal values and purpose is to be mature. The ability to manage the emotional part of the self in an adaptive way—a way in which long-term benefit overrides short-term benefits when the two conflict. Those considered mature in family systems theory are on the higher ends of the scale of differentiation.

**Nuclear family.** A system of man and a woman, and their children living together as a unit. The nuclear family is typically comprised of parental and children subsystems though there may be additional subsystems within the home (e.g., grandparents, live-in others).

**Potentiating.** Potentiating is the effect of anxiety on the system or within one or more members of the system such that the problems within the system are exaggerated.

**Reactivity.** The tendency of the person to respond to perceived threat or the anxiety of others. Heightened reactivity places the person lower on the scale of differentiation.

**Scale of differentiation.** A theoretical continuum upon which all organisms can be understood. Rather than focus on sociological categories such as gender, culture or environmental conditioning. Bowen focused on differentiation that is influenced by sibling position, triangles and multi-generational processes. The scale is not a diagnosis or a definition of *normalcy* (a condition that Bowen eschewed) as the person rises and falls on the scale according to the person’s current differentiation. Higher on the scale is greater differentiation (maturity) and lower on the scale is greater anxious reactivity.

**Scapegoat/symptom bearer.** A family member can likely to be the *identified patient* cast in the role that exposes him or her to criticism, blame, punishment, or scorn. This phenomenon is when two parts of a triangle covertly agree that they are okay (“in”) but the other is not okay (“out”). It is often seen in gossiping and fighting. The scapegoat is the disruptive one, or the rebellious member, or unloving child, etc.

**Secrets (or “family secrets”).** Avoided anxiety that will have dysfunctioning effects in the next generation (e.g., conceiving a child prior to marriage but untalked about in the family).

**Self-differentiated.** A person who is self-differentiated is one who stays connected with others but does not depend on other’s acceptance or approval. They thoughtfully and factually assess a situation in a calm manner rather than through emotion. They are able to maintain their own identity while engaging and connecting with others.

**Subsystem.** The collection of relationships between people often in groups within a family or other system; within families members can be involved in several subsystems at the same time.

**System (or “emotional system”).** The collection of relationships between people often in groups called families (as in “family of nations” or “church family”) but other aggregates are common (e.g., herds, flocks, troops, packs, schools, swarms, etc.). It is a set of relationships that becomes its own regulating environment so that the parts that make up a system have less influence than on the overall principles of organization. Bowen used the word “family” as synonymous with “emotional system.”

**Systems theory (or “systems science”).** Systems theory is defined as emphasizing the communication and relationship of differing subsystems within a system. Systems theory argues that however complex or diverse the world that we experience, we will always find different types of organization in it, and such organization can be described by concepts and principles which are independent from the specific domain at which we are looking.

**Triangulation.** A process in which opposing members of a system demands that a third member ally with him or her against the other during conflict. Triangulation is often seen in a marital conflict with a child but it occurs in other systems (e.g., church system where the pastor and elders “triangle in” the congregation for support).

Source: Ducklow 229-35.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **FAMILY SYSTEMS SEMINAR SYLLABI**

#### **PROJECT/DISSERTATION PRE-MEETING AGENDA**

##### **Welcome**

##### **Read Ephesians 4:1-16**

##### **Prayer**

##### **Personal Anecdote**

##### **Basic Overview of Project**

##### **Process to this point**

- Matriculated at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore , KY in July 2002
- Christian Leadership Major
- 9 courses, plus cross-cultural experience
- 3.89 GPA
- Project development
  - Passion for family systems theory
  - Wanting to become more differentiated
  - Reduce my reactivity
  - Project proposal approved in November 2009
    - Chapter 1- Problem
    - Chapter 2- Literature Review
    - Chapter 3- Methodology
- Complete project, gather data through November 20
  - Write Chapter 4 – Findings
  - Write Chapter 5 – Discussion
- Graduate May 21, 2010

##### **Handout Binders**

- Assignment of participant number (inside binder cover)
- Walk through pages
- Pre-Intervention Semi-Structured Interview Form (Appendix D)
  - Complete front and back
  - Hand in
- Covenant Form (Appendix B)
  - Fill out and sign

