

a community called ...

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ABSTRACT

A Map through the Minefield:

Church Merger as a Strategy for Starting New Faith Communities

Kelly McClendon

The New Church and Congregational Development Team of the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church has set a goal "to identify strategies for developing new churches in our conference" as a means to fulfill our collective responsibility for evangelism. The need to start new churches or faith communities is being recognized more and more as a critical need in our denomination and across Christendom. One of the possible strategies being considered in Kentucky and elsewhere is church merger. However, there is little evidence suggesting this strategy will be successful or effective in most cases for starting new faith communities. In fact, significant evidence and opinion suggest church merger is one of the least desirable and most difficult strategies for generating church growth or for doing evangelism.

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of church merger and consider variables which may influence the effectiveness/success of church merger. This study intends to provide guidance to groups or persons who are involved in a church merger or who are considering the strengths, weaknesses, and unique challenges associated with church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities and/or church renewal and growth.

There is a scarcity of published information to guide church leaders through the process of church merger. Church merger represents a form of radical organizational change. The review of literature presents important information about the nature of this

type of radical change and the unique leadership approach it requires. This study identifies the churches formed by merger in the Kentucky Conference between 1983-1998 and presents the findings of a survey designed to glean wisdom from those who have participated in this unique experience. To increase the usefulness of the study beyond the UMC the findings are also compared with the results of a national survey of merged churches in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

This study suggests that church merger is a worthwhile and necessary endeavor in many circumstances. However, it is a difficult process -- not for the faint of heart.

Two analogies help interpret the process. First, church merger is like leading a company of soldiers through minefield. Occasionally armies have nowhere to go but forward, even if through a minefield. If any soldiers emerge on the other side of the minefield they will have survived a harrowing experience. They may bear wounds from the experience. At a minimum, they will have experienced the trauma of seeing comrades lost or wounded in the journey. The destination beyond the minefield may or may not prove worth the sacrifice, but in any event, they will know they have been at war.

The second analogy, even more radical, speaks of the costs and rewards associated with this unique experience. Church merger requires nothing less than a kind of death for the merging churches. However, by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, these churches may also experience a resurrection to new life. Church merger represents a way for congregations "to lay down their lives for their friends" (John 15:13). It represents a way for congregations deep in decline to give up their lives, their identities, and physical manifestation in order to experience new life in a new body created by a miracle of God.

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CHURCH MERGER AS A STRATEGY FOR
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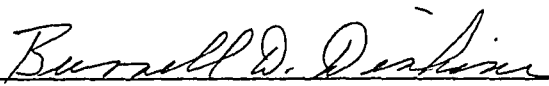
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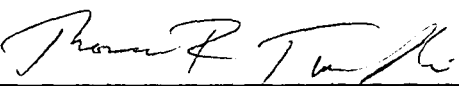
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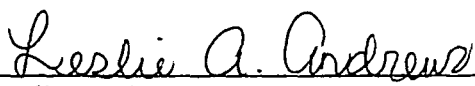
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by Kelly Dee McClendon

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Nothing is too difficult for God. This is not to say that the difficulty of a given undertaking will not be incredibly fierce. However, fierce or not, nothing is too difficult for God. The conventional wisdom among pastors is that it is virtually impossible to bring new life to a sick, dying, or dead congregation. Many church growth experts suggest that ambitious, visionary, and evangelical young pastors interested in growing a large and vital congregation should "start from scratch." These pastors are encouraged to "plant" a new church instead of "revitalize" an existing church (Schaller, "Redevelop" 23-26). This somewhat implied, and often overt, encouragement or favoritism toward new church planting has been a seductive element of the Beeson Pastor program in which I have been a participant. The reasoning behind this favoritism is very compelling and beyond the scope of this project. However, the basic assumption behind this favoritism is that it is simply too difficult to transform an existing congregation into a church with an appropriate vision and effective ministry for the twenty-first century. Again, my conviction remains: nothing is too difficult for God ("Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" Genesis 18:14; "But with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26).¹

For many reasons I am compelled to challenge the assumption that all our energy should go toward new church plants. The first reason is that God has called me, at this time, to be a United Methodist pastor in the Kentucky Conference. While our vocal

1

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations use the New Living Translation © 1996.

commitment is growing, actual plans for planting new churches are still slight in the Kentucky Conference. I hope this changes soon. I do believe that planting new churches is an effective method for evangelism and the building of vital congregations. However, new church plants in our conference are likely to remain few and far between. This suggests that most pastors, including myself, are much more likely to be appointed to existing churches which are at various stages on the decline side of their lifecycle.

The second reason I am interested in reversing the decline in existing churches is even more significant for me personally. I believe the existing churches of United Methodism in Kentucky need revitalization and that it is not God's will that they be abandoned to a slow and painful death. Transformation, healing, resurrection, and new life are foundational realities of our faith and these realities should apply to congregations as well as individuals (Crandall 9-11). Surely many congregations will die, scores of them, because sometimes death is the best form of healing God can provide (Barna 107-108). However, there are others dying prematurely. Some of these churches are "sick unto death" but not ready to die. Some are seriously ill and in desperate need of a proper "diet" and "exercise." Some are functioning and maintaining the appearance of health, but their ability to minister to their members or community is far below their potential. Still others need to consider an attempt to find new life through a unique form of organizational death and resurrection: the creation of a new church through church merger.

As I was completing my final months as a Beeson Pastor, I engaged in a consultation process with the bishop of Kentucky and the Louisville district superintendent regarding my appointment. At that time I was reading and meditating on the biblical story of

Ezekiel. In that story, the people of Israel had been defeated soundly--the holy city of Jerusalem reduced to rubble. The people were forced into exile in Babylon, the situation was filled with despair, disgust, hopelessness, and the stench of death. The Lord gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of a valley filled with old dry scattered bones. The Lord asked the prophet if the bones could live, and Ezekiel essentially said, "God only knows."

Then the Lord said, "Speak to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the Word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to breathe into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'" (Ezekiel 36:4-6)

In his vision Ezekiel spoke the words and must have been amazed by what he saw,

"The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as they were before," then the muscles and flesh but not yet the breath. And God said, "Speak to the winds and say: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so that they may live again' (Ezek. 36:9). Ezekiel did as he was commanded and "They all came back to life and stood up on their feet - a great army of them." (Ezek. 26:10)

Then God said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones - all hope is gone.' Now give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again" (Ezek. 36:12)

Another biblical passage preoccupied my thoughts at this time. These are the words the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the church in Corinth, and also to our churches today:

And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world. But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life. (1 Cor. 15:19-20)

In my consultation with the Kentucky bishop regarding my appointment, I shared with him my preoccupation with these biblical passages. His response was to offer me an appointment, which in his opinion, provided me with an opportunity to be involved in the revival of two declining churches and also the starting of a new faith community by forming one new church from the merger of these churches.

Background

In June of 1996, facing the likelihood of continuing decline in membership and attendance, both the Oakdale and Beechmont United Methodist congregations agreed to accept a special pastoral appointment and to undergo a process of discovery and experimentation. Both of these congregations were located in the southwest region of the greater Louisville area, approximately one and a half miles apart. Both congregations had experienced a slow and steady pattern of decline in membership, attendance, giving, mission outreach, evangelism efforts, as well as the loss of programs for children, youth, and young adults with children. Prior to June of 1996 each of these congregations had their own pastors, both elders in full connection with the Louisville Annual Conference.

For a period not to exceed the 1996/1997 conference year (June 1996 - May 1997) these two congregations were yoked together as a two-point charge with one pastor, myself, who was called to engage them in a joint discovery process to determine the best course for their futures. The bishop and district superintendent made this appointment on the assumption that a pre-existing dialogue initiated by the former pastors had led the churches to the point where the majority of people in both congregations favored merger to form one new congregation within a few months of my appointment. However, once

on location, I discovered significant fear of and resistance to church merger among the members of each congregation. In one of the two churches the congregation was almost evenly split: if merger were approved, one half would immediately leave the church; if it was not, the other half would soon leave. Many in the other church believed the congregation could grow now that a young evangelical pastor had been appointed, so there was no longer a need to consider a merger.

Together with church leaders I identified the following five major strategies for the future of these congregations:

1. The two congregations could unite to form one new congregation in one location (using one of the existing facilities or a new one).
2. The two congregations could unite to form one new ministry in two locations, with one staff, one vision, one structure, but two campuses for ministry.
3. The two congregations could agree to continue indefinitely as a two-point charge sharing a single pastor with most ministry functions kept separate.
4. The two congregations could agree to separate at the end of the annual conference year (May 1997) and return to being independent congregations. The district superintendent informed the churches that this option would likely mean the appointment of a part-time student pastor, or part-time local pastor for the Oakdale congregation. The pastoral options for the Beechmont congregation were uncertain, but it was very unlikely that I would be appointed as their pastor after the first year.
5. The churches could fail to act in any way and continue their slow and steady pattern of decline.

In the fall of 1996 both congregations narrowly approved option one: The two congregations would unite to form one new congregation in one location using the existing facilities of the former Beechmont congregation. In January of 1997 a new congregation, Gateway Community Church, was formed from the merger of the Oakdale and Beechmont churches.

The first seven months following my appointment to this situation rank as the most difficult, even the most brutal, in my fifteen years of pastoral ministry. The analogy that seemed appropriate at the end of this period was that of leading an army through a minefield.

A minefield is a place where explosive charges, placed slightly underground and out of sight, are left by an enemy to destroy persons or equipment. Occasionally armies have nowhere to go but forward, even if through a minefield. If any survivors emerge on the other side of the minefield they have been through a harrowing experience. They may bear their own wounds from the experience. At a minimum they have experienced the trauma of seeing comrades lost or wounded in the journey. The destination beyond the minefield may or may not prove worth the sacrifice, but in any event, the soldiers will know they have been at war.

The process of merging these two congregations was a journey fraught with explosive and contentious situations. I found myself struggling to understand complex issues such as: strategies for starting new faith communities, transformational change, leadership, the nature of the church, congregational lifecycles, hope and hopelessness, tradition, purpose, leadership, conflict, and vision. I was wounded in many ways in the

process of church merger, and I also grieved as I witnessed church members wounded--in some cases mortally.

Throughout the process of merger I looked desperately for maps to help me navigate the congregation around the mines in our path. I found very little helpful information that addressed church mergers specifically. For the most part it was a process of trial and error and gaining hard-fought ground with occasional explosions along the way.

Our merger process is now substantially completed. We have survived the crossing of the minefield. We are experiencing new life and hope on the other side. We have experienced the biblical truth that "With God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26). But in the event that others will wish to follow this path, I hope to make their journey more positive. The goal of this project is to provide a map through the minefield of church merger, drawing on our experience of merger and also on the experiences of other churches formed by merger, particularly those in the Kentucky Conference.

The Problem

Unfortunately, the United Methodist Church in Kentucky is following the same pattern of decline that has plagued the denomination nationwide for the past three decades. Since the formation of the United Methodist denomination in 1969 (from the merger of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Church), national membership and attendance have been on a precipitous decline. During this period, total denominational membership has dropped by nearly three million people and attendance has decreased by nearly one million people. The ratio of existing churches being closed to

new churches being started is approximately two to one. Over the past thirty years total membership and attendance numbers in Kentucky have decreased at twice the rate of the state's population increase. The majority of Kentucky United Methodist churches (two-thirds to three-fourths) have either plateaued in size or are shrinking in numbers (NCD unpublished working papers).

The complex reasons for the chronic membership and attendance decline in the United Methodist denomination and in the Kentucky Conference are beyond the scope of this project. However, research conducted by the Kentucky Conference New Church and Congregational Development Team (NCD) has identified a correlation between church growth and the development of new faith communities. In their report to the 1999 Kentucky Annual Conference the NCD stated:

Approximately 100 million Americans under the age of fifty are not related to a church. The challenge for The United Methodist Church today is to establish new faith communities that will meet the spiritual needs of these generations. We can no longer assume that people will come to existing congregations; many have already tried that. Annual Conferences that make new faith communities a priority and that train spiritual leaders will be the ones who are able to minister with these generations. (NCD 2)

While I personally affirm this commitment to the development of new faith communities, a defense or critique of this commitment is beyond the scope of this paper. The 1999 session of the Kentucky Conference unanimously approved the report and action plan of the NCD which includes beginning a search for a new cabinet level staff person in the new position of Director of New Church and Congregational Development. In Kentucky the approved action plan for generating vitality and growth in our conference centers on the development of new faith communities.

The report of the Kentucky New Church and Congregational Development team states their goal for 2000 is "to identify strategies for developing new churches in our conference." The possibilities listed in the report include:

1. Large church plants (goal of averaging 500 in worship within three years),
2. Rural church starts,
3. Ethnic minority church starts,
4. Parenting church concept,
5. New church development among the impoverished,
6. Mergers,
7. Relocations and restarts,
8. "Nesting" strategies,
9. Revitalization of promising congregations (9-11).

Strategies for church renewal and vitality are needed in the United Methodist denomination (and other mainline denominations, like the Presbyterian Church USA). And as noted in the NCD report, one such strategy being considered in the Kentucky Conference is that of church mergers. There is a significant body of conventional wisdom and presuppositions about the minimal potential of church mergers as a strategy for church renewal. However, there is a scarcity of information about church mergers that is objective, published, widely available, or that provides guidelines for people considering or engaged in the process of church merger. The task team for "New Church and Congregational Development" has discovered the absence of guidance for church mergers

or tools for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of merger as a strategy for church renewal and growth.

In 1998, I was appointed by the bishop to serve on the New Church and Congregational Development task team. One of my assigned roles in that appointment is to help provide the team with guidance regarding church mergers as strategy for developing new faith communities. This project attempts to provide this guidance for the Kentucky Conference as well as for other church leaders considering church mergers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of church merger and consider variables which may influence the effectiveness/success of church merger. This study intends to provide guidance to groups or persons who are involved in a church merger or who are considering the strengths, weaknesses, and unique challenges associated with church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities and/or church renewal and growth.

Research Question One

What are the similarities and dissimilarities between portions of the results from a national survey (developed by Carol Gregg) of churches formed through merger in the Presbyterian Church and the results of a similar survey administered to churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Research Questions Two

What can be learned about the desirability of local church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference of the UMC from researcher designed survey questions which focus on the areas of: leadership, vision, organizational change, perceived results of merger, motivations to merge, and obstacles experienced in the process of merger?

Research Question Three

What is the increase or decrease in membership, worship attendance, and Sunday School attendance in UMC churches formed through merger in Kentucky between 1983 and 1998? The rate of change will be determined by taking the combined numbers for the churches for their last annual report prior to merger and comparing them to the most recent annual report available (1998).

Research Question Four

Can the mergers completed in the Kentucky Conference of the UMC from 1983 to 1998 be considered effective or successful according to the following criteria: Increase in worship and/or Sunday school attendance, a sense of unity in the church and acceptance of the new church identity, and a positive attitude of members regarding the merger?

Definition of Terms

Several terms will be used throughout this paper in unique, specific or unconventional ways. To help the reader understand the study the following definitions should be kept in mind.

Merger

For the purposes of this study merger is defined as the uniting of two or more existing congregations to form one new faith community with a new identity, new name, new mission, and new ministry design. For this study, "merger" does not include the union of churches where one church absorbs another church and maintains its own name. In her project Gregg defined merger as the full union of two distinct congregations. To merge, both congregations relinquish their identity in order to form a new joint identity. They become incorporated as one new congregation (Merging 3).

Effectiveness / Success

For the purposes of this study effectiveness or success is defined as an increase in each of the following areas of local church life: Increase in worship and/or Sunday school attendance; a sense of unity in the church and acceptance of the new church identity; a positive attitude of members regarding the merger.

Vision

For the purposes of this study vision is defined as a specific image of what the church may become or what it will be at some point in the future that provides a sense of direction and motivation to move forward in ministry.

Leadership

For the purposes of this study leadership is defined as the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation.

Kentucky Conference

In 1998, the Kentucky Annual Conference and the Louisville Annual Conference were merged to create the Kentucky Conference of the UMC. Use of the term Kentucky Conference in this paper includes both former conferences and always assumes identification as part of the UMC or United Methodist Church denomination.

NCD

Throughout this study the abbreviation NCD will be used for the New Church and Congregational Development Team of the Kentucky Conference.

Theological / Biblical Foundation

Biblical and theological reflection are woven throughout the study particularly in chapter three, the review of literature, and chapter five, conclusions. The biblical and theological material will focus on issues such as the nature of the church, the purpose of the church, biblical metaphors for church merger, biblical teaching about death and resurrection applied to the issues of congregational life and church merger, and biblical concepts of Christian stewardship.

Project Description

The first step in field research was the identification of the "new" local churches that have been born from the merger of two or more pre-existing congregations. This study will focus only on those churches born from merger in the Kentucky Conference (and its predecessors, the Louisville and Kentucky Annual Conferences) over the past fifteen years, from 1983 to 1998.

In preparing for the potential merger of the Oakdale and Beechmont United Methodist Churches, I discovered a study conducted by Carol Gregg in 1995 as part of a Doctor of Ministry program at Princeton Theological Seminary. A synopsis of her study was also published in 1996 by the Alban Institute. A principal part of Gregg's project was a survey sent to Presbyterian churches that had completed the process of merger.

My survey (see Appendix A) utilizes several questions and concepts from the survey used in Gregg's study, along with additional survey questions to help increase the body of knowledge regarding church mergers in the United Methodist Church. This study compares and contrast portions of the results of Dr. Gregg's survey of Presbyterian Churches, with another survey partially based on her survey, used among United Methodist Churches formed by merger in the Kentucky Conference over the past fifteen years. This study will replicate portions of Gregg's survey. However, several of her survey questions have been redesigned to facilitate the analysis of results. Additional questions of a similar type give additional attention to the issues of leadership, vision, organizational change, and perceived results of merger.

Methodology

The following section outlines the methodology used in this study. The methodology describes facets of the study including the population, sample, variables, instruments, data collection and data analysis.

Population

The churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Conference from 1983 to 1998 have been identified through a manual review of the official annual conference

records for this period of the Kentucky Conference (and its predecessors). For this study the population includes current members of churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Annual Conference between 1983 and 1998 who met the following criteria: persons who were members of one of the predecessor churches prior to merger, persons who were active in the church throughout the process of merger, and persons who continue to be active in the church formed through the process of merger. "Active" is defined as participation or attendance at least 50 percent of the time in worship and/or Sunday school. The pastor or pastors "involved" in the church during the process of merger are also included in the population. Being "involved" in the merger process for pastors is defined as being a pastor of one or both of the two predecessor churches, continuing in leadership through the decision to merge, and being pastor or co-pastor of the newly formed church for at least six months following the merger.

Sample

The sample is defined as all the survey respondents from the population.

Variables

The dependent variable is the process of church merger. The independent variables are those things identified in the review of literature and personal experience which are associated with the effectiveness or success of church merger as a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities. The independent variables include leadership, vision, dynamics of organizational change, the motivation to merge, the obstacles experienced in the process of merger, use of biblical metaphors to help interpret the process, emphasis on

stewardship, and attitudes about this strategy held by people who have participated in the process.

Instruments

The primary measurement instrument was a self-administered, written questionnaire, with both open and closed questions. The survey was mailed to the research participants (described above as population and sample) assessing their opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of variables which effect the process of church merger. Anonymity was assured through the use of a coded identification system which was used for follow-up purposes only. The instrument was designed with the help of Linda Young, President, Community Systems Research Institute.

Data Collection

The survey data was collected by return mail, with follow-up phone calls and letters as necessary to increase the rate of response. Data regarding the changes in membership, worship, and Sunday school attendance have been determined through a manual review of the official annual conference records for this period in the Kentucky Conference (and its predecessors).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with the help of Shannon Cambron (MSW). The data analysis utilized the SPSS-PC (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for the Personal Computer) and reports on the frequencies of responses.

Importance

This research is intended to benefit the following groups of people:

1. The task team on New Church and Congregational Development of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.
2. Researchers and church leaders hoping to develop greater understanding of the process of local church merger.
3. Denominational officials in the United Methodist Church, including bishops and district superintendents, who must examine the feasibility and desirability of merging existing congregations to form new ones.
4. Church pastors who are called or appointed to churches that may consider merger with another congregation or churches already formed by merger.

Overview Of Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2 anchors this project in the ongoing flow of related research and literature on church mergers. Chapter 3 details the design of this project, including a description of the research methods, the ministry context and research participants, the evaluation instrumentation, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 reports the significant findings of the project. Chapter 5 integrates the review of literature with the findings of the project. It will also present a general summary of the project results, conclusions, and reflection on the experience of doing the project by the author.

CHAPTER 2

THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As stated in Chapter 1, there is a scarcity of information about church mergers that is objective, published or widely available, or that provides guidelines for people considering or engaged in the process of church merger. Even more alarming is the absence of evidence that this strategy is likely to succeed in most cases.

In fact, significant evidence and opinion suggests church merger is one of the least desirable options for church renewal or for starting new faith communities. The former director of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship, and author, Ezra Earl Jones, had this to say about church merger:

Often the members who have no alternative other than disbanding will agree to merge with another church to avoid the reality of closure. Even if only a few members actually participate in the merged congregation, it is a way of transferring the assets of the dying congregation to another one. (165-166)

Jones further concludes,

Because of the poor or temporary results which may realistically be expected, it (merger) should be entered into only as a stop gap method for serving the remaining members and the communities of the churches during the time of transition. With church mergers, one plus one does not equal three (strength is not created out of weakness). Further, one plus one does not equal two in church merger. Rarely will the new church have the combined assets of the two former churches. But if one plus one equals one and one-half for a few years, and the only other alternative is to close one or both churches (zero plus zero equals zero) when a few years of service may yet be possible, then it is worth doing. (167)

According to Jones, there are only four reasons that justify the consideration of church merger: to obtain critical mass of members to staff basic ministry activities, to solve a building or clergy problem, to buy time so that ministry may continue as long as

possible, or to close a church with as little pain as possible (usually the smaller of the two, or more, involved in merger) (165). Starting a new faith community is not among the reasons Jones lists for considering merger. Jones further observes that it is not unusual for a newly merged congregation to have only slightly more members at the time of merger than the larger church had before. Members will probably be lost from both congregations and new growth will occur at roughly the same rate as it did prior to the merger (168).

Church renewal consultant and author Bill Easum suggests that the only mergers with a chance of having more people in worship two years later are those where each church sells its property and builds a new church on a new site altogether. The church must also have a new name. Any other method results in fewer people in worship two years later (Easum 1). In contrast to Easum, Jones argues against selling both buildings to build a new one because of the short life expectancy of a newly merged church. Jones contends, "Rather than being seen as an ideal way of developing a new church, merger should be one of the last alternatives considered" (166).

Other commentators on the subject, and pastors who have helped churches complete the merger process themselves, share many of the same reservations. After leading two churches into merger, Cherukoua Thomas believes that merger is a viable alternative only to closing churches altogether. He holds out little hope that a merger will result in one new church that is characterized by strength and growth potential (19). Church renewal consultant and author, Douglas Walrath claims, "Merger is the most difficult of all church organizational adjustments" (33). In her study of mergers in the Presbyterian Church (USA), Gregg notes, "Among merged congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA),

the average rate of decline was negative 5.74 percent (as opposed to overall negative 1.24 percent [in the entire denomination]) (Merging 13).

Five dissertations, written by pastors personally involved in the process of church merger, were consulted for this study. In those five cases, one church voted against merger (Hahn), one decided to dissolve the merger and separate (Simpson), two experienced significant conflict and decline following merger (Bowman, Thomas), and one only began to show signs of life five years after merger with the appointment of an entrepreneurial pastor (Crispell).

In the business world, the merger of organizations is also seen as largely unattractive and necessitated by desperate conditions. For example, in a major study of organizational mergers, Simon, Mokhtari, and Simon wrote,

Mergers have always been a burr under the economist's saddle. On the one hand, the economic literature has provided little or no evidence that mergers are profitable, and considerable evidence that they are not profitable. On the other hand, mergers continue to occur. This does not square with the vision of a rational market. (1)

The results of their study indicate that merging firms do worse in the short run than those which employ incremental control methods. Assuming similar subsequent rates of growth for merging and non-merging firms, a loss of 16 percent of firm value is implied as a result of merging (24).

I learned of my appointment to the Oakdale and Beechmont churches before leaving the Beeson Pastor program at Asbury Theological Seminary (the Beeson Pastor program is a one year residential doctoral program emphasizing church leadership and biblical preaching). In the spring of 1996 I discussed the possibility of merging the two

congregations with two of my seminary professors. Asbury faculty member and church growth expert, George Hunter said, "I would ask the bishop to send you somewhere else. Mergers rarely, if ever, work out well, and your time and talent would be better used in a more promising situation." Asbury faculty member, and spiritual formation and church renewal expert, Robert Tuttle said, "If you can make it really grow I will be amazed. In fact, Hunter and I will write an article about you and make you famous if you do!" (Personal Interview).

The effectiveness of the church mergers in the Kentucky Conference has not yet been determined (see Chapter 3); however, informal observation does not indicate significant growth or vitality in these congregations. Taken together, these findings do not constitute a glowing recommendation for church merger as a strategy.

Merger as a Radical Form of Organizational Change

Organizational specialists differentiate between "transitional" or "incremental" and "transformational" change. Transitional change refers to ongoing adaptations and shifts brought on by temporary challenges as the organization moves to new stability. Transformational change is a more radical form of change that constitutes "the shattering of the foundations and the reconstitution of reality" (Mead 70).

Transitional or incremental change might include two levels of change, (1) Do what you are doing, only better, (2) Engage in moderate changes of systems or approach. In contrast, transformational change is a radical change that calls for major departures from the status quo (Schaller, Strategies 90).

Transformational change is also called discontinuous change. The term discontinuous is used in contrast to the term incremental. A transformation is a clear break from the past and the present (Hersey 525).

Transformational change often includes a change in the mission or "reason to be," a change in the identity or outside image, a change in relationships to key stakeholders, a change in the way of work, and a change in organizational culture. A change in identity often involves changes in outside expressions such as logos, symbols, and advertising strategies (Beckhard 40).

Transformational change is characterized by certain features that clearly differentiate it from other types of change. It involves substantial and discontinuous change to the shape, structure, and nature of the organization, rather than incremental adjustments to the status quo. The change is deep and extensive rather than superficial and restrained. Additionally, transformational change requires substantially new and different activities by the members of the organization rather than more or less of existing patterns (Beckhard 80-89). At its most radical, transformational change involves creatively destroying and remaking an organization with a new vision and an overhauled social and mission architecture (Beckhard 47).

Merger is among the most radical forms of organizational change. It is a kind of the discontinuous, transformational change described above, and it involves changing the fundamental identity of a congregation. This change in identity is often represented by a new name, a new organizational structure, a new balance of power and influence among

members, a new location and building, and a new understanding of the purpose of the church.

Cultural Resistance to Change

It is commonly assumed that most people are adverse to change. This natural resistance is amplified when it comes to radical transformational change in organizations. Organizations have cultures, and one of the key functions of culture is to resist change. Culture may be defined as "the idea, customs, skills, arts, etc., of a people or group" ("Culture" 337). When applied to organizations or groups of people, like a local church, culture also means the observed behavioral regularities, the basic assumptions and beliefs shared by members of the organization, the norms that evolve, the dominant values expressed by the group, the philosophy that guides the organization, the formal and informal rules for members and newcomers, the feeling or climate conveyed by the physical surroundings, and the way members of the organization interact with outsiders or newcomers (Schein Culture 6).

Each church has an organizational culture that develops over time and expresses itself in different ways in response to challenges and change. It is a natural function of organizational culture to resist change. Deal and Kennedy observe that "culture causes organizational inertia; it is the brake that resists change because that is what culture should do--protect the organization from willy-nilly responses to fads and short-term fluctuations" (159).

Change always threatens an organizational culture. People form strong attachments to "heros, legends, the rituals of daily life, the ceremonies and symbols that characterize

their common experience. Change challenges these relationships and leaves group members confused, insecure, and often angry" (Deal and Kennedy 157). Applying this same idea to churches, Leith Anderson observes,

All institutions have a natural tendency to resist change, especially religious institutions. Such resistance is good, otherwise they would be like jellyfish, floating with every current. When institutions are unstable, anarchy reigns. Unfortunately resistance to change can also result in the creation of certain barriers. These must be overcome if religious organizations are to fulfill their God-given missions. (111)

Common Reactions to Change

To understand the dynamics and challenges associated with church mergers, it is necessary to recognize the fact that changing an organizational culture is always difficult. It also helps to identify the specific forms of resistance that may be encountered in response to transformational change.

Individuals within organizations resist change, particularly a transformational change like merger. Some people resist change because they feel a sense of personal loss. This sense of loss might relate to security, pride, satisfaction with the status quo, forms of relationships, familiarity, personal authority, and influence. People also resist change when they see no good reason for change or when they expect it to do more harm than good. They often fear losing their individual identities for something that offers little hope for a better alternative. Occasionally people resist change due to a lack of respect toward the person or persons responsible for making the change. This lack of respect may predate the change or be a form of aggression against the leader who is associated with the threats inherent in change. Some people carry a pre-existing negative attitude that is

temporarily focused on the change. Others resist change because it is handled in an objectionable manner. Still others take the proposed changes as a personal insult. If they have been active in establishing the status quo, they may fear that attempts to change it will invalidate their contribution to the organization. Barna suggests that "change is often resisted because it simultaneously represents an admission of failure, and the recognition that the future will not be identical with the past" (38). People resist change because it can create burdens and requires effort beyond what is necessary to maintain the status quo. Others believe that the timing for change is bad. Others take advantage of change efforts to challenge the authority of the leaders. These people want to test their own influence by refusing to go along with change. Some will resist change if they hear about it indirectly. These people may oppose change because of an insult taken at not being in the first loop of information (Kirkpatrick 85-88; Barna 37-48).

With any change, particularly transformational change like that involved in a church merger, comes a severe disruption in the culture of an organization. This disruption may ultimately result in great benefits but first it will have several negative consequences. Radical change effects the habits of all church members, thereby causing disequilibrium in their lives. It upsets the systems a person depends upon and thereby threatens their sense of provision. It generates a fear of the unknown. In the face of these threats many people retreat into the past to find a sense of security (Hellriegle 548-552).

Change in the Local Church

Applying many of the same ideas described above to the local church we can identify several common reactions to change: Shock or an intense feeling of disequilibrium;

disbelief or a feeling of unreality about why the change is occurring; guilt or a feeling by the receiver of change that he or she has done something wrong and that error has brought about the change; projection or the act of blaming someone else for change; rationalization of the effort of people to try to make sense of the change. If the change is led properly, many in the church will pass through two more positive reactions to change: integration, when the members of the church try to turn the change into an advantage; acceptance, when either in resignation or enthusiasm, the organism accepts the new state of affairs (Lippett 55).

Commenting on the local church, Leith Anderson highlights other common reactions to change. People often focus on the institution rather than the purpose it was created to serve. Members in long established churches tend to become socially self-perpetuating, exclusive and resentful of changes that may open the church to outside influence. Churches are often ruled by a small minority of dissenters. For fear of offending this small group, change is postponed indefinitely or avoided altogether. Other church members resist change because they are oriented toward the past instead of the present or future. Many church members decline to take risks and are unwilling to suffer the potential pain often associated with change (Anderson 110-118).

One of the most helpful articles I read in the process of our church merger was "Saving a sinking ship: How to motivate the five groups still on board a declining church," by Bob Moeller. He identifies five groups often present in a declining churches: pioneers, curators, dysfunctionals, stand-by passengers, and the remnant (47-51). Recognizing

these types of church members often present in a declining church helps the pastor and church leaders understand and respond to resistance to organizational change.

In churches less than ninety years old there are usually people who still remember when the church began. They even may have been among the venturesome people who helped establish the church. These pioneers are often the last to leave a declining church and they also face the deepest sorrow when dwindling attendance suggests the need for radical change. Pioneers are often motivated to remain in a declining church to validate their long-term commitment to the church. They favor incremental change because they want to preserve as much of the past as possible. These persons often blame newer members for not being as committed and active as they have been. This group fails to recognize that much of a church's decline may be due to the congregation's chronic inability or unwillingness to change in response to changes in the community.

What pioneers want is assurance that their heritage will not be forgotten in the process of transformational change. They need people to understand and affirm the sacrifice they have made and what they have accomplished through the local church (Moeller 47-48).

Another group of persons found in a declining church are curators, usually a small group made up of the grown children or admirers of the pioneers. Their goal is to keep the church building open as a memorial to their parents and/or the pioneers. Like curators in a museum, they wish to preserve the history and legacy of a previous generation. They resist transformational change because their goal is not renewal but preservation (Moeller 48-49).

Moeller says that motivating curators toward change is no easy task. They are more resistant to change than pioneers who may keep a little of their original venturesome attitude. To motivate curators to change, leaders must assure them that the change will provide the best chance to keep the doors open and enable institutional survival (49).

Unfortunately with a merger, both churches in many senses cease to exist. If the viewpoint of the curator is tied solely to the identity, location, and building of the local church they will be very difficult to motivate. The leaders of church merger must contend with the fear people have that this kind of change will destroy the distinctive traditions of their heritage (Goodhue 127).

Pioneers and curators are similar to church members in what Leith Anderson identifies as the "Resistant Church" culture and the "Yesterday's Church" culture. Members in the resistant church culture are conservative in the purest sense; they want above all to maintain the status quo. As stated earlier, culture ought to have a conserving effect. When tied to critical moral or theological positions, those who resist change are courageous, persistent, and firm in conviction. Unfortunately, much resistance in the local church is not the result of moral courage or theological conviction. Often, resistance is also motivated by "institutional insecurity and the isolationism that comes from fear" (Anderson 140-141). Osborne observes that "the fiercest battles are seldom fought over theology. More often they are fought over change, sometimes even the slightest change" (142). The "Yesterday's Church" culture "keeps hoping that tomorrow will be 1954. They have trouble moving forward since they are constantly looking back. They nostalgically long for the former golden age of the church" (Anderson 141-142).

Moeller also identifies the dysfunctional people in a declining church who are attracted by the confusion and chaos of long-term decline. These people are comfortable in a church of constant turnover and crises, for this often mirrors their family experience. They generally fear newcomers and growth (49-50).

Another group of people often found in declining churches are stand-by passengers, according to Moeller. These are people who want change and improvement but they have lost most of their patience waiting for the church to move forward. They are often gifted, highly motivated people who are frustrated and exhausted by the problems at the church (50).

The last group of people identified by Moeller are the remnant. These people, usually few in number, have endured because they believe God still plans to revive their church. This is what the Old Testament referred to as "a remnant in the land" (2 Kings 19:30; Isaiah 37:31). They are usually open to changes that they believe will advance the will of God for the church (50).

Reaction to transformational change, like that involved in church merger, will also be heavily influenced by the age of the organizations involved. Schein asserts,

Age (length of existence) matters, if a culture change is required. If a church has a long history of successes with certain assumptions about itself and its environment, it is unlikely to want to challenge or reexamine those assumptions. Even if the assumptions are brought to consciousness, the members of the company want to hold on to them because they justify the past and are the source of their pride and self-esteem. (Culture 292)

Schaller agrees when he writes,

In general, the longer a congregation has been in existence, the more vulnerable it is to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This basic principle of physics,

which has been applied to the life of organizations ... declares that every functional organization produces a predictable degree of entropy. ... In general terms the longer a congregation has been in existence and meeting in the same building, the greater the difficulty it encounters in reaching unchurched persons, the stronger the loyalty of members, the greater the opposition to innovation, the longer the delay in accepting new members in policy making positions of leadership, the stronger the attachment to the sacred place, the heavier the weight of tradition, the less oriented it is to persons who live in the vicinity of the meeting place and the greater the chances that the median age of the members will be older than the median age of the residents of that community. (Activating 27-28)

Church merger is a radical form of organizational change likely to evoke all the forms of resistance mentioned above. Church merger results in the replacement of two cultures with one new one. In many ways, the old cultures are destroyed. Schein argues,

"Whenever one ends, or alters beyond recognition, the group that embodies a given culture, by definition that culture is destroyed and whatever new group begins to function must build its own new culture ... this process is traumatic and therefore not typically used as a deliberate strategy" (Psychology 295).

Considering the radical nature of church merger and the resistance to change it is likely to evoke, conflict, not surprisingly, will be involved in the process. Writing from the experience of a pastor leading churches through merger, Thomas writes,

As the threat of change increases, the members of the congregation become unpredictable. Nice people can get mean. People in such situations may blame themselves or others with or without basis. Competent leaders may suddenly become ineffective. Moreover, feelings of lostness can create divisions and hurt among the people. Hostility toward ministerial leadership or denominational leadership can also result. (18)

The term "conflict" means to "strike together." Conflict happens when two pieces of matter try to occupy the same space at the same time. There are three main types of conflict: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and substantive. Intrapersonal conflict is the struggle

persons have within themselves. Interpersonal conflict describes struggles between two or more different people. Substantive conflict can be between individuals, or in relationship to a group, or between groups. It describes conflict over facts, means, ends, or values. The changes associated with merger can evoke any or all of these types of conflict (Leas and Kittlaus 30-31).

Hazen Simpson, in his study of church merger, offers an interesting analogy about the nature of conflict common in church mergers. Our highway signs say "merge left" or "merge right." Some say, "merging traffic" or "merge with traffic." Few of us question the meaning and purpose of such signs, but we all recognize their need. We also realize that caution should be taken when approaching such signs. Usually traffic moves smoothly through the merger area, however the involvement of people, with their often unpredictable behavior and emotional responses to stress, can create major problems. Tempers flare, rudeness takes place, and when someone panics, accidents can result (32).

Simpson's own church merger eventually resulted in the disunion of the two churches involved. One of the critical factors in that disunion was the interpersonal conflict between people as they attempted to form one new church culture following their merger. Simpson describes the demise of his church merger:

Merging churches of like faith and fellowship should succeed because they worship the same God and attempt to fulfill the same basic purpose and needs. [However] ... the selfish needs of leaders and members often will take precedence over the purpose and vision of the church. The human factors of selfishness, greed, jealousy, pride, dishonesty and self-interest can destroy any work of God, but the fragile nature of merged congregations makes them even more susceptible. (43)

One critically important form of resistance to change often associated with church merger concerns the attachments people form to the physical objects, structures, and property associated with churches. This unhealthy attachment to physical objects and places is described repeatedly in the Bible.

The experience of both Jews and Greeks reveals the tendency of people to transfer faith from God to physical objects. One example in the Old Testament is found in 1 Chronicles 7 when the people of Israel allowed their faith to change to greater trust in the temple itself rather than in God whom the temple served. Another example is found in 1 Samuel 4, when the people of Israel inappropriately trusted in the physical presence of the Ark of Covenant to lead them to victory in battle. Since they trusted the Ark more than they trusted the God who made the covenant, they were defeated.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul writes of people who "claiming to be wise became utter fools instead. And instead of worshiping the glorious ever living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people, or birds and animals and snakes" (Romans 8:1:22-23).

In our time people often tie their faith and trust to physical buildings, stained glass windows, pipe organs, and other objects. So tied, people are vulnerable to seeing their faith undermined when these physical objects must be changed, discarded, or replaced.

When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, he taught her (and us) a lesson about the focal point of worship and congregational life. The woman asked if it was right to worship God at Mt. Gerizim where the Samaritans worshiped, or at Jerusalem where the Jews worshiped. Essentially, Jesus teaches here that worship is not

about a place, a "where." Rather it is about a "who" and a "what." The focal point for worship and congregational life is not tied to a specific place but to a person, Jesus Christ. The "what" that eclipsed the importance of "where" is to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:19-26).

Congregations may form emotional attachments to a building; such attachments stem from sacred memories of baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmations, and other significant spiritual experiences. To lose their church building is to lose an anchor of shared memory to which they can cling in the midst of life's challenges and changes. Unfortunately, like the biblical examples cited above, church members may come to place an unhealthy emphasis on the physical objects and structures associated with their faith.

In Hahn's description of the demise of his own church's plans for merger he cites conflict over the attachment to property as a critical reason. In Hahn's closing observations he states that when it comes to church merger "most people would rather fight than switch. Buildings become sacred shrines (if not idols)." He states that often "People want the church to grow, but don't want their church to change" (111).

In her survey of merged churches, Gregg notes the most significant obstacles to merging: loyalty to existing congregation and its history, affection for the church building or property, fear of losing congregational identity, fear of change, and commitment to current location (Study 34). Those engaged in the process of church mergers must face the challenge of helping people realize that no matter how attached they may be to buildings, or to a particular local church identity, these things are a means to ministry, not ends in themselves.

When organizations implement transformational change, the costs are high.

Reshaping churches through merger will undoubtedly be accompanied by resistance, conflict, misunderstanding, and emotional pain. Anderson states,

Some members feel alienated and forced to leave. Long-time friendships may be severed. Total cost can never be fully anticipated. Money is measurable and is therefore the easiest to estimate; but time and emotions and relationships are difficult to quantify. (173).

When comparing mergers to church plants as a method for starting new faith communities, it is helpful to consider the comparison between building and remodeling. In the construction industry, remodelers know it can be much more expensive to change something already built than to build something from scratch. Remodeling requires tearing down before building up and working around existing structures. For this reason, many church growth experts encourage entrepreneurial pastors to start new churches rather than to change a long established congregation (Anderson 174; Schaller, "Redevelop" 23-24). In many ways the pastor and church leaders who engage in the process of merger face challenges of redevelopment and church planting. They must remodel the existing churches near to the point of razing them to the ground. Then they must combine any pre-existing elements still useable, add whatever new ones the church will support, and try to build a new church on that foundation.

The Nature of the Church

To help us make sense of why it might sometimes be advisable to form a new faith community from two existing congregations through merger, it is important to remember

that the church is always more than any one local manifestation. The United Methodist

Book of Discipline provides these descriptions on the nature of the church:

¶ 103. God's self-revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ summons the church to ministry in the world through witness by word and deed in light of the church's mission. The visible church of Christ as a faithful community of persons affirms the worth of all humanity and the value of interrelationship in all of God's creation.

In the midst of a sinful world, through the grace of God, we are brought to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We become aware of the presence and life-giving power of God's Holy Spirit. We live in confident expectation of the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose.

We are called together for worship and fellowship and for the upbuilding of the Christian community. We advocate and work for the unity of the Christian church. We call persons into discipleship.

As servants of Christ we are sent into the world to engage in the struggle for justice and reconciliation. We seek to reveal the love of God for men, women, and children of all ethnic, racial, cultural, and national backgrounds and to demonstrate the healing power of the gospel with those who suffer. (108)

In the United Methodist Book of Discipline, the historic articles of religion state:

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful [persons] in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. Article XIII - Of the Church. (60)

These descriptions focus on the essential purpose of the church rather than its form, location, or indigenous identity.

Drawing on several passages from the New Testament we can learn several things about the nature of the church.

1. The church is a community

... so it is with Christ's body. We are all part of [Christ's] one body and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others. (Romans 12:5)

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity. (Acts 2:46)

2. The church is a unified people

Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace. We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all. (Ephesians 4:3-6)

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally. (1 Corinthians 12:25)

3. The church is God's family

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. (Ephesians 2:19)

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:18)

4. The church exists to glorify God

Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

5. The church exists to love

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. (John 13:34-35)

I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it -- the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. You are my friends if you obey me. I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. I command you to love each other. (John 15:12-17)

6. The church exists for equipping believers

He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

7. The church exists to proclaim the Word

We don't go around preaching about ourselves; we preach Jesus Christ, the Lord. All we say about ourselves is that we are your servants because of what Jesus has done for us. (2 Corinthians 4:5)

Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2)

And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere." (Mark 16:15)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. (Luke 4:18)

So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, for we could only conclude that God was calling us to preach the Good News there. (Acts 16:10)

So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended, and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. (2 Corinthians 1:23)

8. The church exists for ministry

Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters. (Galatians 6:10)

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)

9. The church exists to continue the agenda of Jesus

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me. Then these righteous ones will reply, "Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?" And the King will tell them, "I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" (Matthew 25:35-40)

Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." (Romans 12:20)

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. (John 13:34)

As we look at these biblical descriptions, we see that the church is not a building where people go; but rather the church is God's people, in community, doing what he has called them to do. The reason the church exists is not primarily for its own support or the satisfaction of experiencing God together. The church exists to continue the redemptive

work of Christ in the world. What the earthly Jesus began and perfected in his relationship with the Father, the earthly church continues in our relationship with God and our spreading of the good news in Jesus Christ. We see that the church is much more than any particular local church; it is all believers working together in various locations to fulfill the purposes of God for his people.

In his helpful and ground-breaking book The Purpose Driven Church, Rick Warren claims that all churches must be driven by each of the five New Testament purposes for the church: evangelism, worship, fellowship, edification, and ministry (125). He contends that nothing precedes these purposes in importance for churches. The starting point for every church should be the question, "Why do we exist?" He observes that unless you know why your church exists, you have no foundation, no motivation, and no direction for ministry (81).

Every group must have a shared concept of its "reason to be." In religious institutions the primary tasks are different from economically motivated organizations, but every organization must define and fulfill its core mission or it will not survive (Schein, Culture 52-53).

Church mergers may be worth the inherent difficulties when advancing the broader purposes of the church require it. When a church has forgotten or abandoned its reason to be or does not have the energy to fulfill that purpose in a meaningful way, a radical transformational change is necessary. In a study of churches in decline and how they were able or unable to be revived, Barna observes,

Thousands of churches in America have deteriorated to the point where they are a ministry in theory only, a shell of what they had once been. In these churches, little, if any, outreach or inreach takes place. The name and buildings may insinuate a church is present, but lives are not touched in a significant spiritual way by such artifacts. As long as these churches have a handful of faithful attenders and can afford some meeting space and a speaker, they remain in existence. They have, however, essentially completed their life as a church. (23)

When a church is no longer able or willing to fulfill the basic purposes of the church then the radical transformational change associated with church merger may be advantageous. When should the status quo be questioned in a way as radical as the consideration of church merger? The answer may be: whenever a church does not represent a biblical representation of the church or whenever a church it is not fulfilling its New Testament purposes.

Life-Cycle Theory as Applied to Local Churches

One of the most helpful discoveries in our process of church merger has been learning to diagnose and treat the condition of a church according to its congregational life cycle. This provided a significant share of our motivation to consider the option of merger for the former Oakdale and Beechmont congregations .

The notion that organizations pass through life stages has become popular in recent years through the work of Kimberly, Miles, and Associates (1980), and Adizes (1988). Organizational theorists often use the biological analogy to describe organization. They speak of organizational birth, life, and death with terms such as conception, gestation, birth trauma, and even miscarriage and abortion (Kimberly 6). Adizes uses the analogy of stages in human development to describe the growth and decline of organizations. He

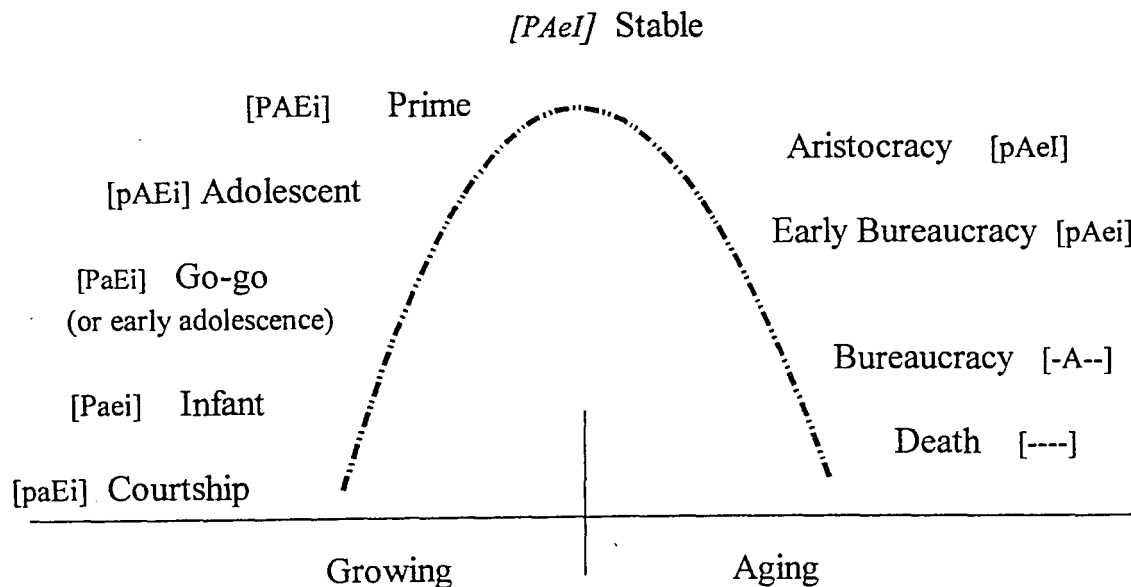
also offers prescriptive measures to treat organizations at various stages of their life cycle. According to Ichak Adizes,

Organizations do have life cycles just as living organisms do; they go through the normal struggles and difficulties accompanying each stage of the Organizational Lifecycle and are faced with the transitional problems of moving to the next phase of development. Organizations learn to deal with these problems by themselves or they develop abnormal "diseases" which stymie growth. ... Because the stages in the organization's Lifecycle are predictable and repetitive, knowing where the organization is in the Lifecycle enables management to take proactive, preventative measures and deal with future problems earlier or avoid them altogether. (Adizes xiii-xiv)

Adizes' basic model is graphically displayed below in figure one.