- Hand in
- Pre/Post-Intervention Questionnaire (Appendix E)
  - Also, DSI (Differentiation of Self Indicator)
  - 4 pages please complete in black ink
  - Circle appropriate rating
  - Provide cognitive change
  - Affective change in attitude, emotion, behavior
- Glossary of Terms (Appendix F)
- Syllabus (Appendix G)
  - Revise the fourth session to 10:30
- Evaluations (Appendixes H – K, M)
  - Session (Survey Monkey)
  - Weekly
    - Dealing with Emotional Triangulation
  - Survey Monkey for Weekly (Appendix M)

## FIRST SESSION SYLLABUS

### Notes

**8:30- 8:45 a.m. Opening gathering**

*Devotional & Prayer*  
(John 17:20-23)

See page 25

**8:45- 9:00 a.m. Overview of seminar**

*Purpose of study*

Ephesians 4:16 “From [Jesus Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grow and build itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

John Wesley’s general rules:

“Do no harm ... do good ... stay in love with God.”

See page 21

Dr. Terry Parsons: “Where two or three are gathered together, there is conflict.”

Gain understanding – reflect on life from systems rather than linear  
– do no harm – reduce our reactivity

**9:00-10:15 a.m. Family systems theory overview**

*Reactivity*

Think of a time where you got angry ...

Ronald Richardson

Anger

PowerPoint Handout

Four ways of coping with your anger:

U \_\_\_\_\_  
E \_\_\_\_\_  
N \_\_\_\_\_  
T \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes*****Biblical Concept of Family Systems***

Community

Unity

Family systems in action in Genesis

Page 15

***Historical development***

Figure 2.1 Historical development of family systems

Fig. 2.1 Handout

Two main threads of development

Page 33

**10:15-10:30 a.m. BREAK****10:30 am-11:50 p.m.      Differentiation of Self*****Case Study***

Friedman yellow tab

***Definition***

Skowron article

***Pre-Intervention Questionnaire***

DSI

Four subscales

Emotional Reactivity (ER)

*"... one's tendency to respond to environmental stimuli on the basis of autonomic emotional responses, emotional flooding, or lability."*

I-Position (IP)

*"... extent of one's clearly defined sense of self and ability to thoughtfully adhere to one's convictions even when pressured to do otherwise."*

Fusion with Others (FO)

*"... emotional over-involvement with others, over-reliance on others to confirm one's beliefs, decisions, and convictions, and a tendency to hold few clearly defined beliefs or convictions of one's own."*

Emotional Cutoff (EC)

*"... reflecting emotional and behavioral distancing and fears of intimacy or engulfment in relationships."***11:50 a.m.- 12 noon      Complete Evaluation Form  
Recommitment, &  
Closing Prayer**