Figure 1.

Adizes' Life Cycle of an Organization



(Adizes 211)

The letters PAEI represent the emphases that more or less dominate each stage of the organizational life cycle. The alternating lower and upper case letters for these emphases in the graph above indicates the greater or lesser degree of importance for each emphasis at various stages in the lifecycle; upper case indicates greater importance and

lower case indicates lesser importance. (P) represents the performance of the purpose of the organization. (A) represents administration, or efforts to systematize, routinize, and program the activities of the organization so that the right things are done at the right times with the right intensity. (E) represents entrepreneurship, which involves preparing proactively for change instead of responding reactively to change. The (E) element is often the result of a visionary leader. (I) represents integration, or the development of a culture of interdependence and affinity so as to nurture the corporate culture. The PAEI functions are interdependent and when they are performed with high intensity and quality, with the right emphases at the right stage of the lifecycle, the organization will be effective and efficient (Adizes 119-130).

For the purposes of this study I will focus on the last two stages of Adizes' organizational life cycle, bureaucracy, and death, since this is when mergers are most likely to be considered.

On the decline side of the bell curve, administration (A) becomes more and more dominant as one moves toward the end of the life cycle. When the administrative function becomes dominant the organization represents form for the sake of form without purpose. Entrepreneurship (E) is exiled from the organization as it declines since the declining organization will defend the status quo above all else; institutional survival becomes more important than having a reason to live. However, of the four (PAEI) roles, the most critical one for changing an organizational culture is still entrepreneurship (E) (Adizes 209-212).

According to Adizes' model, a congregation could be described as an aging organization if it avoids risk, sees opportunities as problems, and is driven by inertia (Adizes 25). Growing organizations value risk-taking and high expectations; aging organizations value security and the maintenance of set rules. This decline of organizations is marked by a lack of flexibility and a failure to be proactive in adapting the organization to meet new challenges.

Adizes offers several therapies for helping an organization change its position in the life cycle. Certain changes can essentially turn back the clock on a declining organization. On the growth side of the lifecycle bell curve, changes may be incremental or transitional. However, the farther down into decline an organization goes the more radical and transformational the changes must become.

Unfortunately, Adizes does not offer prescriptive therapies for organizations in the bureaucracy and death stages of the life cycle. The reason may be that the management of organizational decline and termination is a "humiliating experience and one that subject organizations and their managers loath to have studied or published. Organizations are like individuals, in that they are prone to push thoughts of death from everyday consciousness" (Kimberly, Miles and Associates 439).

Organizations deep in decline may function institutionally for years without any sense of direction or purpose. In this state, they are qualitatively dead (like a brain dead patient who maintains some autonomic bodily functions). Organizations like government agencies, political entities, or non-profit organizations (like the church) that do not depend on "client" satisfaction may continue in this condition for a long period of time. Actual

death occurs in an organization when no one is committed to the organization or its basic reason to exist. Adizes does not offer a treatment for organizations in the bureaucratic or death stages because he believes time has run out for these organizations. The only hope for new life is a radical infusion of entrepreneurial energy (E) and a level of change that is likely to send the organization into shock and "cardiac arrest" (78-84). Adizes writes, "As for restoring dead organizations to life, this is probably a capability reserved for saints" (349).

Churches, like other organizations, experience and exhibit similar lifecycle stages as those described above. Norman Shawchuck made the following observation about congregational life;

There seems to be an ebb and flow to congregational life; congregations are birthed or may be aborted; they grow at different paces, experience crises, sometimes become stagnant, sometimes revitalize, and, at other times, pass from the scene having lived their day. (Leading 163)

Building on the work of Adizes, Martin Saarinen has developed a similar theory and lifecycle model and applied it to congregational life. Saarinen uses a "genetic" metaphor for understanding the stages of congregational life. The four genes in this model are EPAI.

The "E" gene is ENERGY. This factor includes such things as vision and hope, excitement and enthusiasm, and a sense of potency and potentiality. Energy (E) is the dominant factor in the early stages of the congregation's life (Saarinen 1-2).

The "P" gene is PROGRAM, which represents those specific programs and services undertaken by the congregation in response to the needs of its own membership, of its

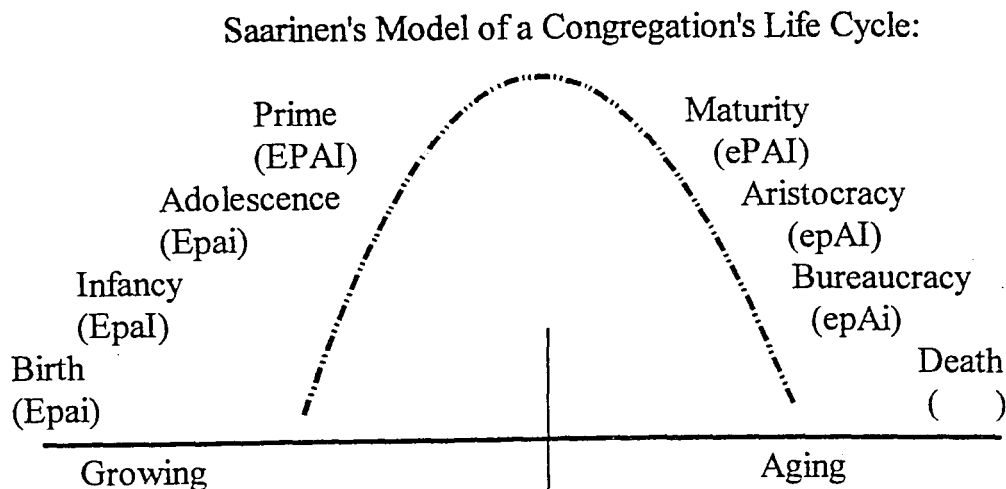
environment, or the ministry mandates of the broader church it supports. Programs serve certain identifiable functions such as worship and music, learning, serving, managing, and witnessing (Saarinen 2).

The "A" gene is ADMINISTRATION. This factor spells out the intentions of the congregation in the form of mission statements, goals, objectives, budgets and planning. Administration (A) describes coordination, integration, and setting of boundaries (Saarinen 3-4).

The "I" gene is INCLUSION, which is the important relational factor in church life. Inclusion emphasizes the drawing and inclusion of people into the life of the congregation and the assimilation of their interests, concerns and spiritual gifts in the church's purposes and programming. It also involves the distribution and use of power and authority among members and the management of conflict in the church. (Saarinen 4).

These four factors--energy, program, administration, inclusion--combine differently in each stage of a church's lifecycle. Saarinen's life cycle for organizations is graphically displayed below.

Figure 2.



This model shares many similarities with that of Adizes. The two sides of the bell curve represent growth and decline. The first four stages represent the growth phase. The last four stages represent the decline phase. Saarinen's (E) for energy, resembles Adizes (E) for entrepreneurship. Energy (E) forces predominate in the growth phase. Administration (A) forces predominate in the decline phase. The upper and lower case letters for the emphases, or genes, also indicates those which are more or less dominant at various stages of the lifecycle. Renewal in the early stages of decline is marked by incremental changes and in the latter by more revolutionary changes (16-23). Barna agrees but notes that, unfortunately, when a church has reached a mature stage, it tends to accept only incremental change rather than revolutionary change. He states, "The church now has discernable traditions, people who reign as 'pillars' and systems that were developed to allow ministry, but simultaneously serve to limit, if not to prevent, innovation and rapid response to opportunities" (21).

Saarinen is more hopeful than Adizes about organizations, in this case congregations, that are in the bureaucratic or death stages of their life cycle. He suggests that the possibility of growth exists at each stage of the decline phase. He observes that "the potency for renewal is positively related to the level of crisis in the congregation--the deeper the level of crisis, the greater the potential for renewal" (22).

Saarinen identifies two primary interventions for a congregation in decline: to reconstruct its corporate memory and identity, and to understand and adapt to its changed

and changing context (22). Both of these interventions may be exercised in church merger.

The bureaucracy culture of a church in decline exhibits a disillusioned culture. The "Golden Age" is no longer sought. Maintaining one's turf personally and corporately becomes paramount in importance. There is a strong sense of boundaries but also rigidity, muteness, defensiveness, hostility, and suspicion. The congregation resists renewal. An "ultimacy" is given to institutional structures. There is a tendency toward personalizing (or even demonizing) systemic problems (Saarinen 15-23).

According to Saarinen, the intervention needed for a congregation at this stage of the life cycle calls for inducing a new identity and empowering the organization with the hope that energy [or an entrepreneurial force] may be released (21-23). This intervention may be exercised in church merger.

The death culture of a church is represented by the ultimate priority given to form over purpose and substance. The death culture presents a complete disintegration of the basic "reason to be" of the organization. The administrative structures and procedures of a "dead" congregation will "resist decay longer than any other part of the organism's anatomy" (Saarinen 16).

What are other ways to determine when a given church is far into the decline side of the life cycle bell curve? Schaller identifies several signs of decline. Decline is evident when: the replacement ratio of membership falls below zero (in other words, adults gained by transfer and confession of faith total fewer than those lost by transfer or death for three consecutive years, or four years out of five), there is a narrowing homogeneity, the

demography of new members becomes more similar to that of existing members, the leadership system tends to exclude fresh leadership, and the gap between the church and community widens. This can be seen when fewer members and new members live in the immediate community of the church. Decline is often apparent when the demographics of members diverge from those of the surrounding neighborhood, the activity level of members declines, programming efforts by the church diminish, and maintenance of property is deferred unless it is crucial or of an emergency nature (Activating 27-29).

The death of a person can be confirmed from physical evidence: absence of heartbeat, brain-wave activity, or respiration. The sustained absence of any of these physical functions makes death difficult to deny. Figuratively speaking, the death of a congregation is more difficult to confirm and much easier to deny. Organizations, including local churches, are born, grow, age, and sometimes die. At each stage of development various challenges must be overcome and opportunities seized if the organization is to survive and thrive. Unfortunately, many congregations continue to exist long after they stop contributing in a positive manner to the welfare of either their members or the community around them. Organizational life stage theorists suggest that organizational leaders must confront the prospect of someday choosing to bring their organization (and their own job) to an end or to step aside for new leaders to participate in a radical restructuring or rebirth of the organization (Adizes 76-85).

According to Saarinen, the intervention for a congregation at the death stage of its life cycle calls for absorption into another entity or the construction of a completely new church body. The alternative is despair, characterized by a complete loss of memory,

identity, and hope. Since no provision is made for a new life beyond, the ultimate power is given to death (16-23).

Saarinen recognizes a redemptive opportunity in the decline phase of congregations. Shawchuck and Heuser agree that the point of deep decline can be seen as opportunity for innovation. They state,

When conditions are so bad that whatever you do can hardly make matters worse, you have arrived at the state of pure and unadulterated freedom. Doing business as usual is a sure way of driving the last nail into the coffin. When a congregation is dying it is no time for business as usual. When the congregation is dying, something must be done, and it must be qualitatively different from what has gone on before. (173)

Finally, Saarinen points the way through death to life for a declining congregation. He states, "Church mergers have a way of reminding us that the death of a congregation can be experienced as its giving itself over to the birth of a new reality" (22).

Biblical Metaphors for Church Merger

In our process of merger, I sought biblical metaphors to help the congregation interpret our experience. A metaphor is "a figure of speech containing an implied comparison, in which a word or phrase ordinarily and primarily used of one thing is applied to another" (Webster 852). Metaphor is becoming increasingly important in Christian theology as theologians recognize the centrality of metaphor in scriptural language as well as in descriptions of the nature of God and the church. Along with symbols, slogans, and stories, metaphors can inspire and motivate a congregation through the process of change. Metaphors help people make sense of unknown experiences through the known (McFague 360).

The following metaphors seem appropriate for the experience of merger: marriage, birth, death and resurrection. In the attempt to keep the experience as positive as possible for church members, I began by using the metaphor of marriage.

Marriage

A text that many associate with church merger is "... and the two shall become one" (Matthew 19:5, Genesis 2:24 RSV). This comparison was used in many of the mergers studied for this project (Hahn, Simpson, Gregg, Crispell). One purpose of marriage is its unifying and creative function. Marriage is a form of joining in which two persons create a new unity. Marriage seems like a useful metaphor for the process of merger.

Not long after my arrival at the Oakdale and Beechmont churches, I performed a wedding that featured the lighting of a unity candle. In the pre-marital counseling sessions, an extended debate between the couple centered on whether or not to blow out the two individual candles after using them to light the one unity candle that would symbolize the married couple.

I found myself favoring leaving both candles lit, and as I did, I began to question the usefulness of the marriage metaphor for interpreting church merger. When two join in marriage they still maintain their own individual identities, a unique heritage, and set of relationships with family and friends. In a sense, married persons willingly sacrifice their total independence for the sake of the interdependence that must characterize marriage. The oneness that people may experience in marriage can stimulate the individuality, personal growth, and development of each partner. However, when Jesus said "the two shall become one" (Matthew 19:5) in marriage, he obviously did not mean that the two

persons become one physical body or represent one single identity. Rather, the marriage creates a dynamic unit, comprised of two separate yet joined individuals who have found a new focus for fidelity, a new way of living, a new way of being (Smith 27).

One definition of merger is "to lose or cause to lose identity by being absorbed, swallowed up, or combined" (Webster 849). By this definition, marriage is not a merger. It is more of an interjoining where formerly separate entities join together mutually into a new system. While married persons maintain their unique individuality together, they form a single married system.

In our process of merger, I feared that the two churches might become one in name only while defensively emphasizing their differences. Merged congregations can become qualitatively separate even in one facility, just as an estranged married couple can share a house but fail to communicate or cooperate for the good of the family unit.

Birth

The hope of a church merger is to give birth to a new faith community. Even that simple description uses the language of birth to describe the anticipation of new life. Experts on church growth repeatedly use the birth metaphor to describe starting a new church (Malphurs 341-356; Schaller, Questions 10-38).

In our process of merger, I began to tell the story of Abraham and Sarah. I likened the new church that would be created from our merger, to their miracle child Isaac. It was a striking coincidence that the respective ages of our two predecessor congregations matched the ages of Abraham (100) and Sarah (90) (Genesis 17:17). I compared our

situation to the faith of this couple, laughably past the age of child-bearing, who nevertheless trusted God and lived to see his promise realized in the birth of a child.

In our merger I also spoke of the sacrificial attitude of parents, which might represent the predecessor churches, who make their individual needs secondary to the needs of their growing child. One illustration I used was that of two exhausted parents of a newborn child lying in bed trying in vain to sleep. The baby begins crying in a normal way, signaling the need for a feeding or changing. The tired parents assert their own needs "It's your turn!" "No, it's your turn, I went last time!" Suddenly, there is a loud noise in the child's room and all crying stops. In a moment both parents are wide awake, on their feet, and moving together to the child's room. Their preoccupation with their individual needs is laid aside for the good of the child.

Unfortunately, I could never seem to generate much enthusiasm for the birth metaphor. One member, drawing on the marriage and birth metaphors stated, "This merger is more like my blended family where two older adults, both set in their ways, came together with their own adolescent children with their own unique demands and needs. Together we form a yours-mine-ours arrangement. Let me tell you, we are really getting practice on our conflict resolution skills!" Others struggled with identifying strongly enough with the new church. In retrospect, it almost sounds comical, but one disgruntled member responded to the birth metaphor by saying "I demand a paternity test! This new church is no child of mine!" That attitude put the birth metaphor to rest.

Death and Resurrection

In our December 1996 newsletter, after the merger had been formally approved, I wrote the following in my pastoral column:

I have struggled to find metaphors to guide me and us in this process of uniting our two churches to begin one new church. In my prayer and reflection time I kept coming back again and again to several images: Abraham and Sarah and their miracle child Isaac--the miracle of new life in unlikely circumstances; Marriage and parenting-- how parents maintain unique identities even as they invest in and sacrifice for the new life of their child as their greatest priority. The one metaphor that I hoped to avoid using was death and resurrection. I was afraid that some would receive it as too negative. But I know now that a kind of death, and the hope for resurrection, has been the experience for many of us in this process.

Someone recently said to me, "What you have all accomplished in the last few months is nothing short of a miracle." I replied, "I suppose it is a lot like the crucifixion, it did the world a lot of good, but at the time I'm sure it hurt like heck. You know, I'm ready for Easter." There has been pain as we have changed together; it has been like a death to recognize our weaknesses, our need for change, and to loosen our grip on the past so we can reach out toward the future. But now--I hope that we will focus more and more on the resurrection.

I recently read about a family that watched the Easter story dramatized on television. The young child of the family was deeply moved. As Jesus was beaten and crucified, tears rolled down her cheeks. She was absolutely still and silent until after Jesus had been taken down from the cross and laid inside the tomb. Then she suddenly grinned and shouted, "Now comes the good part!"

Now comes the good part, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Now comes the good part. This is a day of new beginnings. Let us come together, bind up each other's wounds, honor the past, look to the future and trust God for resurrection. Have a very merry Christmas (and enjoy the Easter of this community of faith) (McClendon 1).

Even though the majority of the church leaders joined me in recognizing that the two predecessor churches were near or at the end of their life cycles, we still tried to avoid the

language of death. But the conflicts, challenges, and changes inherent in merger reminded us that discipleship is costly; it goes by the way of the cross. The cross is sacrificial death to sin and self, so that people might live to God. Jesus said, "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). We remembered that the church is the body of Christ. We also remembered that before the redemptive, life-giving work of Christ was done, his body had to pass through death. Finally, we discovered that death and resurrection is the most appropriate biblical metaphor for church merger. Consider these examples from first Corinthians 15:

And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world. (v. 19)

But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life. (v. 20)

But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of body will they have?" What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put into the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a dry little seed of wheat or whatever you are planting [a church?]. Then God gives it a new body--just the kind he wants it to have. A different kind of plant grows from each kind of seed. And just as there are different kinds of seeds and plants, so also there are different kinds of flesh--whether of humans, animals, birds, or fish. (v. 35-39)

It is the same way for the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies, which will die and decay, will be different when they are resurrected, for they will never die. Our bodies now disappoint us, but when they are raised, they will be full of glory. They are weak now, but when they are raised, they will be full of power. They are natural human bodies now, but when they are raised they will be spiritual bodies (v. 42-44a)

What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God [or a carnal church?]. These perishable bodies of ours are not able to live forever. (v. 50)

The New Testament is honest about the agony of physical and spiritual death among humans, but it also reveals the means of triumph over death. Christ's death was a sacrificial "laying down of his life for his friends" (John 15:13) for the purpose of redeeming those same friends for new life. Through his death, Christ destroyed the power of Satan by removing death as his means of holding power over human beings. Jesus himself, loosed from the pains of death (Acts 2:24) now holds the keys of both death and hell (Rev. 1:18). Christians still die, but their death is not loss but gain for they are now united with Christ in His resurrection (2 Cor. 5:6).

These same promises may be applied to the life of congregations facing the end of their life cycles, particularly if we remember to look beyond death to resurrection. Shawchuck and Heuser observe, "Innovation is the principle of death and resurrection. God has created all living things in such a manner that life comes forth out of death" (171). But first, congregations must learn not to fear death or to "grieve as those who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). All organizations, including churches, resist death, even in form when they can no longer resist it in substance. Many church leaders spend an inordinate amount of energy nursing both programs and methods that want to die. Instead of viewing death as positive (because it makes resurrection possible), they exhaust themselves trying to resuscitate programs that will never be strong and healthy again. Speaking of this tendency in organizations, Peter Drucker writes,

Nothing requires more heroic efforts than to keep a corpse from stinking, and yet nothing is quite so futile, is an old medical proverb. In almost any organization I have come across, the best people are engaged in this effort; yet all they can hope to accomplish is to delay acceptance of the inevitable a little longer and at great cost. (152)

Speaking of the death of congregations, Barna asserts,

Not every church can be turned around. Some are full of emotionally crippled people. We spend far too much time trying to renew churches that can't be renewed. Sometimes the best thing you can do is to let a church become a positive part of history. Calling it quits after a season of faithful service is not a disgrace. Disgrace only occurs in refusing to do what is best for God's kingdom, which may mean releasing people and other resources to work through another ministry. (107-108)

Shawchuck and Heuser claim that regardless of ongoing adaptation, any given congregation will at some point grow old and die (158). The challenge is not always in preventing the death of a congregation, but how to make that death redemptive.

In discussing the human life cycle, Donald Capps identifies the last stage of the life cycle as a choice of "integrity" versus "despair or disgust." Despair and disgust represent a lack of hope and faith in the future beyond death and a preoccupation with regret and bitterness about the process of decline that leads one to that point in existence. On the other hand, "integrity" equals honest acceptance of the condition of our life, and responsibility for that life as it is. This involves acceptance of death. This acceptance of death is not one of despair or disgust, for it is grounded in resurrection faith that looks to life beyond death. This also involves taking up one's responsibility for participation in successive generations, leaving a legacy of faith for those who come after you (Capps 27-29). In her survey of congregations who finally developed positive attitudes about merger, Gregg observed, "For many who faced declining resources, the question was not, 'How do we keep this organization alive?' but rather 'How do we best serve Jesus Christ into the future' " ("Study" 67)?

Church merger, then, represents a way for congregations "to lay down their lives for their friends" (John 15:13). It represents a way for congregations deep in decline to give up their lives, their identities, and physical manifestations, in order to experience new life in a new body created by a miracle of God. When church members and leaders choose to have their church die and be born again through merger, they demonstrate great faith and commitment to the biblical purpose of the church. The "death" of a congregation can be considered "more than a biological [or institutional] event. It may be the occasion for one's boldest act, the ultimate renunciation of egocentricity in favor of theocentricity" (Bailey 110).

That is not to say that the process of death and resurrection necessary for church merger will not be painful and challenging. It does say, when viewed by faith in God, who brings life out of death, it may all be worth it. Recently, Maurice LeFever, chaplain with Hospice of Louisville, shared with me the following meditation,

Let us be honest with death.
 Let us not pretend that it is less than it is.
 It is separation. It is sorrow. It is grief.
 But let us neither pretend that death is more than it is.
 It is not annihilation; as long as memory endures.
 It is not an end to love; our need for love from each other is boundless.
 It is not an end to joy and laughter; nothing would less honor a gentle soul [or church] than to make our lives drab in counterfeit respect.
 It is not an end of life; for Christ's promise endures,
 "Today, you will be with me . . . and where I am you may be also."
 (Author Unknown)

Stewardship

When a church chooses to lay down its organizational life for its friends, that should include the people Christ called us to reach in his Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20),

an essential component of the church's purpose. Church mergers can be seen as a philosophy of service to the people within a geographical area for the enhancement of mission and church growth.

Church merger should not be seen as a means to the end of institutional survival. The impetus for this form of radical change must be love for others, not desire for self-preservation. Jones recognizes that one of the things that may doom a church merger is failure to recognize that its continuing deteriorating condition is due to a preoccupation with survival rather than being a significant instrument through which God can work. If that preoccupation dominates the merger process and continues on into the newly formed church, the poor health of the congregation may remain the same or, more likely, worsen after the stress of church merger. Spiritual renewal must be one of the primary reasons for merger if it is to have hope of success. The pastoral leader must help move the emphasis of members to reasons higher than survival or financial benefits. Churches should merge because Christian disciples have God-assigned tasks to do and they may be better able to do them together (167).

The biblical concept of stewardship begins in the Old Testament. A steward is an official who controls the affairs of a large household, overseeing the service at the master's table, directing the household servants and the household expenses on behalf of the master. Once elevated to power, Joseph's household affairs were in the care of the steward, which in Hebrew literally means "man over the house." See also: Gen. 43:19; 33:4; 1 Kings 15:18; 1 Chr. 27:31; 28:1; Isa. 22:15.

All Christians are to be stewards of the affairs of God (1 Cor. 4:1; Gal. 4:2; 1 Peter 4:10). The Christian concept of stewardship before God involves time, talent, possessions, and self (Eph. 3:2). The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) makes clear God's plans for entrusting to individuals gifts to be used for the benefit of the community of faith and beyond. This parable reinforces the conviction that God intends his people to act as his agents (also see 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

When considering the biblical obligation of stewardship and the state of churches deep in decline--particularly in the aristocratic, bureaucratic and death stages--we should consider the words of Wallace Fisher who wrote,

Here is another complex question that emerges in doing biblical stewardship. Does any congregation that exists by the skin of its teeth in a community that is underchurched have the right to place over ninety percent of its annual budget into a ministry that is in fact a private chaplaincy to a handful? My own view after a quarter of a century of meeting with clergy of all denominations and some sects in several hundred conferences is that upward of a fifth, perhaps more, of the congregations now in existence are "unfaithful stewards" in seeking to keep their doors open, rather than joining selflessly with another congregation or two to provide a full ministry to their members and community, through the church-at-large, the nation and the world. (59-60)

In the past fifteen years, more than forty-one United Methodist churches have been closed or abandoned in the Kentucky Conference. In all but a few cases, the assets (if any), liabilities, and property become the responsibility of the conference. But the corporate memory, the legacy of faith, and the biblical purposes that originally inspired the formation of that church all come to a quiet and pathetic end.

In the Kentucky Conference there is a large number of churches deep in the decline side of their life cycles. Minor incremental changes are unlikely to reverse their downward

momentum. Without transformational change many of these congregations will die. The questions are, How will they die? and, For what purpose will they die? Should these churches be closed with a simple last reading of their names at annual conference? Should these churches be financially subsidized by the conference or given a part-time student or local-pastor? Should they be closed at the direction of the conference and their membership rolls transferred to another United Methodist Church? Should the Bishop appoint an entrepreneurial pastor and pray for revival? Should we send a hospice-type pastor who will help people accept the inevitability of death and help make the church comfortable and peaceful as it dies? Or should we challenge these churches to consider the option of church merger?

Transformational Leadership

The role of leadership is critically important to the successfulness of church mergers. This leadership is most often the responsibility and opportunity of the pastor. In many cases this responsibility for leadership is shared among members of a team including the pastor and lay persons. However, the pastor must still function as team leader for the process to succeed.

According to Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, studies of successful and unsuccessful organizational transformation emphasize the critical role of leadership. The unique situation of transformation "requires special behaviors, strategies and actions on the part of the leader" (521).

Don Hellriegle concurs when he lists several conditions required for successful transformational change: people in the organization must feel pressure in order to be ready

for change, participation and involvement of people in reexamining problems and practices are needed to build commitment for the change, some new ideas or concepts must be brought in from outside the organizational culture, early innovations leading to improvements should be limited in scope to provide early success, and a skilled leader or change agent is needed to bring in new ideas and people (562).

Church merger represents a radical form of transformational change. This type of change is required when a church is deep in decline or facing the bureaucratic or death stages of its life cycle. Speaking of transformational change in declining congregations, Brian McLaren writes,

We must maximize discontinuity. Maybe small changes, superficial changes, were enough in the past. But the degree of external change faced now is such that small measures, even a lot of them, aren't enough. Instead we need major change, qualitative change, revolution, rebirth, reinvention. The future belongs to those willing to let go, to stop trying to minimize the change we face, but rather to maximize discontinuity. (17-19)

Transformational change (like church merger) requires a transformational leadership style. Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson define a transformational leadership style as follows:

A deliberate influence process on the part of an individual or group to bring about a discontinuous change in the current state and functioning of an organization as a whole. The change is driven by a vision based on a set of beliefs and values that require the members of the organization to urgently perceive and think differently and to perform new actions and organizational goals. (525)

What are some of the things that transformational leaders do? These leaders stay close to the action by reading, listening, visiting, and observing. They learn to understand

people by going to where they work, visiting in their homes, sharing their joys and sorrows, and staying closely connected with those that follow them (Anderson 189-190). Transformational leaders get authority from followers; they earn it by developing trust in their followers. Transformational leaders excel amid adversity, seeing it as an opportunity for positive change. Transformational leaders take initiative by being proactive and entrepreneurial (Anderson 187-195).

Schaller also provides a list of critical abilities for leaders of transformational change. His list focuses on the redevelopment of an existing congregation, redevelopment which requires many of the same skills and actions involved in church mergers. He claims transformational leaders must possess the ability to enlist allies from among the long-time and influential leaders with a vested interest in the status quo so they might help build partnerships for change. Transformational leaders must demonstrate a high degree of patience and exercise exceptional persistence. They must use a goal-driven approach to ministry and they must be people of vision with a powerful future orientation. These leaders must have a deep sense of urgency to create a new tomorrow and be motivated by a strong evangelistic drive (“Redevelop” 23).

Leading people through change is a very difficult challenge. Earlier in this chapter I identified several forms of resistance to change in organizations in general and in the local church in particular. At this point in the study the focus moves to methods for helping people accept or tolerate transformational change.

Helping People Handle Change

Leaders must appreciate and respond to the common concerns of people when they go through change. The first concern of most people is simply to have information. People need leaders to help them know what is happening and allow them to ask questions. The second common concern is personal; people experiencing change want to know if they will survive or fit into the new reality. The third concern is the manner of effecting the change. Once people understand the destination of the organization, they are still concerned about how they will get there. The fourth concern is impact. People want to know if potential benefits outweigh their subjective sense of loss or risk. According to Blanchard, these four concerns must be addressed in this order by the leader of transformational change to elicit the support of others for transformational change (116).

Larry Osborne offers several other helpful steps to help people deal with change. He suggests that the leader first test the waters. This means to float the idea of a specific change before a group of influencers and gauge their reaction. He suggests that leaders see resisters first as potential advisors, giving opponents of the change the benefit of the doubt, and not assume they are simply being antagonistic. Their concerns may be easily addressed or they may call for a different approach to change. He asserts that it is best to persuade individuals to accept change before trying to develop group approval. He then advises leaders to lead. They must take a public position in support of the planned change and champion the cause with all the means at their disposal. Leaders must make their views known and do everything in their power to persuade hold-outs to accept the change. The leader must ask him or herself several ethical questions before this kind of

boldness is legitimate. Osborne identifies the following questions: "Is this the will of God? What is the price? Whom might we lose if this change is made? How long do I plan to be around?" (47-48). This last question recognizes that transformational change will put any organization out of balance for an extended period. Osborne says the leader must take responsibility for helping to steady the church after the changes have been made by helping members to accept the new reality and to gain a sense of ownership (44-48). In her study of merged churches, Gregg claims that a key ingredient of success is consistency in pastoral leadership. "A merger produces so much internal change within the life of a congregation that consistent pastoral leadership is necessary to provide stability" (Merging 26).

Donald Kirkpatrick provides many additional themes necessary for effective management of change. He suggests leaders must try to understand the people who will be effected by the change. Their feelings and emotions will have much to do with the effectiveness of the change. Change should not be forced on people; otherwise strong resistance may occur. Kirkpatrick also recommends constant and effective communication. He suggests that the people most affected by the change should be involved in the decision-making process. In reminding leaders that it usually takes time for changes to be accepted, Kirkpatrick suggests planning include consideration of the speed at which change is introduced (34-35).

Kirkpatrick also identifies three keys to successful change that helped me in our process of merger. The three keys to successful leadership of change are "empathy, communication, and participation" (151). Empathy means knowing the people, learning

why some resent or resist change while others accept or welcome it, and anticipating how each person affected will react to a contemplated change. Communication implies helping people know, as far in advance as is practical, about the planned changes, providing the reasons why as well as the "what" and the "how," and then being sure they understand. Participation means that before a decision to change is final, the leader has received input from those involved, listened to them, and carefully considered their opinions as well as the facts. To the extent possible, the leader should use their input in making the decision and give them credit. If their input is not used, the leader should be prepared to tell them why it was not used and affirm to them for being interested enough to share (Kirkpatrick 256-257).

While empathy, communication, and participation are important, transformational change is not always leadership by consensus. Leaders of transformational change need to be motivated by the purpose of God for the church and the discernment of the will of God for congregational life. The majority of people in any organization generally favor the status quo, even if that condition is contradictory to the organization's reason to be--its purpose. Schaller observes that participatory democracy and planned change are often incompatible. He writes,

The only thing that cannot be vetoed is the status quo. Therefore, participatory democracy tends to reinforce the status quo. The desire to achieve a consensus, where diversity is a distinctive characteristic of the group, often means compromise and endorsing a second best or third best course of action.
(Strategies 87)

Paul Heinecke agrees and suggests that leaders of organizational change should be both people-oriented and task-oriented. However, earlier in this chapter we looked at the

way declining churches often let a small group of dissenters (or even an individual) control the agenda of the church, stifling all efforts at transformational change. Recognizing this dynamic, Heinecke argues "there will come a time when the mission [task/purpose] of the church must take precedence over supportive relationships" (104-105).

Earlier, I discussed the five groups of people often found in a declining church: pioneers, curators, dysfunctionals, stand-by passengers, and the remnant. Learning how to motivate them is critical to the success of any merger.

Moeller says that pioneers are motivated by the validation of their long-term commitment to the church. They need assurances that heritage will not be forgotten or overwritten. (47-48).

Curators are motivated by continuity in the church's heritage. Leaders must convince them that changes will provide the best chance of survival. In merger, when a church essentially dies to be reborn with a new identity, this group is difficult to motivate. Leaders must help them see the church in its larger perspective, based on the purposes of the church. Leaders must help them realize that what the founders gave their lives to was not the establishment of a particular church as an end in itself; rather, their church was established as a means to the end of advancing the cause of Christ. Leaders must help church members see that a church which slowly declines to death and closure, without the hope of helping launch some kind of new mission, will not honor the sacrifices made in the past. The best legacy or memorial is to establish a new church with a grateful memory of the churches that gave it new life. Curators must come to see that the new church will

continue to fulfill the purposes of the original church, just as the pioneers of the predecessor churches first wanted to do (Moeller 48-49).

With the group of people Moeller calls dysfunctionals, leaders must establish clear boundaries and they must model healthy relationships and responses to life. When dysfunctionals sense love and affirmation within boundaries, they can begin to help in the renewal of the church (Moeller 49-50).

Stand-by passengers are the most easily motivated in merger. They need hope and signs of new life. The many radical changes associated with merger can generate interest and hope. Rarely will a turnaround pastor be able to make things change fast enough to retain all the stand-by passengers because churches usually change slowly and in small ways. However, represents a radical shift in congregational culture and if properly led, a re-orientation toward the purposes of the church. The pastoral leader should capitalize on this dynamic to enlist the help of this group (Moeller 50).

The remnant is a key group to motivate in the process of church merger. These people already walk by faith and not by sight. If they believe that the leader or leaders have discerned a vision that reflects the will of God, they will be staunch supporters. The leader should help them believe that the better days they have hoped for are now imminent (Moeller 50-51).

Dealing With Conflict

Regardless of how well the process of transformational change is led or managed, conflict is likely to occur. Leaders of transformational change must learn ways to deal positively with conflict.

The first thing that people involved in church merger should realize is that conflict is inevitable. Paul Tournier says, "It is not possible for people to work together at a common task without there being differences of opinion, conflicts, jealousy and bitterness (38). This is especially true in churches which are "conviction communities." Church members are characterized by strong beliefs, values, and convictions. These characteristics make them vulnerable to conflict. Leaders should admit the inevitability of conflict. "Realistically, a measure of the health and effectiveness of a congregation would be, not the absence of conflict, but the way the congregation and its leaders handle it" (Kurtz 112-117).

The leader of transformational change must accept the fact that conflict comes along with courageous leadership. Heinecke suggests that the effective leader confront conflicted people when necessary and ignore when helpful--but take whatever action intentionally. Transformational leaders must be proactive rather than reactive. This means they will not let conflict drive the ministry of the church. Nor will they allow detractors to consume unnecessary energy or dominate the agenda for the church. Transformational leaders accept the fact that leaders cannot please everyone, no matter what they do (102).

Helping People Let Go of the Past

One of the sources of potential conflict in church mergers is the sense of loss that accompanies the end of the former churches' corporate identity. The effective transformational leader must help people let go of the past.

It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear . . . It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus with his blanket in the dryer. There is nothing to hold onto. (Marilyn Ferguson as quoted in Bridges 34)

French poet Paul Valery says, "Every beginning is a consequence. Every beginning ends something." Before church members can learn a new way of doing things, they have to unlearn the old way, so beginnings depend on endings. "The problem is people don't like endings. It isn't so much the changes people resist, it's the losses and endings they experience" (Bridges 19-20).

Leaders must recognize that people tend to focus on what they must give up in change, not what they may gain. This means you have to take their sense of loss seriously and let them grieve. Leaders should not blame people or demean them for negative feelings, but let them talk honestly about their concerns (McLaren 117).

Bridges offers several helpful steps to help people let go of the past and accept the changes that will move them into the future. In order to help people let go, the leader must identify who is losing what. He or she must accept the reality and importance of the subjective losses and not be surprised at overreaction. Losses should be acknowledged openly and sympathetically. Leaders should expect and accept signs of grieving including anger, bargaining, anxiety, sadness, disorientation, depression (see also Kulber-Ross on stages of grief). Whenever possible, leaders should compensate for the losses (ask what might be given back to balance what has been taken away). Leaders must give people information, and do it again and again. The leader must define what is over and what is not (people are often confused and need specifics). This is helped by marking the endings

with creative actions or activities that dramatize them. Leaders should treat the past with respect (you may need to acknowledge missed opportunities, but try to find the good in the past and honor it). Leaders should show people how endings ensure continuity with what really matters (most endings represent the only way to protect the continuity of something bigger) (Bridges 19-32).

According to Bridges, the major reason organizational changes fail is that no one thought about endings or planned how to manage their impact on people. "The first task of transition management is convincing people to leave home" (52).

The Critical Role of Vision

A final and critical factor in transformational change is the role of vision.

"Where there is no vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). Vision may be defined as a specific image of what the church may become or what it will be at some point in the future that provides a sense of direction and motivation to move forward in ministry. In essence, it is an image of where the church is going, a destination or set of conditions that is clear enough for the congregation to determine the extent to which the vision is approached or realized. John Kotter explains the main reason that efforts at transformations so often fail in organizations:

Transformational change fails when leaders underestimate the power of vision. Vision is critical in that it helps to direct, align and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people. Without an appropriate vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all. (7)

According to Gregg's survey of merged churches one of the greatest ingredients for success is vision. Congregations with a vision for the future and plans for growth seem to

be the most successful. "An orientation which looked forward to the future, both with hope and concrete plans, as opposed to an orientation which focused on fond memories of the past contributed to successful mergers" ("Study" 57).

Speaking of the power of vision, Joe Harding and Ralph Mahony write,

Positive anticipation of the future, inspired by great dreams and vision, unites and energizes the congregation! Visions have a unifying forward pull. Lack of vision leads to confusion, absence of purpose, and a growth of meaningless busyness. Vision is essential for the ministry of the church in a new century.
(1)

Church growth and revitalization expert Lyle Schaller believes that the pastor who would be a transforming leader must, (1) conceptualize a vision of a new tomorrow; (2) articulate that vision so persuasively that people rally in support of it; and (3) know how to turn that vision into reality (Seven Day 58).

Organizational change theorists speak of the "Hawthorne Effect." This concept establishes that people will work hard and put up with difficult conditions if they feel that the objective is worth doing. People want to be involved in and to participate in meaningful activities (Argyris 6). Vision is the means to help motivate people to value change and tolerate the difficulties associated with it.

Beckhard and Pritchard have identified four key factors in vision-driven change: creating and setting the vision (usually discerned by the leader or leaders), communicating the vision, building commitment to the vision, and organizing people and what they do so that they are aligned to the vision. They also identify key activities for leaders in directing vision-driven change: developing a vision and commitment to it, ensuring that the vision is communicated clearly to other parts of the organization, diagnosing the present condition

of the organization in light of the vision and identifying the gaps and "managing the management of closing the gaps" (25-35).

An important part of articulating a vision is helping people decide what is negotiable and non-negotiable in congregational life. In examining what is and is not negotiable in church life, one may identify certain sacrifices that might contradict the basic purposes of the church. One may also discover that many of the changes people initially resist clearly fit into the negotiable category.

Sally Morgenthaler observes,

Traditions are a dangerous but persistent fact of life. Just when we think we have rid ourselves of them, we have already formed new ones. The problem is, which ones do we discard, which ones are keepers, and what do we do with the "keepers" to preserve their significance. (132-134)

Many of the change issues people resist concern negotiable elements in church life which have been mistakenly elevated to non-negotiable status over time. Such things as changes in styles of worship, the lay-out of the sanctuary platform, and the use of hymnals versus words projected on a screen may evoke strong emotional reactions. However, these are negotiable issues; changeable means to the greater end of fulfilling the unchanging purpose of the church. The leaders of the church must continually point people back to the biblical purpose of the church and the non-negotiable issues in order to avoid being derailed by commitments to what should be negotiable and loosely valued issues.

Prayer

One final word on transformational leadership and change: prayer. We must avoid the error of assuming that all it takes to form a new faith community through merger is organization, management, and a certain style of leadership. While church leaders can learn much from the business community, the church is more than a human powered enterprise. Warren reminds us,

All of our plans, programs, and procedures are worthless without God's anointing. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain." A church cannot be built by human effort alone. We must never forget whose church it is. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18).
(59)

Jim Cymbala is pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church. The remarkable story of this church's birth and growth is told in the book Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire. This story is a powerful reminder that God, in response to prayer, can bring life and vitality to a church in spite of how its "potential" is defined by demographics, marketing analysis, leadership dynamics, location, and so on. Pastor Cymbala credits the remarkable growth and dynamism of his church to the power of prayer. He calls church leaders to remember the priority of prayer when he states:

Did you ever notice that Jesus launched the Christian church, not while someone was preaching, but while people were praying? In the first two chapters of Acts, the disciples were doing nothing but waiting on God. As they were just sitting there ... worshiping, communing with God, letting God shape them and cleanse their spirits and do those heart operations that only the Holy Spirit can do ... the church was born. The Holy Spirit was poured out (Cymbala 71-72).

While recognizing the critical role of pastoral leadership in church renewal, Pastor Cymbala claims effective leadership in the unique organizational entity that is the Church

of Jesus Christ must be grounded in and empowered by prayer. Speaking to pastors, he states,

We must face the fact that for our churches and ministries to be all God wants them to be, they must be saturated with prayer. No new revelation or church-growth technique will change the fact that spiritual power is always linked to communion with God. If you and I are prayerless, if our churches have no appetite for God's presence, we will never reach our full potential in him Let us never accept the excuse that God cannot work in our situation ... that our particular people are too rich, or too poor ... too inner-city or too suburban ... too traditional or avant-garde. This kind of thinking is never found in the Word of God. No matter what ethnic origin or geography characterizes the local church, we can see God do things just as he did in the book of Acts, since he has never changed. The only changing that can occur is within us. Let us purpose in our hearts to change in his direction and see him do incredible things to the praise and glory of his grace. (183-185)

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Problem

The Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church decided at their 1999 annual conference to emphasize starting new faith communities as a means to fulfill their collective responsibility for evangelism.

The New Church and Congregational Development Team is charged with helping fulfill the Bishop's vision that the Kentucky Conference will start seventy new faith communities by the year 2020. One of the NCD goals for 2000 is "to identify strategies for developing new churches in our conference" (NCD 9). The possibilities listed in the report include merger as one strategy to employ. However, there is little evidence suggesting this strategy will be successful or effective in most cases for starting new faith communities. In fact, significant evidence and opinion suggests church merger is one of the least desirable and most difficult strategies for starting new faith communities or for generating church growth or evangelism.

In 1998 I was appointed by the Bishop to serve on the NCD Team. One of my assigned roles in that appointment was to help provide the team with guidance regarding church mergers as strategy for developing new faith communities. This project attempts to provide this guidance for the Kentucky Conference as well as for other leaders considering church mergers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of church merger and consider variables which may influence the effectiveness/success of church merger. This study intends to provide guidance to groups or persons who are involved in a church merger or who are considering the strengths, weaknesses, and unique challenges associated with church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities and/or church renewal and growth.

Research Question One

What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the results of a national survey developed by Carol Gregg among churches formed through merger in the Presbyterian Church and the results of a similar survey administered to churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church?

While Gregg's study focused on church mergers throughout the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination, this study focuses only on church mergers in the Kentucky Conference. The United Methodist Church offers no parallel source to the General Assembly Statistics of the Presbyterian Church USA from 1983-1993 regarding information on church mergers. A similar source of information is the General Minutes of the United Methodist Church which contains statistics from all annual conferences of the denomination. At each annual conference our denomination requires that certain questions become part of the official record of the proceedings. Question fifteen (sixteen prior to 1990), subsection A and B ask:

- a. What local churches have been organized (para. 270)?
- b. Merged (para. 2545, 2546)?

1. United Methodist with United Methodist?
2. Other mergers?

While the General Minutes of the denomination records the answers to virtually all other disciplinary questions required at annual conferences, these questions are inexplicably omitted from all editions of the General Minutes. Furthermore, no denominational office keeps records of this information. I contacted every board and agency of the denomination as well as all jurisdictional offices and was informed by each that these records were not kept at the denominational level. I discovered that the only way to retrieve this information is to travel to the office of each annual conference and go through the yearly journals (if available) one by one, recording the answers to the relevant disciplinary questions. Because of the difficulties of sampling from the population of members from all churches merged in the United Methodist Church, the population and sample for this study will be limited to the Kentucky Conference.

While the lack of information about church mergers is distressing, the lack of information about new church starts in general is alarming. Considering the plethora of church growth experts who claim starting new faith communities is the most effective means of evangelism (Malphurs, Barna, Schaller, Hunter) it is amazing that no denominational records are kept about new UM church starts. This omission demonstrates our denomination's lack of concern for starting new faith communities and raises questions about our denominational commitment to evangelism as well.

The survey portion of this study has used specific questions and ideas from Gregg's survey. However, my survey is merely based on the Gregg survey and not a replication of

it. Some of the questions were altered to reflect the differences in our denominations (i.e., the term "presbytery" is changed to denomination, district, or conference depending on the question). Other questions were altered to facilitate analysis, that is, some open ended questions were changed to a forced-choice format. In these cases the choices offered were influenced by the most common answers to Gregg's open-ended questions. The Gregg survey is found as appendix B. My first version of the survey is found as Appendix C. The final revised survey is found as Appendix A.

Research Question Two

What can be learned about the desirability of local church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference from researcher designed survey questions which focus on the areas of: leadership, vision, organizational change, perceived results of merger, motivations to merge, obstacles experienced in the process of merger.

This research question is similar to research question one in that it reflects the need to test my assumptions regarding the relationships between several variables and the experience of church merger. This question describes the emphases of the researcher-designed questions in the final survey instrument. It also summarizes categories of variables which may help to describe the experience of merger and the effectiveness/success of this strategy for starting new faith communities.

One variable to be studied deserves special attention. My review of literature and personal experience have led me to believe that pastoral leadership is of critical importance in effective/successful church merger.

A major weakness in Gregg's conclusions is revealed in this summary statement:

"Pastors may need to recognize that their role in congregational life is not of utmost importance. While pastoral leadership was listed as a significant factor for congregations who chose to merge, three other factors were considered more important" ("Study" 35).