## SECOND SESSION SYLLABUS

### Notes

**6:30-6:45. Opening gathering**

*Devotional & Prayer*

Philippians 4:4-8 The Message

**6:45-7:00 p.m. Review First Session**

*Clarify definitions*

*Anxiety*

*Fusion*

*Homeostasis*

*Reactivity*

Glossary of terms

*Anger is not bad, how you deal with it can be*

*Anxiety is not BAD*

See revised handout

*Differentiation of Self*

*“I” and “WE”*

Glossary of terms

**7:00-8:20 p.m. Multi-generational Transmission**

*Picture of my family/mother and dad*

*Definition*

*Family of Origin*

Handout

Glossary of Terms

*Genogram Explanation*

Glossary of Terms

Handout

*Complete basic Genogram*

Use whiteboard  
work on own

*Group sharing of basic info*

*Findings/Discussion*

**8:20-8:30 p.m. Complete Evaluation & Prayer**

### THIRD SESSION SYLLABUS

	<b>Notes</b>
<b>8:30- 8:40 a.m. Opening gathering</b>	
<i>Devotional &amp; Prayer</i> (Micah 6:8)	“Do no harm, do good, stay in love with God”
<b>8:40- 9:00 a.m. Thinking Systems</b>	Example
<b>9:00-9:30 Sibling Position</b>	
<i>Dissertation definition</i>	
<i>Website definition</i>	
<i>Birth order trait overview</i>	Table A of “Birth Order Roles and Sibling Patterns in Individual & Family Therapy.” (Hoopes and Harper 206-13)
<b>9:30-9:40 Break</b>	
<b>9:40-10:20 Genogram Sharing</b>	
<i>Family Sculpting of One Participant (Parsons/Satir)</i>	Genogram handouts
<i>Sharing Genogram</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbols</li> <li>• Relationship symbols (McGoldrick and Gerson 154-55)</li> <li>• Genogram interview (McGoldrick and Gerson 157-58)</li> </ul>
<i>Five minutes each person (groups of 4)</i>	
<b>10:20-10:30 Complete Evaluation</b>	
“Three Simple Rules Bookmark”	



## FOURTH SESSION SYLLABUS

### Notes

#### 6:30-6:40 p.m. Opening gathering

*Devotional & Prayer*

Galatians 6:7-10 (MSG)

#### 6:40-7:00 p.m. Quick Review

*What is all this about?*

- *Differentiation of Self*
- *Multi-generational Transmission*
- *Sibling Position*
- *Only Child*

Handout

#### 7:00-7:40 Emotional Triangles

*Definition*

*Group share experience of triangulation*

*Triangles*

- *Displace*
- *Alleviate pain for one, add pain for others*
- *Distance oneself*
- *Move toward*
- *Move away*
- *Stand still*
- *Anxiety is the driving force of triangles*

*Think triangles*

- *Not the issue but relationship*
- *Improve the relationship*
- *Focus outside ourselves*
- *What is my part?*
- *Blame someone else- they get the power*
- *My changed behavior affects others*
- *Self-focused on how we entered in or added to the problem*

*How to deal with them:*

- *Ask non-confrontational questions*
- *What, where, and how, never WHY?*
- *Get the facts*
- *Get the feelings*
- *Maybe help from outside (a coach)*
- *Not take sides*
- *Take a side- another triangle forms*
- *Emotional issue*
- *Stay calm*
- *Regulate your own anxiety*
- *What is my perceived threat?*

*Friedman's Seven Laws of triangles*

Handout

*Draw example*

**7:40-7:50 p.m. Break**

**7:50-8:20 p.m. Now What**

- *All pieces play*
- *How I react to the system is key*
- *Life*
- *Work*
- *Organizations and committees*
- *Sunday school classes*
- *Mission team members*
- *Sunday School Classes with Sunday School classes*
- *How can it work if I don't know what the other person's situation is, i.e., multi-generational transmission, sibling position, Genogram, family of origin, emotional triangles, etc.*

***It comes down to ourselves and our reactivity***

- ***Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)*** *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.*
- ***Micah 6:8 (NIV)*** *... to act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.*
- ***Colossians 3:17 (NIV)*** *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
- *Do no harm, do good, stay in love with God (John Wesley's Three Simple Rules)*

*Lord, help us.*

*Lord, forgive us.*

*Lord, sanctify us.*

*Lord, may we become more self-differentiated, becoming more and more like you, Lord Jesus!*

***Weekly reflections***

***Focus Group/Celebration November 13, 2010, 8:30-11:30 a.m.***

*Brunch provided by Chef Marlane*

**8:20-8:30 p.m. Complete Evaluation & Prayer**

## APPENDIX H

### FIRST SEMINAR SESSION PARTICIPANT'S EVALUATION FORM

PARTICIPANT # \_\_\_\_\_

Please place an "x" in the most appropriate response for each scaled item below:

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of this seminar session?	<i>Not Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How helpful were the listed aspects of this seminar session?	<i>Not Helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat Helpful</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very Helpful</i>	<i>NA</i>
• <i>Devotional/prayer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Lectures</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Small group discussions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Case studies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Personal anecdotes</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How meaningful were the following concepts for your life, leadership, and/or service?	<i>Not Meaningful</i>	<i>Somewhat Meaningful</i>	<i>Meaningful</i>	<i>Very Meaningful</i>	<i>NA</i>
• <i>Reactivity/Anger</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Biblical Concept of Family Systems</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Historical development of Family Systems</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Differentiation of self</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How useful may this information on family systems theory be to the rest of FUMC's leadership and the congregation?	<i>Not Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	

What important insights, understandings, or knowledge did you gain that will help you better serve as part of your family, FUMC, church staff, or church leadership

What expectations did you bring with you that were not met at this session?