In her study, the only survey results Gregg reported about pastoral influence related to the initial discussions about considering church merger. In other words, who or what provided the initial stimuli for people to begin talking about this strategy? Gregg did not ask questions to determine the role of the pastor in moving the discussion from idea to the implementation phase, or the role of the pastor in facilitating or leading the process of transformational change. She did not attempt to correlate effectiveness or success to any function of leadership. Gregg further claims, "Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a vision for the future is key to the success of a merged congregation" ("Study" 36). My review of literature suggests that in all transformational change, the leader of the organization is the primary agent for articulating the vision, ensuring ownership among members, and administering the church so the vision is realized. If leadership was as insignificant as Gregg's conclusions suggest, then how can she explain her conclusion that "vision a key to the success of a merged congregation"? Who was responsible for developing and articulating the vision if not the pastor or leader? Additional survey questions were developed to gather more information about the role of leadership in the process of merger and the correlation of leadership to effectiveness/success (or the lack thereof).

Research Questions Three and Four

Because of the high degree of relatedness between these two questions they will be described together below.

Research Question Three

What is the increase or decrease in membership, worship attendance, and Sunday School attendance in churches formed through merger in Kentucky? The rate of change will be determined by taking the combined numbers for the churches for their last annual report prior to merger and comparing them to the most recent annual report available (1998).

Research Question Four

Can the mergers completed in the Kentucky Conference from 1983 to 1998 be considered effective or successful according to the following criteria: increase in worship and Sunday school attendance, a sense of unity in the church and acceptance of the new church identity, and a positive attitude of members regarding the merger.

For the purposes of this study alone, effectiveness or success is defined as: an increase in worship and/or Sunday school attendance, a sense of unity in the church and acceptance of the new church identity, and a positive attitude of members regarding the merger.

Gregg concluded that the mergers in her study succeeded because a majority of her respondents felt positive about the process and believed the two former churches had truly become one in the process of merger (Merging 18). While I believe the subjective feeling of satisfaction on the part of church members should be one criterion of success, it is limited by the fact people may wish to justify both the decision to merge and their participation in the process. Gregg concluded that mergers succeeded because of the subjective feelings of respondents regarding the process, even though virtually all of the

churches formed through merger declined in membership (“Study” 29). Gregg noted that of the 117 churches formed through merger, only eleven have experienced sustained growth since that time. This translates into 9 percent of churches showing an increase in membership while 91 percent showed a decrease (“Study” 28). Gregg's study reports that among merged congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA), the average rate of decline was 5.74 percent (as opposed to overall decline of 1.24 percent) (“Study” 13).

Gregg based her assessment of growth and decline solely on membership statistics (“Study” 30). I believe attendance in worship and Christian education events represents a better indication of the growth or decline of a given congregation. Additionally, membership numbers may be deceptive in the case of merger when two churches combine membership rolls that include large numbers of inactive persons.

This study will evaluate effectiveness/success by considering the positive attitude of members regarding the process and results of merger, the degree to which members of the merged church accept the new identity of church born from the union or the two pre-existing churches, and also by evidence of an increase in attendance in worship and Sunday school. Information regarding attendance increases or decreases was not requested as part of the survey. To prevent exaggeration or error, the attendance records for each church surveyed were tabulated from official annual conference records. The most recent year's attendance in the merged church was compared with the combined attendance records of the predecessor churches for the last reporting year prior to merger. This information is found in Chapter 4 of this study.

Population

The population for this study is comprised of the current members of churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Annual Conference between 1983 and 1998 who meet the following criteria: persons who were members of one of the predecessor churches prior to merger, persons who were active in the church throughout the process of merger, and persons who continue to be active in the church formed through the process of merger. "Active" is defined as participation or attendance at least 50 percent of the time in worship and/or Sunday school. The pastor or pastors involved in the church during the process of merger are also included in the population. Being "involved" in the merger process for pastors is defined as being a pastor of one or both of the two predecessor churches, continuing in leadership through the decision to merge, and being pastor or co-pastor of the newly formed church for at least six months following the merger. These pastors will be identified in conversation with the current pastor and/or from official Kentucky Conference appointment records.

Sample

The sample is defined as the respondents to the survey from the population. The names and addressees of individuals from the population were gathered through personal contact with the current pastor of the church formed by merger. The pastor was asked to mark the names and addresses of those individuals who met the population criteria on a current membership roster and then to send the complete list to me. Several follow-up telephone calls were made to secure this information from the pastor and to verify that all members of the population were included.

I recognize that this project follows a different sampling strategy from Gregg's study. The primary difference is the smaller population for this study compared to that of Gregg. Gregg's surveyed one hundred of the 121 churches formed through merger in the Presbyterian Church (USA) between 1983 and 1993. As I described above under research question one, a national study in the United Methodist denomination was impractical due to the lack of appropriate sources of information. Therefore, my population is limited to the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist church and those churches formed through merger between 1993 and 1998. Another difference in the sampling strategy is the number of people included in each case studied. Gregg sent five surveys to each merged church. However, the wording of her cover letter actually requested four responses from each church surveyed. Evidently, the pastor, or whoever received her packet of surveys, could decide who would be asked to complete the survey. Her direction were to ask the following people to respond: the current clerk of the session, the current pastor (following these directions either the clerk and/or the pastor may or may not have been involved in the merger), and one lay person from each of the predecessor congregations. Whereas Gregg simply asked five (or four?) persons to complete the surveys, my population includes everyone in the merged churches who fit the population criteria. My population also takes into consideration the fact that the current pastor or lay leader may have not be present during the process of merger. Efforts were made to contact all pastors, including those now appointed to other churches, who were involved in the merger process so they also could be included in the survey.

A significant delimitation of both this and Gregg's study, is the fact that the population neglects to include people who are no longer part of the merged congregation. This might have included people who have moved to another city or left the church for other non-issue reasons. However, it is also possible that people have left the church due to dissatisfaction with either the process of merger or the results of merger. These groups of people might provide invaluable information about the weakness of church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities. However, this group would be too difficult to locate and motivate to participate in the survey and were therefore excluded. In some cases, there may have been a power struggle involved in the process of merger, resulting in the departure of members prior to or soon after the merger was completed. It is a well-known, regrettable, but unavoidable axiom of social science that "the winners write the history."

Variables

The independent variable is the process of church merger. The dependent variables are those factors identified in the review of literature and personal experience which are associated with strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities associated with church mergers, including: the people involved in the merger discussion, the process of decision to merge, the impetus to merger, the obstacles to merger, use of biblical metaphors to help interpret the process, emphasis on stewardship, and leadership of transformational change.

Instrument

To help understand the research instrument used in this study I must first describe elements of the methodology of a previous study of church merger conducted by Carol Gregg. In 1995, as part of a D. Min. program at Princeton Theological Seminary, Carol Gregg conducted a survey of churches merged in the Presbyterian Church (USA) between 1983 and 1993. The Alban Institute published a synopsis of her study in 1996. Her source for identifying these churches was the General Assembly Statistics of the Presbyterian Church USA from 1983-1993. Gregg asked several questions loosely grouped in the following categories: demographics of the congregation, the neighborhood or location of the congregation, the state of congregational finances and church building, the mission of the congregation, the discussion process; congregational loyalty, and the outcome (7).

Unfortunately, Gregg's study does not provide research questions, variables, or descriptions of the population or sample. Also, her thesis did not provide a review of literature, so it is difficult to determine the criteria used to choose the topics or questions in the survey. However, several things can be observed from the text of her paper. Gregg sent her survey to one hundred congregations and received responses from seventy-one of those churches. A total of 520 surveys were mailed with a total response of 216 completed and returned (Merging 2). The survey was cross-sectional, self-administered, and direct mail in type--employing both open and closed, force-choice, and selected response questions. Five copies of the surveys were sent to the current pastors of the churches that had been formed through merger with instructions for them to complete one

survey personally and to distribute the remaining surveys to two lay persons from each of the predecessor congregations and the clerk of the session ("Study" 7). The analysis of the data from the surveys was limited to the frequencies of answers by respondents to selected questions and narrative comments on those frequencies.

As I have described above, I have several quality concerns about the methodology used, the lack of certain questions, and the conclusions drawn from this survey by Gregg (For example, her conclusions concerning the role of the pastor in the process of merger). However, many questions from the survey instrument itself are adequate and useful for the purposes of this study. Judging by my review of literature, personal experience of leading a church through merger, and study of other D.Min. projects related to merger, I believe several of the questions asked are worthwhile and are therefore used in my survey.

Gregg's study is the only example found in literature where a somewhat quantitative approach was used to evaluate and describe the phenomenon of church merger. Other dissertations followed a case study approach (Hahn, Simpson, Crispell, Bowman) and neglected to offer any comparisons with the experience of other churches formed through merger. Other commentators on church merger do not describe the basis for their conclusions about the challenges and outcomes associated with church merger (Jones, Schaller).

I hope to do more than describe my experience of leading a church through merger. I want to compare our church experience of merger with the experience of other churches in the Kentucky Annual Conference in light of the review of literature and the results of Gregg's survey, supplemented by additional questions. Perhaps this process will

provide significant data for the NCD of the Kentucky Conference and others who wish to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and success potential of church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities.

The primary measurement instrument used in this study is a self-administered, written survey with both open-ended and closed-ended questions mailed to the selected research participants (described above as population) assessing their opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of variables which may effect the process of church merger. The final instrument was designed with the help of Linda Young, President, Community Systems Research Institute.

Gregg's survey has been tested, used effectively, and the results published by the Alban Institute. However, since I added additional questions, the total revised survey was pre-tested and revised before final distribution. The pre-test for the first version of the survey was conducted in the following manner: ten persons who fit the criteria for the population were requested to participate in the pre-test; they were randomly selected from the population in the Gateway Community Church, and Epiphany United Methodist Church (both formed from merger); they were given the same cover letter and survey intended for the complete population; after completion of the survey, they were given an additional questionnaire about the survey instrument which helped identify misunderstandings, ambiguities, and useless or inadequate items. The questionnaire evaluating the survey instrument was also designed with the assistance of Linda Young and is found as Appendix D. As noted previously the first version of the survey is found as Appendix C and the revised final survey is found as Appendix A.

Reliability/Validity

Reliability was established by employing some aspects of a previously tested and utilized research tool, specifically the survey designed by Carol Gregg. Additional reliability was established by pre-testing additional and revised survey questions with a pilot group from the study population. Validity was achieved on a construct basis. Construct validity can be defined as validity based on the manner in which one variable (or more) relates to another within a theoretical framework (Rubin 179-180). A response rate of 40 percent or greater from the population was anticipated.

Data Collection

The churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Conference from 1983 to 1998 were identified through a manual review of the official annual conference records for this period of the Kentucky Conference (and its predecessors).

Each survey was coded by church and the name of the individual to whom it was sent. This coding was for the purpose of determining the need for follow-up mailings to increase the rate of response. The cover letter promised respondents that their individual identity and that of their churches would not be revealed or matched to particular survey results. Each survey letter included a return enveloped with pre-paid first-class postage. As the surveys were received, the code was checked off the returned list. One week after the return deadline had passed, a second copy of the same survey was sent to all non-respondents. The cover letter for this second mailing is found as Appendix E.

Data regarding the changes in membership, as well as worship and Sunday school attendance were determined through a manual review of the official annual conference records for this period in the Kentucky Conference (and its predecessors).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the help of Shannon Cambron, MSW. The data analysis utilized the SPSS-PC (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for the Personal Computer). Each response was manually entered by the researcher into a spreadsheet. The responses were imported into the SPSS program, and the frequency of responses for each question were tabulated. The frequencies for the following groups were also tabulated separately: by church, by role in the congregation (pastor versus lay person), and by the nature of the predecessor church (smaller versus larger and members who left their former facility versus those who remained in their former facility). The size of the population, the number of churches involved, and the number of survey respondents did not justify further levels of analysis beyond frequency distributions. A presentation of the frequency distribution for all responses on the final survey is included as Appendix F.

Remaining Chapters

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the survey instrument with textual and graphical formats in relationship to the research questions of the study. Chapter 5 includes an evaluation and interpretation of the findings in relationship to the entire study, including the review of literature.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The first step in data collection was to identify the churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Conference from 1983 to 1998. This was done by manually checking the annual conference journals for each year. There were eight church mergers during this period which fit the criteria of this study. They are listed by date below:

1. Covenant UMC (Middlesboro) was formed from the merger of Middlesboro First and Middlesboro Trinity in 1989.
2. Epiphany UMC was formed from the merger of Jones Memorial and Kenwood in 1990.
3. Genesis UMC was formed from the merger of Calvary East and Shawnee-Parkland in 1991.
4. Grace UMC was formed from the merger of Russell First and Raceland / Henderson in 1994.
5. Covenant UMC (La Grange) was formed from the merger of Kinnett and La Grange in 1996.
6. Gateway Community Church, UM was formed from the merger of Oakdale and Beechmont in 1997.
7. Faith UMC was formed from the merger of Kerr Memorial and Westside in 1998.
8. Resurrection UMC was formed from the merger of Eastwood and Advent in 1998.

This phase of data research also yielded interesting information about the number of church plants, church closures, and the number of absorption type mergers (where one larger church absorbed a smaller church, retaining only the name of the larger church). Between 1983 and 1998 a total of seventy-four (74) churches were closed in the Kentucky Conference (inclusive of the former Louisville Conference).

During this period five new church plants were created: Christ UMC (Florence); Advent (Louisville); Ledbetter (this may be a reopening); Louisville Korean; First Korean (Radcliff); Harvest (Lexington). The Advent church merged with Eastwood and reopened as Resurrection UMC in 1998. It is unclear whether the Harvest church was formally discontinued or was closed and reopened with a new name. The building, property, and debt that once belonged to Harvest now belongs to Andover UMC which lists 1998 at its opening date. There were also eight absorption type mergers. Additionally, one church (New Hope) was relocated and renamed (to Vineyard of Hope) during this period, but it has since been discontinued.

The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter 5. But take note of the fact that for the past fifteen years, the most frequently used method for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference has been church merger.

The pastors of each of the eight churches formed through merger were contacted and asked to supply the names of individuals who met the population criteria. The pastor of Faith UMC declined to provide names for this population and refused to allow the survey to be sent to members of his congregation. After consultation with his district superintendent, the pastor believed the survey might stir up negative feelings about the

process of merger that were just now beginning to calm down (almost two years after the decision to merge). The implications of the pastor's refusal to allow the Faith church to participate will be discussed in Chapter 5 (Conclusions).

The number of persons in each merged church who met the population criteria, according to the current pastor, are as follows : Covenant (La Grange) (179); Epiphany (99); Covenant (Middlesboro) (86); Gateway (72); Grace (57); Resurrection (36); Genesis (6). The total population size is thus defined as 535 individuals. A survey was sent to each of these individuals (as described in Chapter 3). A total of 273 surveys (or 51 percent) were returned and analyzed.

Research Question One

What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the results of a national survey developed by Carol Gregg among churches formed through merger in the Presbyterian Church and the results of a similar survey administered to churches formed through merger in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church?

General Observations about Similarities and Dissimilarities

There are several points of comparison between the Gregg survey and the instrument used in this study. They concern responses to questions about the motivations or stimuli for merging churches, obstacles experienced in the process of merger, assessment of the effectiveness or successfulness of the merger, attitude of respondents about the future, critique of the process, and recommendations to others considering church merger.

Upon more careful review of the data analysis and reporting from Gregg's survey, I realized that the responses to several of her survey questions were never analyzed or reported. In trying to obtain the complete survey results I discovered that Gregg did not include this information in her published dissertation. This was either a mistake, an

oversight, a decision related to time constraints for the project, or the personal preference of Gregg regarding her final emphases. However, this omission of data limits the opportunity to compare the results of our respective surveys.

One of these omissions occurred at a key point of comparison and will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5 (Conclusions). However, at this point it is important to note that Gregg concluded that the role of the pastor in influencing the decision to merge and in facilitating the process of merger was not a significant factor. There were two questions on Gregg's survey which might influence this conclusion. One was a forced-choice question about who was involved in the merger discussions. In this question, the pastor was one of only five choices, along with presbytery representative (like a UMC District Superintendent), the session (like a UMC Administrative Board), individual lay persons, and the entire membership. The results to the analogous question on my survey will be reported under research question two below. Gregg failed to provide the responses to this question in her data reporting. Therefore her conclusion about the role of the pastor was based primarily on her question referring to "the greatest stimuli" for merging. In this question about stimuli for merging, respondents were asked to choose from a list of sixteen options and rank their response from one to five, with one being most important and five being least important. One of these options was the "influence of the pastor." Considering the additional options created by the opportunity to rank responses, ranking the "influence of the pastor" as one of the top five motivations, was only one option among eighty possible choices overall.

In her question about "greatest stimuli" for merging Gregg reported that "the influence of the pastor" ranked fourth in frequency, behind financial stress (at number one), size of congregation (at number two), and similarities between the two congregations (at number three). Gregg did not provide the numbers or percentage of total answers to support her ranking of responses to this question. I will discuss the implications of the differences between our respective questions about leadership in Chapter 5 (Conclusions).

Stimuli / Motivations for Merger

Gregg's complete report regarding the greatest stimuli for merging and obstacles to merging can be compared to my survey results. Her report regarding "the greatest stimuli for merging" revealed the following top five stimuli for merging: (1) Financial stress, (2) Size of congregation, (3) Similarities between the two congregations, (4) Influence of the pastor (s), (5) Desire to create a growing congregation.

She reported the following as the least significant stimuli for merging (the lack of number ranking or percentages reflects Gregg's reporting format): influence of the presbytery, willingness to join a larger, stronger congregation, willingness to try something new, desire to move to a new location, and desire to undertake a new mission

In my survey I changed the word "stimuli" to "motivation." The top five motivations for merging were those that received the most first-place and second-place rankings. (The complete frequency distribution for the survey used in this study is found as Appendix F.)

Table 1 presents the frequencies for the top five motivations chosen by respondents:

(1) To better fulfill the mission of the church, (2) Best use of time, talent, financial, and

property resources, (3) Desire to create a growing congregation, (4) Financial stress, (5) Size of congregation. The following table shows how the top five responses listed above was determined.

Table 1

Top Motivations for Church Merger

Top responses regarding greatest motivation for merging:	Ranked # 1 by:	Ranked # 2 by:	Ranked # 3 by:
To better fulfill the purpose of the church.	22.3 %	11.4 %	10.3 %
Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources.	16.5 %	9.9 %	10.3 %
Desire to create a growing congregation	15. %	9.2 %	10.3 %
Financial Stress	14.6 %	6.9 %	6.2 %
Size of congregation	13.2 %	6.6 %	6.6 %

The least significant motivations for merging were determined by comparing the frequencies for responses not chosen or ranked at all, and also the lowest frequency of responses to the top three rankings. The five least significant motivations for merger were: (1) Influence of lay leaders (91.6 percent did not include in ranking), (2) Willingness to join a larger, stronger congregation (90.5 percent did not include in ranking), (3) Desire to move to a new location (89.7 percent did not include in ranking), (4) Influence of the denomination (88.3 percent did not include in ranking), (5) Willingness to try something new (86.8 percent did not include in ranking).

Obstacles to Merging

Another key point of comparison between the two surveys regards the greatest obstacles to merging. With the pretest group of my survey, the question about obstacles,

as it appeared in Gregg's survey, was considered ambiguous by participants. Persons could not decide if it referred only to obstacles in the consideration of the initial idea to merge or those encountered in total experience of merger. Gregg's question is stated, "The greatest obstacles to merging were: ..." ("Study" 109). Respondents were asked to rank the five most important obstacles encountered. Before meeting with my pre-test group I believed that the words "obstacles to merger" indicated Gregg's intent was to emphasize only the decision to merge. However, my pre-test group persuaded me to be more inclusive in my question about obstacles. They stated that the decision to merge is in fact only the beginning of merger. My final revised survey asked the question about obstacles as follows: "During your merger process, from the consideration of the idea, through the decision to merge, and then creation of the new church identity, the greatest obstacles experienced were: ..."

Gregg's reported the response to her question about the five most significant obstacles as follows: (1) Loyalty to existing congregation and its history, (2) Affection for church building or property, (3) Fear of losing congregational identity, (4) Fear of change, (5) Commitment to current location.

The least significant obstacles were listed as: desirable size of congregation, desirable neighborhood, too little leadership or vision for merging, too little congregational participation in decision, influence of the presbytery.

My survey questions related to obstacles duplicated all of the options on Gregg's survey (with minor rewording, i.e. "presbytery" was changed to "denomination."). I also added the following options for obstacles: lack of information about changes; insufficient

reasons given for this type of change, and interpersonal conflicts resulting from changes. My survey indicated the following regarding obstacles encountered during merger. The top five obstacles were: (1) Fear of losing congregational identity, (2) Loyalty to existing congregation and its history, (3) Affection for church building or property, (4) Interpersonal conflicts resulting from changes., (5) Fear of change.

Table 2.
Top Obstacles in Process of Merger

Top Five Responses Regarding Greatest Obstacles Experienced in Merging:	Ranked # 1 by:	Ranked # 2 by:	Ranked # 3 by:
Fear of losing congregational identity	17.6 %	11.0 %	11.0 %
Loyalty to existing congregation and its history	17.2 %	12.1 %	15.8 %
Affection for church building / property	15.0 %	12.1 %	11.0 %
Inter-personal conflict resulting from changes	13.6 %	5.5 %	7.3 %
Fear of change	12.8 %	9.2 %	9.2 %

The five least significant obstacles for merging were determined by comparing the frequencies for responses not chosen or ranked at all, and also the frequency of the lowest responses to the top three rankings. The least significant obstacles are: (1) Desirable neighborhood (96.7 percent did not include in rankings), (2) Insufficient reasons given for this type of change (95.2 percent did not include in rankings), (3) Influence of the denomination (94.9 percent did not include in rankings), (4) Too little leadership or vision for merging (94.1 percent did not include in rankings), (5) Desire to maintain size of your church fellowship (88.3 percent did not include in rankings).

“Other” Responses About Stimuli / Motivations and Obstacles

The questions in both Gregg’s and my survey related to motivations (stimuli) and obstacles offered the option of writing in responses under the heading “other.” Gregg did not report the results of these write-in answers in her study. Of the 273 surveys returned in my study, forty-two persons wrote in a response to the question regarding motivations for merger. Of these forty-two, thirty-eight ranked their write in response as their first or second most significant motivation for merger.

Two of the churches formed from merger, Covenant UMC (La Grange) and Epiphany UMC, had unique situations influencing their decisions to merge. These situations were evident in the write-in responses from these two churches. Epiphany UMC was formed from the merger of Jones Memorial UMC and Kenwood UMC. The Jones Memorial property was ordered to be sold by the Louisville city and Jefferson county governments to make way for airport expansion. Twenty-two persons (8 percent of total survey responses) indicated “airport expansion, “or forced to sell/move by government” as the primary motivations for merger. Not surprisingly, each of these responses came from the Epiphany UMC respondents and former members of the predecessor church Jones Memorial.

The formation of Covenant (La Grange) was in part motivated by the unique desire to unite two churches in close proximity but with different ethnic populations. The Kinnet UMC congregation was largely, if not completely, populated by African-Americans. The La Grange congregation was largely, if not completely, Caucasian. On the surveys, seven

persons from Covenant (La Grange) indicated the desire to blend these ethnic groups and/or a spiritual calling to racial reconciliation as the first or second most important motivations for merger.

The only other noteworthy response came from five persons who indicated they were motivated to merge because they had prayerfully discerned it to be God's will.

Attitude about the Future

I consider the attitude of church members about the future to be one of the signs of the effectiveness or success of church merge so I will discuss this finding in more detail under research questions three and four below. However, the responses to one question on the Gregg survey and mine have a high degree of correspondence. Gregg's question was: Are you hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries? The options for response were: yes (hopeful); no (not hopeful); don't know (unsure). Gregg reported the results from her survey as follows: hopeful 85 percent; not hopeful 7 percent, unsure 7 percent. My survey yielded the following results: hopeful 85.8 percent; not hopeful 1.8 percent; unsure 2.9 percent, and no response to question, 9.2 percent. Thus, in both surveys the results indicate that a large majority of respondents feel hopeful about the future of their church.

Attitude about Successfulness of Merger

As stated in Chapter 3, my definition of success is broader than that of Gregg. Therefore, a more complete discussion is found under research questions three and four. However, both surveys asked the same question:

On a scale of one to ten, rate the success of the merger in your opinion
(Circle one number):

a. Unsuccessful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly Successful

Gregg’s reporting of responses to this question are hard to follow or verify. She does state that the median rating from all respondents was 8.6. The average of all responses was 7.7. But the most frequently chosen rating was 9 (Merging 18).