Additional comments:

## APPENDIX I

## SECOND SEMINAR SESSION PARTICIPANT'S EVALUATION FORM

Please place an "x" in the most appropriate response for each scaled item below:

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of this seminar session?	<i>Not Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How helpful were the listed aspects of this seminar session?	<i>Not Helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat Helpful</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very Helpful</i>	<i>NA</i>
• <i>Devotional/prayer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Lectures</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Small group discussions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Case studies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Personal anecdotes</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How meaningful is understanding the <i>multi-generational transmission</i> concept of family systems theory for your life, leadership, and/or service?	<i>Not Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How useful may this information on family systems theory be to the rest of FUMC's leadership and the congregation?	<i>Not Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	

What important insights, understandings, or knowledge did you gain that will help you better serve as part of your family, FUMC, church staff, or church leadership

What expectations did you bring with you that were not met at this session?

Additional comments:

## APPENDIX J

## THIRD SEMINAR SESSION PARTICIPANT'S EVALUATION FORM

PARTICIPANT # \_\_\_\_\_

Please place an "x" in the most appropriate response for each scaled item below:

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of this seminar session?	<i>Not Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How helpful were the listed aspects of this seminar session?	<i>Not Helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat Helpful</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very Helpful</i>	<i>NA</i>
• <i>Devotional/prayer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Lectures</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Small group discussions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Case studies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Personal anecdotes</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How meaningful is understanding the <i>sibling position</i> concept of family systems theory for your life, leadership, and/or service?	<i>Not Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How useful may this information on family systems theory be to the rest of FUMC's leadership and the congregation?	<i>Not Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	

What important insights, understandings, or knowledge did you gain that will help you better serve as part of your family, FUMC, church staff, or church leadership

What expectations did you bring with you that were not met at this session?

Additional comments:

## APPENDIX K

## FOURTH SEMINAR SESSION PARTICIPANT'S EVALUATION FORM

PARTICIPANT # \_\_\_\_\_

Please place an "x" in the most appropriate response for each scaled item below:

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of this seminar session?	<i>Not Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Effective</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How helpful were the listed aspects of this seminar session?	<i>Not Helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat Helpful</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very Helpful</i>	<i>NA</i>
• <i>Devotional/prayer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Lectures</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Small group discussions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Case studies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Personal anecdotes</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How meaningful is understanding the <i>emotional triangle</i> concept of family systems theory for your life, leadership, and/or service?	<i>Not Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Meaningful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>NA</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
How useful may this information on family systems theory be to the rest of FUMC's leadership and the congregation?	<i>Not Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Somewhat Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Very Useful</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	

What important insights, understandings, or knowledge did you gain that will help you better serve as part of your family, FUMC, church staff, or church leadership



What expectations did you bring with you that were not met at this session?

Additional comments:

## APPENDIX L

### FOCUS GROUP AGENDA AND QUESTIONS

#### Notes

8:40- 9:00 a.m. Complete DSI

9:00- 9:10 a.m. Break & Food

**9:10-9:30 a.m. Opening gathering**

*Devotional & Prayer*

(James 3:1-12)

Basic survey/participation info

Read an excerpt on “Do no Harm” from *Three Simple Rules- A Wesleyan Way of Living*, Rueben P. Job

**9:30-11:15 a.m. Focus Group Questions**

*1. Since meeting together and reflecting on family systems each week, what has been the most difficult part of the process? For what reason?*

*2. Which concept or idea of family systems consistently comes up in your mind? Why?*

*3. What things do you think you learned over these last eight weeks that you feel have transformed you in one manner or another?*

*4. What feelings arose in you during this time of a reflection through this family systems perspective?*

*5. In what ways did your new understanding and reflection help you in your relationships with your family, work, committee, or church group? How?*

*6. How has/will what you learned and practiced ultimately assist you in “doing no harm?”*

*7. What is the one thing you hope to pass on as a result of this experience?*

*8. Is there anything else you want to share?*

**11:15-11:30 Closing Remarks and Prayer**

“Three Simple Rules Bookmark”

**APPENDIX M**

**FAMILY SYSTEMS REFLECTION GUIDE**

Four Digit Participant

Please select proper weekly survey i.e. 4000  
ending date:

# \_\_\_\_\_

SEPTEMBER 25

OCTOBER 2

OCTOBER 9

OCTOBER 16

OCTOBER 23

OCTOBER 30

NOVEMBER 6

NOVEMBER 13

1. What situation(s) did you experience this week that readily revealed family systems in action?

2. Of the four concepts covered in the Family Systems seminar, which one(s) was (were) prevalent to play a part in your family life, life of congregation, work, or church leadership?

Differentiation of self

Multi-generational transmission

Sibling position

Triangulation

3. What did you learn or practice from the family systems perspective this week that helped you serve better as a member, constituent, staff member, or part of leadership at FUMC Paulsboro?

4. If you or another person (s) used or attempted to use triangulation in this past week, how did you utilize, avoid or overcome the triangulation?

5. Please note any other insights or reflections or comments you may have.

## APPENDIX N

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

**Focus Question 1:** Since meeting together and reflecting on family systems each week, what has been the most difficult part of the process? For what reason?

**Focus Question 2:** Which concept or idea of family systems consistently comes up in your mind? Why?

**Focus Question 3:** What things do you think you learned over these last eight weeks that you feel have transformed you in one manner or another?

**Focus Question 4:** What feelings arose in you during this time of reflection through this family systems perspective?

**Focus Question 5:** In what ways did your new understanding and reflection help you in your relationships with your family, work, committee, or church group? How?

**Focus Question 6:** How has/will what you learned and practiced ultimately assist you in “doing no harm?”

**Focus Question 7:** What is the one thing you hope to pass on to others as a result of this experience?

**Focus Question 8:** Is there anything else you want to share?

## WORKS CITED

- Ackerman, Nathan W. *The Psychodynamics of Family Life*. New York: Basic, 1958.
- Ansbacher, Heinz L., and Rowena R. Ansbacher. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. New York: Basic, 1956.
- Banks, Robert. *Paul's Idea of Community*. Peabody, MA: Henderson, 1994.
- Beghtel-Mahle, Patricia. "Church as Family System." Seminar. Sherman, TX. Fall 2007.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. San Francisco: Harper, 1954.
- Bowen, Murray. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aranson, 1978.
- Charles, Richard. "Is There Any Empirical Support for Bowen's Concepts of Differentiation of Self, Triangulation, and Fusion?" *American Journal of Family Therapy* 29.4 (July-Sept. 2001): 279-92.
- Coker, William D. "Using Family Systems Concepts for Church Renewal." Diss. Columbia Theological Seminary, 1999.
- Driver, John. *Images of the Church in Mission*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1997.
- Ducklow, Patrick J. "Coaching Church Leaders in Conflict Resolving Strategies Using Family Systems Theory." Diss. Trinity International U, 2002.
- Flügel, John Carl. *The Psycho-Analytic Study of the Family*. London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1921.
- Friedman, Edwin. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guildford, 1985.
- Fuller, H. John. Personal conversations. Fall 2007.
- Galloway, Dale. *Leading with Vision*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1999.