My survey yielded the following results:

Table 3.

Attitudes Regarding Success of Church Merger

Unsuccessful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly Successful
Response %	.4	1.5	2.9	1.1	10.3	6.6	3.3	19.8	13.6	33.	7.7 (none)

Therefore, the median rating was 9.0 percent. The mean rating was 8.02 percent. The standard deviation was 2.16 percent. The most frequently chosen rating was 10 (33 percent). Clearly, the large majority of respondents to both surveys considered their merger to be highly successful.

Why Did You Consider Merger Successful?

In both Gregg’s survey and mine, respondents were asked to write in a response to the question: “Why do you consider it successful or unsuccessful?” Unfortunately, Gregg did not report the response to this question. With my survey, 206 of the 273 surveys returned included written responses to this question. Each response was read, similar

answers were grouped together, and a frequency distribution was manually determined for the groups of answers.

Positive Results of Merger

The largest group of responses was grouped under the category “positive results of merger.” Eighty-one responses (30 percent of total) fit under this category. Examples of the positive results listed include: increase in ministries/programs (19), better financial situation (18), better facility/location (18), and increase in lay leadership/involvement (16).

Quality of Relationships Existing in New Church

Fifty-six responses (20 percent of total) were grouped here. Examples include: A new sense or spirit of unity (30) and new friendships and a sense of affection among church members (12).

Numerical Growth since Merger

Forty-eight responses (18 percent of total) were grouped in this category. Examples included reference to total church membership, worship attendance, or attendance in groups like choir, youth program, children’s ministry.

Characteristics of people involved

Twenty-nine responses (11 percent of total) came under this heading. These responses suggested that the unique qualities and characteristics of the people involved in the churches has contributed to the successfulness of merger. Examples included people were cooperative (16), and people had similar vision or goals for church ministry (6).

Sense of Spiritual Direction/Well being

Thirteen responses were grouped here. Examples included references to feeling centered now in God's will, unification in the Spirit, and improved prayer life.

Miscellaneous Responses

Other groupings included compliments of leadership (11), positive attitudes (7), and the keeping the heritage of churches alive (6).

Why Did You Consider the Merger Unsuccessful?

Fifty of the write in responses described opinions as to why the merger was considered unsuccessful. Thirty-two of the responses concerned the loss of members or a decline in attendance and/or participation as a result of merger. Seven cited inter-personal problems that emerged during the process. Five indicated a decrease of ministry programs in the church. Four mentioned dissatisfaction with leadership provided by the pastor or district superintendent. Two claimed the merger process moved too quickly.

Critique of Merger Process and Recommendations

Both Gregg's survey and mine included the following open-ended questions: "What would you do differently if you had the chance?" and "What recommendations would you make to other congregations considering a merger?" ("Study" 104). Gregg presented the responses to both of these questions together as "Comments and Recommendations." In analyzing my survey results I discovered a high degree of repetition and overlap between the responses to these two questions. In general, the responses to these questions are best considered together. Gregg presented the responses to these two questions under the

following headings: communication, leadership, timing, vision and identity, miscellaneous.

I will use the same headings and list my survey responses immediately following Gregg's for each heading. For each heading the most frequent responses will be listed along with the number of instances for that response.

Communication

Gregg's Survey Results: Involve entire membership and keep everyone informed (34); have plenty of open discussion, lay out facts, use variety of formats to communicate (33); help people from both congregations get acquainted (29); pay careful attention to human dynamics (8), be open minded (7).

This Study's Survey Results: Improve and/or ensure wide distribution of information regarding changes / process (71), increase overall participation in process by members (44), carefully consider emotional impact of merger and reactions (30), encourage open dialogue, including constructive dissent (27), research options and facts about church condition and results of merger and communicate to all (18).

Leadership

Gregg's Survey Results: Ministers and lay leaders must be committed to process (10), use a consultant (7), if two ministers (and other staff) are involved, be clear about where they stand after merger (7), start with new pastors or replace after a limited period of time, rather than co-pastors of former churches (7), have consistent pastoral leadership throughout the merger process (both pastors should stay or have long interim pastor) (5).

This Study's Survey Results: Need to have strong, involved, lay leadership to make merger successful (20), must have strong, multi-competent pastor who is highly involved in the process (17), the Bishop and/or district superintendent should stay out of the process (10), the Bishop and/or district superintendent should be more involved in the process (4), the pastor should be less involved in the process (3).

Timing

Gregg's Survey Results: Take your time and be patient (29), act now/merge before it becomes a necessity (15).

This Study's Survey Results: Move slowly, be patient (38), merge only if your church is dying (7).

Vision and Identity

Gregg's Survey Results: Be clear on goals, mission, identity (14), focus on the future more than the past (10), base decisions on theological convictions nor survival or self (6), make sure congregations have enough in common (6), acknowledge/maintain traditions and history (5).

This Study's Survey Results: Need a common vision for mission and ministry for the new church formed (18), try to maintain continuity from heritage of former churches in new merged church (6), be aware that one or both congregations will lose it's identity and heritage and that this is painful (9).

Miscellaneous

Gregg's Survey Results: Get rid of existing buildings and build a new one (8), pray for guidance (7), pick a good name (7).

This Study's Survey Results: Pray and let God guide the process (49), pick a good or better name (11), close both churches and start new one, not merger (7), do not merge (6).

Research Question Two

What can be learned about the desirability of local church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference from researcher designed survey questions which focus on the areas of: leadership; vision; organizational change; perceived results of merger; motivations to merge; obstacles experienced in the process of merger.

[Note: from this point forward, unless otherwise indicated, all survey references are to the final survey used in this study.]

Leadership

The survey used in this study had several questions designed to describe the role of leadership in the decision to merge and the process of merger. These will be taken in the order in which they appear on the survey.

Who Influenced the Decision to Merge?

Survey question one asked respondents to describe the extent to which certain individuals or groups were involved in the decision to merge. Table four presents the frequency of response for each question item.

Table 4

Influencers in Decision to Merge

To what extent were the following people involved in the final decision to merge?	Greatly	Moderately	Little	No Response
Denominational representative	29.7 %	23.4 %	11.7 %	35.0 %
Pastor (s) of the congregations	68.2 %	8.8 %	2.6 %	27.8 %
Local church governing bodies	44.9 %	23.4 %	3.7 %	27.8 %
Individual lay people	35.4 %	25.5 %	9.5 %	29.2 %
Entire membership	37.2 %	27.4 %	14.2 %	20.8 %
Other	3.6 %	.4 %	.7 %	95.2 %

This table clearly demonstrates that the majority of respondents believe the pastor(s) of the congregation was (were) the most involved in the final decision to merge. The relatively higher number of people who did not choose any of the three choices for each item suggests an additional category should have been supplied on the survey offering the option of “unknown” or “no involvement.”

The Most Influential Leader(s) Who Emerged During the Process of Merge

Survey question seven asked the following: Who emerged as the most influential leader(s) during the process of merger--from the consideration of the idea, through the decision to merge, and then creation of the new church identity?

The frequency of response for each question item was distributed as follows:

- The pastor (or pastors): 47.3 percent
- A team, committee, or task group: 26.3 percent
- Denominational representative 3.7 percent

Other:	3.3	percent
A lay person:	2.9	percent
Church consultant:	0	percent
No Response:	16.5	percent

As indicated above, the most influential leader during the process of merger was the pastor, followed in influence by a team, committee, or task group. In each case the responses written in for the option “other,” referred to a lay person in the church, but respondents wanted to include their position in the church (i.e., Sunday school teacher, lay leader, choir member). If you add the “other” and “lay person” responses together, then the lay person option moves into third rank at 6.2 percent.

Pastor as Facilitator of Merger Process

Question eleven of the survey asked respondents: How important was the role of the pastor(s) in facilitating the process of merger? The frequency of responses was:

Very Important:	74.1	percent
Somewhat important:	13.2	percent
Unimportant:	2.9	percent
Don't know:	2.6	percent
No response:	7.0	percent

As indicated above, the survey respondents considered the role of the pastor to be very important in facilitating the process of merger.

Vision

Survey question twelve addressed the role of vision in the decision to merge (12-a) and the process of merger (12-b). The frequency of response to these questions is as follows:

To what extent did "vision" play an important role in your decision to merge?

Very Important:	59.0	percent
Somewhat important:	17.9	percent
Unimportant:	5.5	percent
Don't know:	7.3	percent
No response:	10.3	percent

To what extent did "vision" play an important role in completing the process of merger?

Very Important :	56.4	percent
Somewhat important:	22.0	percent
Unimportant:	3.7	percent
Don't know:	8.1	percent
No response:	9.9	percent

Biblical Metaphors Used in Process

In the review of literature, I demonstrated that metaphors or comparisons are often used by leaders in facilitating transformational change in organizations. These comparisons or metaphors help members of the organization interpret the process of change in a way compatible with the organization's vision and core beliefs. In leading a

church through transformational change, biblical metaphors or comparisons are often used to help interpret the process of change. Survey question ten was designed to determine which, if any, of these comparisons was used by the churches in the process of merger.

The survey question and the frequency of responses is as follows: Which of the following biblical comparisons were used to describe the experience of merger? (Check the one most frequently used):

Table 5

Biblical Metaphors for Church Merger

Birth (New Church as baby)	11.7 %
Death (End of an era)	3.3 %
Marriage (The two become one)	39.6 %
Death and Resurrection (Dying to be Reborn)	9.9 %
Don't Know	19.8 %
Other	2.9 %
No response	12.8 %

This table clearly indicates that most survey respondents believed marriage is the most appropriate biblical metaphor for interpreting the experience of church merger.

Perceived Results of Merger

The survey questions and responses which describe respondents' perceptions and attitudes about merger will be presented under research question four below.

Motivations and Obstacles

The survey questions and responses which describe the respondents opinions about motivations to merge, and obstacles experienced in the process of merger are presented under research questions perceptions and attitudes about merger will be presented under research question four below.

Research Question Three

What is the increase or decrease in membership, worship attendance, and Sunday school attendance in churches formed through merger in Kentucky? The rate of change will be determined by taking the combined numbers for the churches for their last annual report prior to merger and comparing them to the most recent annual report available (1998).

The findings of this study, indicate that overall, each church involved in merger has experienced a decline in worship attendance, and/or Sunday school attendance following merger. Three of the eight churches experienced moderate increases in worship attendance: Covenant (Middlesboro) (6.2 percent or 9 persons), Genesis (34 percent or 29 persons), and Epiphany (25.5 percent or 38 persons). However, their increases were matched by significant decreases in Sunday school attendance and/or membership: Covenant (Middlesboro) had a 34 percent decrease in Sunday school and a 6.8 percent decrease in membership; Epiphany had a negligible increase in Sunday school and a 34.5 percent decrease in membership; Genesis had a 45.6 percent decrease in Sunday school and a 16.7 percent decrease in membership. Only two churches experienced an increase in Sunday school attendance, but one of those was negligible (Epiphany with 1 percent) and the other increase was based only on the first year following merger (Gateway with 15 percent). The decreases in worship attendance ranged from .01 percent to 59 percent following merger. The decreases in Sunday school ranged from 14 percent to 62.5 percent. The decreases in membership ranged from 3.8 percent to 21 percent (The

complete presentation of increases and/or decreases for all churches in population is presented in Table 6).

While Gregg only studied membership numbers and not worship or Sunday school attendance, the trends in this study correspond with the results of the Gregg study. Gregg stated, "Among merged congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA), the average rate of decline was negative 5.74 percent (as opposed to [the overall negative rate of decline of] 1.24 percent [in the denomination]) (13).

Table 6

Pre-Merger and Post-Merger Changes in Membership,
Worship Attendance and Sunday School Attendance²

Congregations	Membership	Worship Attendance	S.S. Attendance
COVENANT (1989) (Middlesboro)	395	153	56
Middlesboro First	239	94	54
Middlesboro Trinity	185	50	30
Net Change	(29)	9	(29)
% Change	(6.8)	6.2	(34.0)
EPIPHANY (1990)	384	187	90
Jones Memorial	276	78	58
Kenwood	311	71	31
Net Change	(203)	38	1
% Change	(34.5)	25.5	1.0

2

The church name in all caps is the new church formed by merger, the date of the merger is listed parenthetically, the names of the predecessor churches are indented and listed below the name of the new church. The numbers for the predecessor churches are from the last complete year prior to merger. The numbers for the new church are from the most recent annual reports available from 1998. The net changes reflect the difference between the combined numbers for the predecessor churches and the new church formed by the merger. A more detailed form of this table is found as Appendix H.

Table 6, continued

Pre-Merger and Post-Merger Changes in Membership,
Worship Attendance and Sunday School Attendance

Congregations	Membership	Worship Attendance	S.S. Attendance
GENESIS (1991)	301	185	25
Calvary East	170	100	25
Shawnee/Parkland	134	11	8
Calvary West	57	30	3
Net Change	(60)	44	(21)
% Change	(16.6)	31.0	(45.6)
GRACE (1994)	356	130	54
Russell First	196	97	50
Raceland/Henderson	146	36	26
Net Change	14	(3)	(22)
% Change	4.0	(2.0)	(29.0)
COVENANT (1996) (La Grange)	926	282	131
Kinnett	110	45	20
La Grange	744	249	143
Net Change	(72)	(12)	(32)
% Change	(8.4)	(4.0)	(19.6)
Gateway Community Church (1997)	514	166	104
Oakdale	176	43	20
Beechmont	334	126	70
Net Change	4	(3)	14
% Change	0.7	(0.1)	15.5

Table 6, continued

Pre-Merger and Post-Merger Changes in Membership,
Worship Attendance and Sunday School Attendance

Congregations	Membership	Worship Attendance	S.S. Attendance
FAITH (1998)	431	150	81
Kerr Memorial	158	55	27
Westside	290	105	67
Net Change	(17)	(10)	(13)
% Change	(3.8)	(6)	(14)
 RESURRECTION (1998)	 180	 41	 18
Eastwood	49	25	10
Advent	179	75	38
Net Change	(48)	(59)	(30)
% Change	(21.0)	(59.0)	(62.5)

Research Question Four

Can the mergers completed in the Kentucky Conference from 1983 to 1998 be considered effective or successful according to the following criteria: Increase in worship and/or Sunday school attendance, a sense of unity in the church and acceptance of the new church identity, and a positive attitude of members regarding the merger?

Worship and Sunday School Attendance

The first source of data to answer this question is found in answer to research question three which presents objective data in Table 6 regarding the numbers of people in worship, Sunday school and membership. As the table 6 clearly indicates only three out of the eight churches studied experienced any increase in worship attendance following the merger. Only two churches experienced an increase in Sunday school attendance.

Covenant (Middlesboro) experienced a 6.2 percent increase in worship attendance (or 9 persons) in the nine years since their merger. During the same period, their Sunday school attendance decreased by 34 percent (or 29 persons). The Genesis church experienced the largest increase in worship attendance, 31 percent (or 44 persons). I contacted the current pastor of Genesis to congratulate him on having the largest increase in worship attendance, and he confessed that 1998 was an exceptionally good year but the numbers for 1999 were far lower and would negate any increase since the merger. During this period (from 1990-1998) the Sunday School attendance at Genesis decreased by 45.6 percent (or 21 persons). The other church with an increase in worship was Epiphany which has seen an increase of 25.5 percent (or 38 persons). In the time since merger their Sunday school attendance increased by 1 percent (or one person). The only other church with an increase in either worship or Sunday school attendance was Gateway Community Church, which saw an increase of 15.5 percent (or 14 persons) in the first year following their merger.

There appears to be some connection between an increase in worship attendance and the length of time since merger. The first three mergers in this study, the least recent, are the only ones that experienced any increase in worship attendance. They completed their mergers eleven (Covenant [Middlesboro]), ten (Epiphany), and nine years (Genesis) ago.

Sunday school attendance decreases were experienced in the majority of churches formed through merger. The decreases ranged from 14 percent to 62.4 percent. Again, only two churches experienced an increase in Sunday school attendance, Epiphany (1 percent) and Gateway (15.5 percent).

The implications of these numbers will be discussed in Chapter 5 (Conclusions).

However, at this point, it is apparent that the majority of church mergers in this study do not satisfy this part of the research question criteria for effectiveness/success.

A Sense of Unity

A second part of the criteria for effectiveness/success for this study is the sense of unity that exists in the churches formed by merger. Survey question four was designed to determine the existence of this factor. It asked: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The two former congregations have now genuinely become one." The frequency distribution of responses below show the extent of agreement with the statement: The two former congregations have now genuinely become one.

Strongly Agree:	38.0 percent
Agree:	48.2 percent
Disagree:	6.6 percent
Strong Disagree:	.4 percent
No response:	6.6 percent

The majority of respondents (86.2 percent) either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the two former churches have now genuinely become one. A small number of respondents (7 percent) either "disagreed or "strongly disagreed" that the two former churches have become one. There is a 10 percent difference between the "strongly agree" (38.0 percent) and the "agree" (48.2 percent) responses. The possible implications of these numbers will be discussed in Chapter 5 (Conclusions). However, at this point it is clear that the surveys

indicate that the churches in this study satisfy this part of the criteria for effectiveness/success.

Positive Attitude About the Merger

Seven survey questions were designed to determine whether respondents had a positive or negative attitude about church merger. Five of these questions were force-choice and two were open-ended. The first three of the five forced-choice questions, 2-a, 2-b, 2-c, and the frequencies of responses for each question are presented in Table 7. Survey question 13-a and the frequencies of responses to this question are found in Table 8. Survey question 16 and the frequency of responses to this question is found in Table 9.

Table 7

Attitudes about Church Merger (Survey questions 2-a, 2-b, 2-c)

Is the new congregation in a desirable location? (survey question 2-a)			
YES: 87.2 %	NO: 1.8 %	Don't Know: 2.2 %	No Response: 8.4 %
Is the new congregation financially more stable than one or both of its predecessors? (Survey question 2-b)			
YES: 75.8 %	NO: 2.9 %	Don't Know: 12.1 %	No Response: 9.2 %
Are you hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries? (Survey question 2-c)			
YES: 85.8 %	NO: 1.8 %	Don't Know: 2.9 %	No Response: 9.2 %

Table 8

Attitudes about Church Merger (Survey question 13-a)

On a scale of one to ten, rate the success of the merger in your opinion (Circle one number):											
Unsuccessful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly Successful
Response %	.4	1.5	2.9	1.1	10.3	6.6	3.3	19.8	13.6	33.	7.7 (none)
The median rating was 9.0 percent. The mean rating was 8.02 percent. The most frequent response was 10 (33 percent).											

Table 9

Attitudes about Church Merger (Survey question 16)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Church merger is a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference. (Please check one):				
Strongly Agree: 19.4 %	Agree: 54.6 %	Disagree: 10.6 %	Strongly Disagree: 2.6 %	No Response: 12.8 %

There were two open-ended questions that might also reveal attitudes about the merger process: What would you do differently if you had the chance?; What recommendations would you make to other congregations considering a merger? The frequency of responses to these questions is discussed in detail under research question one above. The largest group of responses to these questions was grouped under the heading, "positive results of merger." These write-in responses conform to the same patterns as the responses to the questions above and indicate a positive attitude about church merger by a large majority of survey respondents.

As summary of the responses described above is presented in Table 10. These results are listed in the order in which they appeared in the survey.

Table 10

Summary of Responses Revealing Attitude about Merger

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of respondents believe the merged church is in a desirable location.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of respondents believe the merged church is financially more stable than one or both of its predecessors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of respondents are hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of respondents consider the merger to be highly successful.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of respondents agree that church merger is a viable strategy for starting new faith. communities in the Kentucky Conference.

The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter 5 (Conclusions).

However, at this point the survey results indicate that the church mergers study satisfy the attitude component of the criteria for effectiveness/success.

Other Findings

From the review of literature, I suspected that the following would be listed as important obstacles experienced in the process of merger: affection for church buildings or property, loyalty to existing congregations and their respective histories, fear of losing congregational identity. The findings supported this suspicion in that these three obstacles were the most frequently chosen in both the Gregg survey and the one used in this study.

I also suspected that there would be some relationship to attitudes about the effectiveness/successfulness of merger and the nature of the predecessor church attended by the respondent. From my review of literature and personal experience, I suspected that

the persons who previously attended the smaller of the two churches involved in merger, and/or the persons who had to leave their former church property would have a more negative view of the process of merger. The two groups that I hoped to compare were: (1) members of population from the predecessor church with the smaller attendance, and/or who left their facility, and (2) members of the population whose predecessor church had the larger attendance, and/or who did not leave their facility.

The survey questions designed to identify any differences between these two groups and the frequency of response are as follows:

“Did your former congregation have the larger or smaller attendance before the merger?” (Survey question 3).

Larger attendance: 41.8 percent

Smaller Attendance: 44.0 percent

No Response: .7 percent

“Did you have to leave the facility of your predecessor local church?” (Survey question 5).

Yes: 32.5 percent

No: 58.6 percent

When the frequency of responses were tabulated for each of these groups, I discovered there was no significant difference between their survey question responses.

Pastor's Responses

Eleven pastors from the study population completed the surveys (11 of the 15 located, or 73 percent). For the most part, their responses were very similar to that of other respondents. I will list only those differences that are pronounced.

Pastor's Role in Decision to Merge and Process

With regards to the extent to which the Pastors was involved in the decision to merge, 100 percent of pastor respondents believed they were greatly involved. The general survey responses differed in that 68.2 percent believed pastors were greatly involved, 8.8 percent believed they were moderately involved, 2.6 percent believed they had little involvement in the decision to merge, and 20.1 percent did not check any option for this question.

With regards to identifying the person(s) who emerged as the most influential leader during the process of merger 75.7 percent of pastors identified the pastor(s), while 18.2 percent named a team, committee, or task group. Among the general respondents, 47.3 percent identified the pastor as the most influential, and 26.3 percent named a team, committee, or task group.

Attitudes about the Condition of the Church

With regards to whether one considered the new congregation to be more financially stable than one or both of the predecessor churches 90.9 percent of pastors said "yes" compared to 75.8 percent who said "yes" among the general respondents.

One hundred percent of the pastors who completed the survey responded that they felt hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries, as compared to 85.8 percent of the general respondents.

Motivations for Merger

The following table (11) compares the top five most important motivations by merger between pastors and the general responses from the population.

Table 11

Pastors Top Five Motivations for Merger - Compared to General Responses

Pastors	General Responses
1. To better fulfill the purpose of the church	1. To better fulfill the purpose of the church
2. Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources	2. Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources
3. Desire to create a growing congregation	3. Desire to create a new congregation
4. Capital/building needs	4. Financial stress
5. Influence of pastor	5. Size of congregation

Obstacles to Merger

The following table (12) compares the top five most important obstacles experienced during the process of merger between pastors and the general survey responses.

Table 12

Pastors Top Five Obstacles Experienced During Merger Compared to General Responses

Pastors	General Responses
1. Loyalty to existing congregation and its history	1. Fear of losing congregational identity.
2. Interpersonal conflicts resulting from changes	2. Loyalty to existing congregation and its history.
3. Affection for the church building or property	3. Affection for church building or property
4. Fear of losing congregational identity	4. Inter-personal conflicts resulting from changes
5. Fear of change.	5. Fear of change.

Vision

Regarding the importance of “vision” in the decision to merge, 63.9 percent of pastors considered it very important or somewhat important, as compared to 76.9 percent among respondents from the study’s population. Among pastors, 9.1 percent considered it unimportant, and 27.3 indicated they were unsure if “vision” played an important role. Among the respondents from the study’s population 5.5 percent considered it unimportant, 7.3 percent didn’t know, and 10.3 percent did not respond.

With regard to the importance of “vision” in completing the process of merger 72.7 percent of pastors considered it important or somewhat important, 9.1 percent considered it unimportant, and 18.2 percent said they were unsure. Among the respondents, 78.4 percent believed it was very important or somewhat important, 3.7 percent said it was unimportant, 8.1 percent were unsure, and 9.9 percent did not respond.

Biblical Metaphors or Comparisons

In contrast to the general survey responses, pastors chose the biblical comparison of “death and resurrection” more often than marriage. Pastors chose a biblical comparison by the following frequencies: birth (9.1 percent); death (0 percent); marriage (18 percent); death and resurrection (66.4 percent). The general respondents chose marriage by 39.6 percent, birth by 11.7 percent, and death and resurrection by 9.9 percent.

Merger as a Strategy for Starting New Faith Communities

The final point of comparison regards whether or not respondents would agree that merger is a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky. The percentage of pastors who strongly agreed or agreed that is a desirable strategy (72.7 percent) was very close to the general response from the study population (74 percent). The pastors who disagreed or strongly disagreed that this is a desirable strategy (27.3 percent) was higher than the response from the general study population (13.2 percent).

Conclusion

The various findings reported in this chapter are evaluated and interpreted in the following chapter. The implications of the findings for revision of the existing body of knowledge regarding church mergers are also considered there. Chapter 5 also discusses limitations of the study, unexpected conclusions, and points toward practical applications and future study. I will also reflect on the experience of doing the project and share personal comments about church merger.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

One of the purposes of this study was to evaluate church merger as a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities. Another purpose was to help others better understand the unique strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities associated with church merger. It was hoped that the results of this study, taken together with the review of literature, and closing comments would provide clear guidance to the NCD Team of the Kentucky Conference. However, the results of this study do not present a conclusive case in support of or in rejection of merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities. The decision of whether to employ this strategy or not will be a judgement call by churches, denominational leaders, and in Kentucky– the NCD team and its director. They will have to consider the many strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges associated with the unique strategy of church merger. This study will provide helpful information to use in making that decision.

Effectiveness/Success of Church Merger

Based on the criterion for effectiveness/success used in this study, the results are mixed. The criterion used is: an increase in attendance at worship and principal Christian education or spiritual formation ministries (i.e., Sunday school), a positive attitude among the majority of members regarding the process and results of merger, and a sense of unity among the majority of church members and a corresponding acceptance of the new church identity born from the union of the two pre-existing churches. The three parts of this criteria will be discussed in sequence below.

Attendance Increase or Decrease

As described in chapter four, the findings of this study suggest that churches formed through merger are likely to experience a decline in membership and attendance in worship and Sunday school when compared to the combined numbers of the predecessor churches (See Table 6). This conclusion must be qualified by the recognition that there has not been sufficient time to adequately assess patterns of growth or decline in many of the churches studied. Of the eight churches used in this study four had been merged only two years or less when the final numbers were gathered. This fact, combined with the fact that the only churches reporting gains in worship attendance are those merged longest, suggests that, given more time, any of these churches may have shown an increase in membership, and/or worship and/or Sunday school attendance. However, in any event, a significant numerical increase may be an unrealistic expectation for most of these situations. When we ask, how much numerical growth did merger produce? The answer is likely to be disappointing. Perhaps, a better question is this: If they hadn't merged with another church, how much farther down in decline would each of the predecessor churches be now? In my own situation, I suspect at least one of the two churches would be very near closure. The larger of the two might have recovered somewhat, but I am certain the church would have remained far into the decline side of its life cycle. Based on my review of these results, personal observation of the churches involved, and conversation with the pastors of these merged churches, I am of the opinion that each of the churches involved in merger would be far worse off by now if they had done

nothing, or kept on doing what they were doing with more vigor, or tried any number of incremental changes to stimulate renewal.

A Sense of Unity and Acceptance of New Church Identity

The survey results indicated that 86.2 percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the two former congregations have genuinely become one. Only 7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that a sense of unity in their new identity exists following the merger (6.6 percent didn't respond to this survey question). Clearly, a large majority of respondents enjoy a sense of unity and have accepted their new church identity following merger. The results of Gregg's survey agree. In a summary of her study, Gregg reports that a ratio of four to one respondents claim their congregations have genuinely become one (Merging 18).

This sense of unity and acceptance of the new church identity is a significant indication of successfulness or effectiveness. It is especially significant in light of the number one and number two obstacles listed by respondents in this study and (ranked 3 and 1 in Gregg's study): fear of losing congregational identity, and loyalty to existing congregation and its history.

As stated in Chapter 2, church merger is a radical form of organizational change. It either destroys or radically alters the pre-existing church culture and identity. It marks a radical reorientation of identity as members of both predecessor congregations learn to consider themselves part of the new congregation. The survey respondents indicate that they have overcome the obstacles they feared most, and that they now enjoy a sense of oneness.

Attitudes about Merger

The survey results are very clear that a large majority of respondents have a positive attitude about their experience of merger and the results the merger has produced. They believe their new congregation is in a desirable location. They believe that the new congregation is more financially stable than one or both of the predecessor congregations. They feel hopeful about the church and its future. They consider their church mergers to have been highly successful. The majority also agreed or strongly agreed that church merger is in fact a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference.

Summary

The above indicates that two out of three requirements of the study criterion for effectiveness/success of church merger were satisfied: (1) a sense of oneness, and (2) a positive attitude about church merger. The third criteria was not met: (3) attendance figures generally declined for worship, Sunday school and membership. In spite of these declining numbers most people still had very positive feelings about merger, so much so that they would recommend it to the NCD team as a strategy for starting new faith communities.

As this study indicates, in practice, church merger has been the default strategy in the Kentucky Conference for starting new faith communities over the past fifteen years. However, it has also been one of the least discussed at district and conference levels; it has been the least financially supported, the least celebrated, and the least understood.

At a recent NCD meeting I attended, of the ten pastors in attendance, five were pastors of churches that have been formed from merger. When the Kentucky Conference Leadership Team (which is responsible for nominations of conference leaders) considered who might know something about starting new faith communities, these pastors of merged churches were the most experienced people they could find in our conference. And yet, as a member of this team, I know that the primary focus of our Conference continues to be new church plants. New church plants are near the center of excitement and enthusiasm; they are the beneficiaries of the best research; and they are the target of the majority of proposed funding. If the ratio of church mergers relative to new church plants continues as it has for the past fifteen plus years, this focus needs to change, and more support must be given to those who engage in church merger. The mixed results regarding successfulness or effectiveness of church mergers revealed in this study might persuade people away from this strategy. However, there is ample evidence that the people who have been involved in them consider church merger to be worth the sacrifices involved. As this chapter continues, I hope to describe more of the strengths and opportunities inherent in church merger as well as more of the weaknesses and challenges it entails.

Motivations for Church Merger

There were significant similarities between this study and the Gregg study about what motivated people to consider church merger. The top five reasons in Gregg's study were: financial stress, size of congregation, similarities between the two congregations, influence of the pastor, and the desire to create a growing congregation. The top five reasons in this study were: to better fulfill the mission of the church; best use of time, talent,

financial, and property resources; desire to create a growing congregation; financial stress; and size of congregation.

The question must be asked: Why should churches consider church merger, as opposed to other less radical forms of change? You may remember that in Chapter 2 I described how merger fits the definition of transformational change which “... involves substantial and discontinuous change to the shape, structure, and nature of the organization, rather than incremental adjustments to the status quo. The change is also deep and extensive rather than superficial and restrained” (Beckhard 80-89). Church merger is a radical form of transformational change. Beckhard observes, “At its most radical, transformational change involves creatively destroying and remaking an organization with a new vision and an overhauled social and mission architecture” (47). As this study demonstrates church merger fits the description of radical and transformational change. Why then consider merger instead of transitional changes which carry much less short term risk and difficulty?

Only one question on the survey considered this larger question directly. The survey basically asked: “Were you motivated to merge because other forms of change did not improve your situations?” (Survey question 18-a). The number of people who chose this option was small; only 13.6 percent ranked this as one their top five motivations. However, the survey only listed this as one of eighteen or nineteen other options (I should have made this a separate question). My personal experience leads me to believe that, if I had asked the question more directly, many more people would have said that they tried

merger only after they had tried and failed to stimulate renewal in their churches using many other forms of transitional or incremental change.

The most frequently chosen motive for merger in this study was “to better fulfill the mission of the church.” One might applaud this motive but also recognize that this should already be a basic motivation for the ongoing work of ministry in any church. One must ask, “Why couldn’t they ‘better fulfill the mission of the Church’ as two independent churches?”

Perhaps the answer to this question is found in the other motivations most chosen in this study. The second most frequently chosen motivation was that merger would represent the “best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources.” The basic underlying motivation here is stewardship. I believe the other reasons chosen also reflect a strong concern for faithful stewardship. I will consider the third most frequently chosen motivation later. The fourth and fifth most chosen motivations were financial stress and size of congregation. These two motivations ranked first and second in Gregg’s survey results. Again, the underlying motivation is faithfulness in stewardship.

In Chapter 2 I discussed biblical stewardship in some depth. One quote from that chapter bears repeating here,

Here is another complex question that emerges in doing Biblical stewardship. Does any congregation that exists by the skin of its teeth in a community that is underchurched have the right to place over ninety percent of its annual budget into a ministry that is in fact a private chaplaincy to a handful? My own view after a quarter of a century of meeting with clergy of all denominations and some sects in several hundred conferences is that upward of a fifth, perhaps more, of the congregations now in existence are "unfaithful stewards" in seeking to keep their doors open, rather than joining selflessly with another

congregation or two to provide a full ministry to their members and community, through the church-at-large, the nation and the world. (Fisher 59-60)

In my own area of Louisville, there are five United Methodist churches within a five mile radius of our church. Many of these churches are struggling with approximately the same number of people in attendance each week (approximately 150 or less). They are targeting the same population, using many of the same methods, and having the same limited results—little or no increase in attendance or growth through conversions. Our sense of connectionalism within the United Methodist denomination helps us to consider the people in these churches as close kin. What should close kin-folk do when they are struggling against the same obstacles? They should work together to overcome them.

I believe that what the writer of Ecclesiastes says to individuals may be applied to churches as well,

Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. There are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. (Ecc. 4:9-12)

Imagine two or more churches, in close proximity, populated by similar people with similar values, hopes, dreams, needs, and so forth. These are generally churches with more building than people, and less workers than work. These churches often run out of money before they run out of bills, and the members are getting tired of trying to do the same things and getting the same poor results year after year. Now, imagine the hope that merger might create; the new congregation combines the strengths of both congregation:

the spiritual gifts of the members, the financial assets, the sharing of debt retirement, the volunteer ministry, and so on. Immediately following merger, otherwise discouraged church members are encouraged by the new energy released by creativity, faithful risk taking, new relationships, and the fact that, when they gather for worship, the sanctuary they occupy is now fuller than it was before merger. They may even have new building and location to enjoy as a result of their church merger.

The third most frequently chosen motivation was “the desire to create a new congregation.” I suggest that the churches who chose to engage in church merger wanted what Saarinen describes as a radical infusion of “energy” and what Adizes describes as “entrepreneurship,” in their lifecycle (see Chapter 2 pages 41ff). Saarinen suggests two primary interventions when a church is deep in the decline side of its life cycle (late bureaucracy or death): (1) to reconstruct the corporate identity, and (2) the organization must learn to understand and adapt to its changed and changing context (21).

Merger allows a church to make the first of these two interventions, the reconstruction of the corporate identity. In the process a new energy and life is released into the organization. The second intervention, learning to adapt to changes, is critical at every stage of organizational life. In fact, the review of literature suggests that organizations that do this well may never enter into the death phase of their lifecycle—for the changes they make along the way turn the life-cycle bell curve in a never ending series of dolphin curves so that the decline side is never allowed to exert its downward pull on the organization. If the churches involved in merger could effectively manage the intervention of adapting to their changed and changing environment—then they would not

need to consider the more radical intervention of reconstructing corporate identity. However, when the first intervention is accomplished successfully, it may very well create a new ability to change and adapt to the ever changing context of the organization. This is what happened in the church merger in which I participated. In our merger we changed the basic identity, culture, and approach to ministry. Merger released a new entrepreneurial attitude, a willingness to change, to adapt, to be responsive. It created a new youthful flexibility.

Drawing from our experience of church merger, I can identify several positive results and new opportunities created by the process. The new church formed from our merger exists at a much earlier stage in the lifecycle than either of the predecessor congregations. It is now clearly on the growth side of the life cycle bell curve. I would place our church at the early adolescent stage of the congregational lifecycle now, over two years after merger. This life cycle change was the single, most positive aspect of the merger. We have a new opportunity, impossible before, to experience a rebirth. We still have to seize the new moment and face all the unique challenges and opportunities at this early stage of the life cycle, but merger has made this new moment possible. We are still experiencing high levels of enthusiasm and energy associated with infancy. We must continue to foster a sense of community and mission and to develop ministries that match our reason to exist. There is an high-energy emphasis on assimilating the many new people who have joined the church since merger and moving them into ministry and leadership (Saarinen 10-11).

Not long ago a common refrain in our predecessor churches was, "We've never done it that way before." Some say that those are often the seven last words of a dying church. More and more another seven words are becoming common among us: "Let's try it and see what happens." Those are the words of a living church eager to be creative and proactive for Christ--words of people who trust the Lord and love people enough to accept the risk of change.

Following the process of merger, we are now manifesting what Anderson calls an "entrepreneurial" and a "renewing church" culture. In an entrepreneurial church culture people welcome risk, adventure, and the new. They are market sensitive and embrace changing to stay culturally current. They avoid tradition for its own sake and emphasize what is fresh and innovative. A renewing church culture builds on its traditions, stability, and strengths while valuing change as needed to be ever relevant. This is a church that welcomes evaluation, modification, questions, and flexible responses. The renewing church maintains creative tension between the old and the new (140-147).

In a recent article on church renewal in Leadership, Stephen Grunlan notes several things that bring new life to declining or dying churches. First he claims the church must find a way to build hope. This may be done by pointing to the Father who is able to bring life out of death and to Jesus Christ who said, "I will build my church" (11). You must also point to the church's strengths and to churches that have turned around. In our case, the process of merger established a new basis for hope. We placed our faith in the God of resurrection power and trusted him for new life in our new church. Whereas, the former orientation was to the past, the new orientation is to the future.

Grunlan also recommends fixing the facility. He claims that a church in disrepair sends the message that it is dying (11). In our church merger the funds generated from the sale of property helped to provide funds for renovations and the purchase of equipment that would not otherwise be available. Growing churches need the resources for a repaired, attractive, and accessible facility. The funds generated from the sale of property made this possible for our church. In the United Methodist denomination, all funds from the sale of church property can be used only for the purchase of additional property or the renovation and repair of existing property (Book of Discipline Paragraph 254). Fortunately, when we pooled the cash resources of the two predecessor congregations, we were also able to generate significant funds to provide for new professional staff leadership.

According to Grunlan, the development of new leaders is also critical. He suggests moving new people into leadership as soon as possible. They will bring “a new vision [and are not] part of previous factions” (11). When our congregations merged, we also took advantage of a new rule in the UM Book of Discipline that permits a development of a unique indigenous administrative structure (Paragraph 242.2). We dissolved all the pre-existing administrative bodies and developed a streamlined system built around purpose-driven leadership teams. Each of these teams was initially staffed with the best members of both predecessor congregations--leaders of faith, vision, and courage. Many of the new people who have joined the church since merger are now involved in our ministry teams.

Some of the common characteristics often found in growing churches were created or recreated in our process of merger. We became a congregation large enough to provide

the range of services expected by members and the community. We became a congregation committed to a ministry driven by purpose-driven biblical priorities. We developed an emphasis on evangelism. With decline comes an exclusivity or insecurity that often makes evangelism one of the most neglected purposes of the church. Through our process of merger and the inclusion of several families attracted by the new vision of the church, we are now focused more outwardly than inwardly. Meeting the needs of the unchurched is now equal to or greater than the desire to meet needs of our existing members. In my opinion, none of these things would have been possible had we not created a new faith community through church merger.

Obstacles Likely to be Experienced in Church Mergers

Once again, there were many similarities between the results of this study's survey and that used by Gregg. In her study, Gregg reported the top five obstacles to merger as loyalty to existing congregation and its history, affection for church building or property, fear of losing congregational identity, fear of change, and commitment to current location.

The top five obstacles chosen in this study were: fear of losing congregational identity; loyalty to existing congregation and its history, affection for church building or property, inter-personal conflicts resulting from changes, and fear of change.

The NCD team of the Kentucky Conference lists "church merger" as only one of the strategies it will use to start new faith communities in our conference. As I have shown, it is in fact the most common strategy used. However, new church plants continues to receive most of our attention. Research conducted by the NCD has shown new churches are most likely to reach new people for Christ and to fulfill the evangelism facet of the

church's purpose (Malphurs 21-57). Most of the fastest growing churches in our nation are those that were planted within the past twenty years. However, as I have shown, while there is evidence that new church plants will grow rapidly through reaching the unchurched, there is little evidence to suggest the same will be true for "new faith communities" formed through church merger. In our own merger experience, I tried to consider myself a church planter more than what Barna calls a "turnaround Pastor" (61-73). However, I soon learned that the obstacles I faced had more in common with a "turnaround" scenario than a "church planting experience." The conventional wisdom among most pastors is that to attempt to radically change a church of over one hundred members that has existed for fifty or more years is an invitation to martyrdom. With church merger there are some of the same opportunities and many of the same challenges associated with church planting. However, one will also surely face the challenges usually associated with attempting to revitalize a declining church.

The obstacles identified in the findings of this study confirm that the primary dynamic at work was "change." "Change" implies a pre-existing reality that is being altered. It is, in many ways, new wine in old wineskins, or at least the attempt to patch old and new wineskins together (Mark 2:22). Speaking of the challenge of revitalizing existing churches Malphurs writes,

Over the years, established churches build up a number of traditions that become set in concrete. This is because they have proved valuable and helpful in the past ... Of course, the problem is that times change and so must those traditions. But this is never realized in far too many churches. Some pastors who are change agents, will accept the pastorate of one these traditional churches, with a view toward changing it. However, most aren't very patient and move rather quickly. In private they say, "... I want to bring this church

into twentieth century [at least] since the twenty first century [has arrived].” The result is one of two things. Either the pastor is asked to leave, which is usually what happens, or many of the people in the church leave. In both situations, there are lots of unhappy people. This is the problem of “old wineskins.” It is not anything unique to the twentieth century. [In using this illustration] Jesus indicates it’s hard to change established traditions. He’s not evaluating those traditions, or saying that one is better than the other. He’s warning of the difficulties for those who attempt to bring change into situations where structures are already in place. We should rightly question the wisdom of attempting to bring significant change to older, established churches. Old skins don’t stretch very well! While it is imperative that some change take place if these churches are to survive, it’s often gradual and over an extended period of time. There’s simply not much stretch left! Otherwise, the tear is too great, and the old skin bursts (44-45).

The pastors and leaders who attempt church merger should recognize that they are attempting to change two or more existing congregations in a radical way. While they may want to emphasize the newness associated with the new church identity, they will still bring along many of the same people involved in the predecessor churches—people with strong memories of the identity and values they once held so dearly.

Based on my experience, the review of literature in this study, and the findings of this study--church merger has much more in common with church renewal and revitalization than it does with church planting. Let me illustrate from our merger experience. One challenge associated with merger that I personally experienced is the automatically large pastoral care load in churches born from merger as opposed to new church plants. In the four years since my arrival here our church family has experienced over seventy funerals of members, constituents, and active participants. We have lost another fifty or more active participants who are now homebound due to chronic illness. Each of these situations and persons required a tremendous amount of support by the pastor and members of the

church. In each of these situations, there have been many costs: tremendous emotional energy as we grieve the loss of loved ones, a loss of leadership, a loss of financial support, and a loss of time (while all of these cases were worth all the ministry time involved, they did represent a large use of limited time and leadership resources). The church born from our merger has done a remarkable job of reaching unchurched people and attracting new people to the church. But our total attendance numbers are the same or slightly less than the combined figures of our predecessor churches before merger. In contrast I have several friends who started new churches at the same time I began to lead this church through merger (In 1996). Several of these pastors/friends have yet to do a funeral in their church. Several of them have no home-bound members on their list of calls to make. All their members are relatively active since they are all relatively new. Most church planters do not face the challenges of burying scores of people, visiting dozens of homebound and hospitalized, and trying to engage large numbers of marginally active people during the first years of a "new" church's existence. Church merger is much more like renewing a declining church than it is like church planting.

The survey respondents support this view of the radical nature of change involved in church merger. They speak of their fears of losing their congregational identity. They speak of their sense of being forced to choose against loyalty to their existing congregation and its unique history. On both counts, I believe their fears are well grounded. Over time, their former church identity will be lost. Over time, their existing congregation will in fact cease to exist. Its unique history will become, in many ways, a closed book. I will say more about how leaders might help people cope with these changes later in this

chapter; but at this point, please recognize that there is a tremendous sacrifice and sense of loss that is inevitably associated with church merger.

As you might expect, this kind of radical transformational change is sure to evoke interpersonal conflict. This was listed as the fourth major obstacle by general respondents to the survey and second in importance by pastors. In the review of literature, I have alluded to several ways leaders can appreciate the causes of these conflicts and also how to cope with them. In the section on leadership below, I will say more about helping churches handle the changes associated with merger.

One illustration about the virulence of this conflict may be helpful to note. One of the pastors of a church in the population for this study was not willing to have his congregation involved in this study. His reason was that “after two years most of the conflicts have started to die down. I don’t want to get everyone all stirred up again as they remember what we went through.”

While interpersonal conflict was significant for all respondents it was an especially important obstacle according to pastors. Pastors cited “interpersonal conflicts” as their second most important obstacle. Pastors chose “interpersonal conflict” as one of their top five obstacles experienced in the process of merging, with 72.2 percent of responses, as compared with 43 percent from the general respondents. In my experience of merger, a lot of conflict goes on behind the scenes out of the sight of the membership of one or both of the predecessor congregations. Echoing the minefield analogy from Chapter 1, I believe the pastor will be the point person in the journey through the minefield of church

merger—he or she will take several hits, witness the hits on others, see the wounded first, and perhaps grieve the hardest.

One of the obstacles or costs that I failed to include in the list of options on the survey was, “the loss of members or participants.” Of those who chose to write critical remarks about church merger, this was the most often cited complaint (32 of the 50 write-in responses). During our merger process, I thought of the war time military term “acceptable losses.” My experience of church merger taught me the truly terrible nature of this concept. As I have reflected on my role as pastor in the process of change and loss, I have pondered the Tom Hanks character in the Academy Award winning film “Saving Private Ryan.” The film demonstrated, with great emotional effect, the personal burden he bore for the consequences of his decisions, the consequences of the orders he carried out, and the consequences of moving forward or back when he was stuck with his followers, “between a rock and a hard place” (in that position there no way to avoid someone getting bruised).

In our case, we lost many people, most of them immediately after the decision to merge. However, the influx of new people from the community in the first couple of years of our existence masked these losses to outside observers. Occasionally, I will hear pastors of very large churches talk about significant and seemingly necessary changes that resulted in the loss of many members (they speak of “hundreds” of losses in a way that amazes small church pastors like me). I have heard such pastors say, on several occasions, “No problem. We never missed them since new people came in to fill their place. That kind of thing is just part of making needed changes.”

I could never manage to think that way. For me, and a few others, each loss was bitterly painful. I wept and prayed and wept and prayed over each person who refused to come along with us. I wept and prayed and wept and prayed over each one who was hurting emotionally or spiritually because of the decision to merge. My personal conversations with other pastors involved in church merger confirm that I have not been alone in feeling this pain.

One critical oversight in the design of my survey was in not providing questions to encourage people to talk about the sense of loss, if any, they felt during the process of merger. I know much about the cost involved in church merger from my personal experience and from my relationships with other pastors. However, it would be helpful to those who read this study, who have not shared this experience, to hear of the sacrifices involved from the people who actually made them.

Each of the obstacles most chosen in both surveys correspond very closely to what organizational development and church renewal experts anticipate when organizations undergo radical transformational change. Therefore the steps described in leading through this type of change described in the review of literature should prove useful to pastors and church leaders who hope to attempt church merger.

Leadership and Biblical Metaphors

As I stated in Chapter 2, I believe the biblical metaphor most appropriate for describing church merger is death and resurrection. However, when given the choices of marriage, birth, death, and death and resurrection, most survey respondents chose the marriage comparison. Marriage was chosen by 39.6 percent of respondents, while birth

was the choice of 11.7 percent. Death and resurrection was chosen by only 9.9 percent, almost 10 percent less than the 19.8 percent who marked “don’t know.” Another 3.3 percent chose death (as in “end of an era”). I think it is interesting to note that among pastors, the death and resurrection metaphor was the number one choice at 66.4 percent while marriage was second at 18 percent. I believe I should have worded this question differently to allow for a scale of agreement. For example the survey might have asked, “To what extent was each of the following biblical comparisons used to interpret the experience of merger?” and then provided a scale to indicate agreement or importance. Like most of the other pastors who responded to this question, I believe that the most appropriate biblical comparison or metaphor is death and resurrection.