- Gottwald, James T. "Embodying Bowen's Family System Theory and Claiming My Soul." Diss. Western Theological Seminary, 2004.
- Greene, Jennifer C. *Mixed Methods in Social Inquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Headley, Anthony J. *Family Crucible: The Influence of Family Dynamics in the Life and Ministry of John Wesley*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010.
- . Personal Interview. July 2010.
- . "Wesley on Depression." *The Asbury Seminary Herald* (Summer 1997): 9-10.
- Heitler, Susan M. *From Conflict to Resolution*. New York: Norton, 1990.
- Hess, Richard S., and M. Daniel Carroll, eds. *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Hoopes, Margaret M., and James H. Harper. *Birth Order Roles and Sibling Patterns in Individual and Family Therapy*. Rockville, MD: Aspen, 1987.
- Jankowski, Peter J., and Marsha Vaughn. "Differentiation of Self and Spirituality: Empirical Explorations." *Counseling & Values* 53.2 (Jan. 2009): 82-96.
- Jenkins, William Harvey, Jr. "Building Up the Family of Christ: A Systems Approach to Church Development." Diss. Candler School of Theology of Emory, 1985.
- Job, Rueben P. *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.
- Kerr, Michael, and Murray Bowen. *Family Evaluation: The Role of Family as an Emotional Unity that Governs Individual Behavior and Development*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988.

- Krueger, Richard A., and Mary Anne Casey. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Lawson, Paul D. "Old Wine in New Wine Skins: Centering Prayer and Systems Theory—Congregational Leadership for the Next Millennium." Diss. Claremonth School of Theology, 1998.
- Lester, Andrew D. *Coping with Your Anger*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983.
- Lowe, Verna. Lecture. DM 803. Asbury Theological Seminary. Wilmore, KY. Jan. 2007.
- Matthews, Lawrence E. "Bowen Family Systems Theory: A Resource for Pastoral Theologians." *Review & Expositor* 102.3 (2005): 425-44.
- Maxwell, John C. *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.
- Microsoft Excel*. Computer software. Ver. 10. Redmond, WA: Microsoft, 2010.
- Microsoft Word*. Computer software. Ver. 10. Redmond, WA: Microsoft, 2010.
- McGoldrick, Monica, and Randy Gerson. *Genograms in Family Assessment*. New York: Norton, 1985.
- Morgan, David L. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Mulholland, M. Robert. *Shaped by the Word*. Nashville: Upper Room, 2000.
- Murchison, Carl, ed. *Psychologies of 1930*. Worcester, MA: Clark UP, 1930.
- Neil, Richard R. "The Dynamics of Belonging: A Family Systems Model for Leadership Training in the Presbyterian Church (USA)." Diss. Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1990.



Nichols, Michael P., and Richard C. Schwartz. *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*.

2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn, 1991.

Nunn, James G. "An Exploration of Relationships between Perceptions of Family System

and Spiritual Well-Being." Diss. Asbury Theological Seminary, 1996.

Palwelke, Michael B. "Training Leaders: A Systems Approach to Leadership

Development." Diss. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2002.

Papero, Daniel V. *Bowen Family Systems Theory*. Boston: Allyn, 1990.

Parsons, George, and Speed B. Leas. *Understanding Your Congregation as a System: The*

*Manual*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1993.

Parsons, Terry. "Intimacy Jungle Seminar." First United Methodist Church Allen. Allen,

TX. Oct. 2007.

Patten, Mildred L. *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide*. Los Angeles: Pycszak,

2001.

Perry, Helen S., and Mary L. Gawel, eds. *Harry S. Sullivan: The Interpersonal Theory of*

*Psychiatry*. New York: Norton, 1953.

"Random Integer Generator." *Random.org*. 12 May 2011 <<http://random.org/integer/>>.

Rediger, G. Lloyd. *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under*

*Attack*. Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos, 1997.

Richardson, Ronald W. *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the*

*Pastor's Own Family*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

---. "Bowen Family Systems Theory and Congregational Life." *Review & Expositor*

102.3 (2005): 379-402.

- . *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- Satir, Virginia. *Conjoint Family Therapy*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1983.
- Sawyer, Boyd M. "Using the Leadership Insights of Edwin H. Friedman's Understanding of Family Systems in Developing Leadership Skills as a Local Pastor of Waples Memorial United Methodist Church." Diss. Perkins School of Theology, 1994.
- Shoesmith, Robert P. "Congregational Systems." Diss. Hartford Seminary, 1998.
- Skowron, Elizabeth A., and Myrna L. Friedlander. "The Differentiation of Self Inventory: Development and Initial Validation." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 45.3 (1998): 235-46.
- Skowron, Elizabeth A., and Thomas A. Schmitt. "Assessing Interpersonal Fusion: Reliability and Validity of a New DSI Fusion with Others Subscale." *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 29.2 (Apr. 2003): 209-22.
- Steinke, Peter L. *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006.
- . *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1996.
- Stone, Howard. "Introduction to Pastoral Care." Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TA. Fall 1993.
- "Systemic." *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. 1987 ed.
- The Strengths Foundation. *Virginia Satir (1916-1988)*. 9 Sept. 2010  
<<http://www.thestrengthsfoundation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2008/09/image66.png>>.

- Survey Monkey. Home page. 12 May 2011 <<http://www.surveymonkey.com>>.
- Tashakorri, Abbas and Charles Teddlie. *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.
- Toman, Walter. *Family Constellation; Theory and Practice of a Psychological Game*. New York: Springer, 1961.
- The United Methodist Book of Discipline, 2008*. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing, 2008.
- The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing, 1992.
- Van Gelder, Craig. *The Essence of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.
- von Bertalanffy, Ludwig. *General Systems Theory*. New York: George Braziller, 1968.
- Warren, Rick. *Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Way, Peggy. "Family Systems." *Circuit Rider* July/Aug. 2001: 16-17. 16 July 2008 <<http://www.umph.org/pdfs/circuitrider/FaSy.pdf><http://www.umph.org/pdfs/circuitrider/FaSy.pdf>>.
- Weatherhead, Leslie D. *The Will of God*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1944.
- Wenham, Gordon J. "Chapter 5—Family in the Pentatuch." *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*. Ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. 100-124.
- Wesley, John. *Explanatory Notes of the Old Testament*. Salem, OH: Schmul, 1975.
- . "Sermon 56—God's Approbation of his Works." *The Works of John Wesley*. Ed. Outler, Albert C. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985.
- Wiersma, William, and Stephen G. Jurs. *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson Education, 2005.

Wynn, J. C. *Family Therapy in Pastoral Ministry*. San Francisco: Harper, 1982.

## WORKS CONSULTED

- Brown, Kenneth Ray. "The Challenge of Changing Congregations/Changing Lives."  
 Diss. Claremont School of Theology, 2003. RIM. *Asbury Theological Seminary*.  
 106 pp. 7 Jan. 2008 <<http://rim.atla.com/scripts/starfinder.exe/4708/rimmarc.txt>>.
- Carter, John D., and Bruce Narramore. *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*.  
 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979.
- Clinton, J. Robert, and Paul D. Stanley. *Connecting*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress,  
 1992.
- Crowe, John M. "Preaching for a Whole-Person Response in Developing a Healthy  
 Church." Diss. Asbury Theological Seminary, 2001.
- Harper, Steve. *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition: A Workbook*. Nashville: Upper  
 Room, 1995.
- Henderson, Michael D. *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*.  
 Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury, 1997.
- Lorne, Michael W. "Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership,  
 and Congregational Life." *Pastoral Sciences* 21.1 (Mar. 2002): 144-45.
- Mallory, Sue. *The Equipping Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Maxwell, John C. *Developing the Leaders around You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995.
- . *Developing the Leader within You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993.
- . *Today Matters*. New York: Time Warner Book Group, 2004.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New  
 York: Crossroads, 1993.

Richardson, Lois, and Ronald W. Richardson. *Birth Order and You: How Your Sex and Position in the Family Affect Your Personality and Relationships*. Vancouver: Self-Counsel, 1990.

Steinke, Peter L. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Herdon, VA: Albin Institute, 1993.

Stevens, R. Paul, and Phil Collins. *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership*. 1993. New York: Alban Institute, 2000.

Titelman, Peter. *Emotional Cutoff*. Bowen Family Systems Presentations. New York: Haworth, 2003.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.