On the cover letter to the survey I was forced to add a postscript to persuade one pastor to release the mailing list for members of his church in the study population. He said the “word” merger was forbidden in his church and that without some disclaimer he would not allow his church to participate. He had used the terms “union” or “marriage” exclusively since he thought the term merger was essentially negative and implied a dissolution of the preexisting church identities. He told me, “We used the metaphor of marriage because even in marriage while the two become, in a sense ‘one,’ they continue to maintain their separate identities.” That may be true in a marriage, but in a church I doubt you would want that kind of separation to continue. I argued with my colleague by saying, “So do you hope that people will still be thinking of themselves as members of one of the predecessor churches in five or ten years from now? What about the new people who come after your union? They will have no memory of those identities. While

you will want to remember where many of your members have come from, don't you hope their primary sense of identity will be in the new church formed from your union? Every butterfly was once a caterpillar, but once it has changed into a butterfly do you think most people would still identify it with an earthbound crawling larva? If these mergers or unions work out, then the reality is that one or both of the churches involved will lose their former identity (or it will be changed beyond recognition). People will remember their former church identities for some time, but if the church continues, and prospers with the addition of new people, this heritage and identity will become more and more distant. New people will come with in no memory and little desire to look back. This kind of loss of identity is not true (or not supposed to be true) in marriage." Finally, he admitted, "Listen, I know the analogy will break down soon enough. I just want to keep things as positive as possible. You and I know this may be more like death and resurrection, and even though we believe life comes out of death for the faithful, it still hurts to die!"

It is commonly known that our culture tries to avoid the implications of human mortality. Just as individuals tend to deny the reality of death, I believe organizations tend to deny or avoid talk of death. As a pastor faced with many funerals and terminal illnesses in my congregation, I have discovered that the tendency to deny the reality of death is common even among Christians. There is a sense in which Christians should know better. We believe in resurrection, but we must also know that before resurrection is possible, death must occur. Many of the most glorious promises of our faith are not possible this side of death. We must go through physical death to enter into eternal life.

When one considers the challenges and obstacles associated with church merger, it is legitimate to ask once again, "Why consider church merger?" I refer the reader to the extended discussion of the biblical concept of death, resurrection and lifecycle theory as applied to churches from Chapter 2 (41ff, 50ff). At this point let me state clearly: I believe church merger is most often advisable only when a congregation is far into the decline side of its life cycle. It is only advisable when less radical forms of incremental change are not enough to redirect the organization toward health and vitality. There may be some occasions when a sense of stewardship will inspire two or more strong congregations in close proximity and with significant similarities to merge and create one new congregation. However, the motivation of stewardship alone may not be enough if these churches are not stimulated by other problems. In most cases, at least one of the churches involved will be a sick, declining, or even dying congregations before they will see merger as their best hope to be part of a healthy church that fulfills the biblical purposes of the church. So what does a pastor, church leader, denomination, or church member do with a sick, declining or dead congregation? What can be done when a church cannot change enough in its present form to adapt as needed to its changed context? What can be done if the people in these churches are willing to accept radical change, willing to sacrifice, and willing to place the purpose of the Church universal ahead of even their own congregational identities? What do you do when your only option is to put new wine into old wineskins?

Is it difficult to face the realities of terminal illness and the likelihood of death for persons and for churches. But at some point you must seriously consider the alternatives.

What can be done for a sick and dying church? The same things one does with an ill person. You pray for them, you work for healing using all the technology and skills and wisdom God has given to humankind—you do all humanly and spiritually possible to restore a person to health. But, while we believe God heals peoples bodies in miraculous ways, the reality is that every human being ultimately reaches the end of their life cycle. All of the people Jesus healed physically while on earth (including Lazarus whom he resuscitated from the dead) eventually died a physical death and were buried to await resurrection (John 11:43-44).

As a pastor in ministry with elderly people or those consumed by a terminal illness, I have learned to sometimes say, "I trust that God wants to heal you, and I will pray for your healing, but I believe in your case, the method God may choose for healing will be death and resurrection." I have come to believe that death is a profound form of healing. At the recent funeral of a church member, I shared an insight gained during a short tour of duty as a hospital chaplain. Another more experienced chaplain helped me in my struggle in praying for terminally ill patients racked with pain and disease. I wanted to ask God to just take them, to end their suffering, but I felt guilty and faithless offering that prayer to God. This was his advice,

"Always pray for healing. For God always heals. It is a mystery, and it requires great trust in the wisdom of God--but you must believe that God always heals. Most of the time God heals through doctors and medicines and surgery and other forms of medical science (God is at work through all these things to heal people). Sometimes, not often, God heals with what we might call a miracle, and a disease disappears, or goes into remission temporarily. Sometimes, God heals by giving a person the strength, and grace, and dignity to live on through an illness or handicap--shining through their hardship. And sometimes God heals a person completely after their physical death. Finally, this is the healing

that comes to every person who trusts in Christ--all other healing is temporary, only this healing is forever. God didn't make our physical bodies to last forever, only our saved souls. The final act of healing is death and resurrection.”

Unlike human beings, I don't believe all organizations, including churches, must enter the death phase of their lifecycle. If an organization never fails to adapt to its ever changing context, in just the right ways, then it may continue indefinitely. However, the vast majority of congregations will one day face the end of their lifecycle. As I stated in Chapter 2, the choice is then one of despair, disgust, or integrity. Integrity equals honest acceptance of the condition of life and responsibility for that life as it is. This involves acceptance of death. This acceptance of death is not one of despair or disgust, for it is grounded in resurrection faith that looks to life beyond death. This also involves taking up one's responsibility for participation in successive generations, leaving a legacy of faith for those who come after you (Capps 27-29). The choice to merge is one of integrity in the face of death.

Adizes' work on the lifecycles of organization offers no prescriptions for organizations in the late bureaucracy or death stages of their lifecycle. Adizes is a secular organizational development writer, however, he says something that gives direction to the unique organization which is the Church of Jesus Christ when he states, “As for restoring dead organizations to life, this is probably a capability reserved for saints” (349).

Fortunately, Christ's church is called to be populated by “... those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours ...” (1 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV).

Jesus Christ once said, "I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it-the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends" (John 15:13).

I believe church merger represents a way for the saints who constitute a congregation "to lay down their lives for their friends" (John 15:13). It represents a way for congregations deep in decline to give up their lives, their identities, and physical manifestations, in order to experience new life in a new body created by a miracle of God. When a church chooses to die and be born again through merger, the pastor and members demonstrate great faith and commitment to the purpose of the church. I think Saarenin puts it well, "Church mergers have a way of reminding us that the death of a congregation can be experienced as its giving itself over to the birth of a new reality" (22).

The Role of the Leader and Vision

As stated earlier, Gregg's study concluded that the role of the pastor, as leader of the merger process was not considered significant by the majority of respondents. This study contradicts her conclusion regarding leadership. Respondents to my survey indicated, by wide margins, that the pastor was the most involved person in the decision to merge, the most influential leader throughout the process, and he or she had a very important role in facilitating the process of merger. These responses correspond closely to my review of literature which says that the leader of an organization will take on even more importance when the organization is involved in radical transformational change.

Chapter 2 provides helpful advice to pastors and other church leaders for helping people through the process of transformational change. Let me remind the reader that the

congregation is likely to fear the changes they must go through and the loss of identity that accompanies church merger. These fears and losses are real and they will take their toll on the church members and leaders. Pastors and other church leaders must be well prepared to personally cope with the sense of loss and fear, and the interpersonal conflicts they inspire, and they must also help church members cope with these challenges. In chapter two I discussed the five groups of people often found in a declining church: pioneers, curators, dysfunctionals, stand-by passengers, and the remnant. I found all five groups in the two predecessor churches of our merger. Learning how to motivate them is critical to the success of any merger.

Moeller says that pioneers are motivated by the validation of their long-term commitment to the church. They need assurances that heritage will not be forgotten or trampled on (47-48). In our merger process, we always celebrated the saints on whose shoulders we stood to look into the future. We established a heritage area with memorabilia from both predecessor churches and promised that the history of the former congregations would be a permanent part of our new congregational story.

Unfortunately with a merger, both churches in many senses cease to exist. If the viewpoint of the curator is tied solely to the identity, location, and building of the local church, they will be very difficult to motivate. At the closing service of one of the two churches involved in our church merger, I faced animosity and hostility from members of this group who came back for the closing service. Many of them lived in our community but they were not active in the church or supportive in any way. They refused to participate but were extremely resentful that we would close "their church" or more

frequently, "their parents church." The leaders of church merger must contend with the fear people have that this kind of change will destroy the distinctive traditions of their heritage (Goodhue 127).

In responding to the fear of losing identity, I tried to help people cope by teaching and preaching about the nature of the church (see Chapter 2). I tried to help members see the broader definition of their identity-beyond membership in a particular local church. They are Christians first, members of the universal Church second, members of the United Methodist denomination third, and then members of a particular congregation.

The results of this study confirm what Gregg and the review of literature said about the critical role of vision in transformational change. The vast majority of respondents said that "vision" (as defined in this study) played a very important role in the decision to merge and in the completion of the process of merger. Pastors and church leaders must lead with a clear and compelling vision to motivate people to move forward in ministry.

Our vision was to become one new, purpose-driven church. An important part of this vision was deciding what is negotiable and non-negotiable in congregational life. In examining what is and is not negotiable in church life, we identified certain sacrifices which might contradict the basic purposes of the church. We also discovered that most of the changes people initially resisted clearly fit into the negotiable category. This examination of negotiable aspects of church life gave us the opportunity to point people back to the biblical purposes of the church.

In our merger process I emphasized the biblical witness about the nature of the church and in so doing I pointed people to our purpose. I asked people to recall why each

predecessor church had been started. When we identified the purposes of evangelism, ministry, fellowship, worship, and discipling we recognized that our commitment to these purposes could carry on through the process of merger. In fact, because of the merger we have the opportunity to fulfill the original purposes of the predecessor churches in a more faithful and potentially fruitful way. That which was most valuable in our heritage could continue. The new church would build on the base of what had been done in the past to fulfill the purpose of the church. The new church would owe its life and opportunities for ministry to the history of both congregations and their ultimate commitment to fulfilling the purposes of the church.

Leadership and Conflict

The leader or leaders of transformational change must accept the fact that conflict comes along with this type of change. Conflict management skills will definitely be needed by the pastor or leader who attempts to lead churches through merger. Interpersonal conflict was cited by pastors and the second most significant obstacle faced in the process of merger. Pastors and other leaders should be empathetic and enable full participation and communication. The largest group of recommendations made on the surveys involved the importance of good communication, participation in the process, constructive dialogue (with room for dissent), and careful consideration of all options. The review of literature in Chapter 2 provides preliminary guidance to help pastors and other leaders cope with conflict.

One significant word about conflict needs to be restated. When a church is involved in a radical transformational change like church merger, even the best leadership skills will

not eliminate conflicts in every situation. The merger of the Oakdale and Beechmont congregations was one such situation. I learned that it takes great faith, great boldness, and great courage to lead some churches through merger.

Prior to my appointment, both predecessor churches had two full-time pastors. I was appointed as pastor of both congregations with the direction to lead the congregation in a process of merger that they had already decided to implement. However, when I arrived, I discovered that at least one-half of the membership in one church was opposed to merger. Furthermore, they saw my appointment as evidence that the bishop was forcing the issue and not letting them decide for themselves. Others who agreed with the idea of merger opposed the process because they saw me as the bishop's "hatchet man." The church leaders and I decided to restart the process of discernment and decision from the beginning and let the church leaders make the final decision. However, there was intense emotional opposition from one group of resentful members who could still not shake the sense of being forced to merge.

Change should not be forced on people, otherwise strong resistance may occur. This may be the biggest reason why the merger process here was so difficult. Through no fault of my own, from before I arrived, many in the congregation believed they were being forced to merge.

We established a "Vision and Uniting Team" to reconsidering all the strengths and weaknesses of merger. I realize now that I was trying to "put the genie back into the bottle." The two camps were firmly established and they merely went through the motions of reconsidering their positions. At least one of the two churches involved was

hopelessly spilt on this issue. Whichever way the church moved, at least one half of the congregation would leave in anger and disgust.

The one question that I wanted answered to was this: "What does God want us to do?" We set up daily prayer vigils for one to two months to meet early each morning, alternating days between the sanctuaries of both congregations. In one these prayer times I became convinced that God wanted us to go ahead with merger. At the same time, I realized how entrenched and immovable the opponents were. They totally boycotted these prayer meetings. They were not open to dialogue, compromise, or a change in their point of view. They refused to even meet with other Christians from their congregation and the other congregation who were sincerely praying that we would discern God's will. As more time passed the more bitter and hurtful their words and actions became.

I reached a point where I realized that merger was what we must do; I was convinced it was God's will; it was the only hope of saving the churches from slow and meaningless deaths; and the leaders and workers of the churches wanted to go in this direction. I began to speak and lead boldly in that direction. From that point on, the dissenters were forced to follow me and others in that path, to get in our way, or to go their own way.

Paul Heinecke suggests that leaders of organizational change should be both people-oriented and task-oriented. However, declining churches often let a small group of dissenters (or even an individual) control the agenda of the church, stifling all efforts at transformational change. Recognizing this dynamic in churches, Heinecke argues that "there will come a time when the mission [task/purpose] of the church take precedence over supportive relationships" (Heinecke 104-105).

A critical event in the process of our merger came at a meeting of one of the administrative boards a month before the final vote to unite. A man known in the church for being both negative and influential decided he was opposed to the idea of merger. By this time, the leadership team of the churches and I were convinced that merger was the will of God for both churches and the only hope to once again fulfill God's purposes for the church. In years past, this man's voice of dissent had stopped many worthwhile initiatives dead in their tracks. After making his speech in opposition, he said, "If you proceed with this, I will quit supporting the church financially and move my membership to another church." He sat down expecting our plans for merger to disappear. I responded, "I am sorry you feel that way, but we will put this to a vote in the congregation and I will do all in my power to see that the vote is in favor of merger. You do what you have to do. I am not asking you to leave but if you would be happier in another church I won't stop you from going."

After several people recovered from nearly fainting, the board broke out in cathartic applause. Nothing similar had ever been said by a pastor in a board meeting. No pastor had tried to lead with that kind of boldness. It was a pivotal moment and one that made possible the final decision to move forward with merger. Incidentally this man respected my strength and conviction and has continued to be involved in the new church formed by our merger. Leaders must not be afraid of conflict and placing the purpose of the church over the feelings of individuals at odds with those purposes.

The results of this study agreed with the review of literature, my own experience, and common sense: it is best to go slow, be patient, try to build consensus and

participation. However, I realized that one of the churches was hopelessly divided on this issue. In this case, patience, taking it slow, and avoiding conflict were not the best choices.

I realized that if we failed to merge, the second church (whose members were generally in support of merger) would be hurt, and would not be able to make the changes and improvements needed for growth. I also realized that the other church would split over this issue in any event. If we failed to act quickly, then the impatient remnant would leave, and the church would be destined to a slow and meaningless death. This was acceptable to some, but not to me. One of my most bitter opponents in the process of merger admitted that without radical transformation, the church had no hope for renewal and growth. In despair and disgust (versus integrity), he said, "I know we are a sick, old church, and that we can't grow. I don't care about growing or reaching out. Just go and let us die in peace." Several church members, with similar sentiments, had set the congregation up for split in any event.

In my opinion, the situation was win or lose—and if those who wanted to merge were to win, then there must be fight for it. The opponents would never surrender or cease fire until the war was clearly over (and some still haven't laid down their arms).

What the opponents of merger hoped I would accept was a war of attrition. However, I knew I would lose such a war, the remnant would not wait for it and merger would fail. I thought the cost of losing in this case was too high to pay.

If not a war of attrition, the opponents of merger and change hoped that I would give them time to wear me and others down with a guerrilla war against us (character attacks,

gossip, petitions to the bishop). Again, I I knew I couldn't win that type of war (can anyone win against a suicidal guerrilla force?).

I realized that the only war I had a chance to win required a frontal assault. Since both sides were settled in their position and opponents were not willing to listen, or even pray about it, then a rapid formal decision, was in order. Win or lose, we needed to get the decision made. Even maintenance ministry in this contentious environment was all but impossible. Church growth or renewal was out of the question until we were past this battle.

Opponents and supporters of merger presented their case on the platform and behind the scenes. Finally, we put it to a official vote in both congregations. While I thought merger would prevail, I believed, even if it failed, the churches would be better off with the issue put to rest. We voted. Merger passed, in both churches, but in the smaller of the two congregations, it passed by the narrowest of margins.

Leadership and Prayer

One major mistake in the design of my study was not including any questions about prayer. After the need for good communication, the need for prayer and seeking God's guidance were the most frequent recommendations written in by respondents.

I prayed fervently for strength, guidance, protection, and forgiveness often during our process of merger. In fact, I have never been driven to my knees more strongly by any other experience. For more than a month before the final decision to merge, we opened the sanctuary every morning for a time of discerning prayer and encouraged all members who wanted to know the will of God to meet together for prayer. Many joined me for

that special time of prayer. I believe we heard the voice of God and were enabled by him to move forward in his will. Still, the one thing I would most readily change about my role in the merger process was defined for me by the late Samuel Chadwick: "I wished I had prayed more, even if I had worked less; and from the bottom of my heart I wish I had prayed better."

Limitations of the Study

This study would have been much more valuable had I been able to target a larger population. I had originally planned to include the entire denomination or at least the merged churches in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. I abandoned the idea of a wider survey when I discovered that no agency, board, or office in the whole United Methodist denomination bothers to keep records on churches formed through merger (or new churches started). While I believe this study will be helpful to the churches of the Kentucky Conference, the limited size of the population studied severely restricts the ability to generalize for the denomination as a whole or churches in other denominations or locations.

While lifecycle theory was an important part of the review of literature, I was unable to include it in the survey research. In conversations with my congregational reflection group and survey pre-test group, I determined that the concepts involved are too complex to include in a self-administered survey. I had considered using focus groups who could respond to a verbal explanation of the concepts or perhaps a written summary, and then, for either case, answer questions about their churches position on the lifecycle before and after merger. However, focus groups would involve a small number of participants from

an already small population. I decided the information gathered would be essentially useless.

It would have been helpful to track the pattern of the numbers used in this study for membership, worship, and Sunday school attendance for several years prior to the merger. I am certain from personal contact with the pastors involved in these mergers that each church was in decline before merger, but I have no evidence to describe the rate or pattern of decline. If I had investigated long-term attendance numbers and other objective data, I might have been able to identify the position of each church on its lifecycle before the merger and after the merger.

This study is also limited by the length of time since merger for several of the churches included in the population. Only eight churches in the Kentucky Conference fit the criteria of merger used in this study. Of those, only seven participated in the survey. Of those seven, three churches had only been merged three years or less when the attendance and membership numbers were recorded. Two of the churches had only reported attendance and membership numbers for one year following their merger. The only churches that demonstrated an increase in worship attendance were those who had been merged eight or more years. It is possible that any of the churches involved in this study could show an increase if given more time following their mergers.

I was unable to find any relationship between numerical growth or decline in the churches and the survey responses. The pattern of survey responses was consistent from church to church regardless of length of time following merger, rate of increase or decline in attendance or membership.

From my survey questions it is hard to quantify the costs associated with merger—the costs I know from my personal experience to be involved in the process. When given a chance to write in a response, the number one criticism was the loss of members and participants due to merger. I should have included more questions about the costs involved in the survey, questions like: Did people leave your church as a result of the merger decision, process or change etc? How many? How did this affect you spiritually, and emotionally? Was this a difficult process? Would you advise other churches to try other less, radical forms of change first?

I have a moderately close personal relationship with most of the pastors in our conference who have pastored or are now pastoring the churches in this study. The extremely positive sentiments about merger reflected in the surveys generally, and in the pastors responses in particular, do not match what most of these pastors say in person. I was struck with the inconsistency when I noticed that 100 percent of pastors surveyed feel hopeful about their church after the merger. For such hopeful people they, like me, often whine about the challenges in their church. I think the survey design did not elicit sufficient detail about the costs and difficulties involved in church merger.

Another limitation was the inability to include the people who left the church since the merger. Some of these may have left because of the merger and their critical comments would be very helpful. However, as I described in Chapters 1 and 3, this group was impossible to locate in numbers large enough to make their comments significant.

In discussing biblical metaphors I believe I made an error by not including stewardship along with birth, marriage, death, and death and resurrection. Although I

discussed stewardship at length in the review of literature, I included it as a separate item, apart from the discussion of biblical metaphors. Furthermore, I did not include stewardship as a separate option in the survey when asking what biblical metaphors were used to help interpret the experience. I suspect that stewardship may have been, in fact, the most frequently chosen response, had I included it in the question about metaphors or biblical comparisons. This suspicion is supported by the fact that four of the top five motivations for merger chosen by survey respondents suggested stewardship was of paramount importance.

Unexpected Personal Benefits

One of the unexpected benefits of this study was my increased appreciation for the value of research and quantitative methods. One illustration is the remarks of Ezra Earl Jones. Virtually all of the dissertations I read about merger and each of the church renewal books with any reference to merger included the quote from Ezra Earl Jones found on page nineteen of this study. Jones was highly critical of church merger in general and very disparaging about its usefulness as a means for starting new faith communities. I also heard references to the conclusions of Jones in several conversations with directors of new church development from around the Southeastern Jurisdiction. At some point, I started wondering how he reached those conclusions. The conclusions of authors such as Jones and Schaller have a tremendous influence on the attitudes of pastors about many things including church merger. But one must be careful to ask several questions: What kinds of research were used? How were facts confirmed? What population was studied? What methods of data collection and analysis were used? How might a person examine

the same set of facts to confirm or refute their conclusions? Everyone has an opinion, but he or she can be right or wrong or somewhere in between. Surely, the opinions of a person with a wide range of experience is valuable on face value, but how much more valuable might they be if they are backed up by careful research and a reporting of the steps taken to reach their conclusions? If Jones, Schaller, Easum, and other church renewal experts are in error, and they have drawn the map everyone is using, then many people and churches may end up traveling in the wrong direction.

Consider an oft-quoted conclusion by Bill Easum regarding relocation after merger. He claims that the only merged churches that will have any chance of long-term success will be those that sell both properties, relocate, and build a new one (1). However, there is no indication of the method used to reach this conclusion.

Of the eight churches involved in this study, only two have a completely new site and facility. Many renovated and in some cases they even built a new sanctuary; however, they still use all or part of existing facilities and/or property.

It is difficult to judge the validity of Easum's conclusions, but even if they are valid, relocation and rebuilding will not be viable options for many churches who merge or who should consider merger. In the case of our church merger, the leaders had several concerns including the advanced age of many members and the belief they would not be willing and/or able to move to a new location or to find a new church, and would therefore be left without a church to support them. We also had a desire and a sense of divine calling to continue ministry in an ethnically and socio-economically diverse area. We recognized that church growth experts would be unlikely to recommend planting a

church in our neighborhood, and many churches from our area have relocated to more fertile fields for ministry (you may translate that to predominately white, upwardly mobile, suburban areas where new homes, schools, and businesses are proliferating). The members of the predecessor churches involved in our merger didn't want to join the flight of churches from this area. Another reason that selling the property and relocating was not attractive is that money raised from the sale of older facilities, in locations with a depressed real estate market, would not be great enough to cover the cost of property and building in new location. Instead of starting with a large sum of money for renovations, equipment, and supplies in one of the current locations, these churches would be forced to start in a temporary location with funds restricted to use for property or material items. If they built soon after merger, they would be faced with a significant debt, and in many cases, the same limited base of financial support at the outset that existed in the predecessor churches.

Contribution to the Existing Body of Knowledge

As I indicated in Chapter 2, there is little published information about church merger. The contribution of this work is more in adding to the body of knowledge rather than in its revision. However, this study does offer some significant revisions to the existing body of knowledge. I believe this study contradicts the conclusions of Gregg regarding the significance of pastoral leadership. I also believe this study presents a broader context which helps evaluate the conclusions and observations in the case studies/dissertations written by Hahn, Simpson, Bowman, and Crispell.

With the review of literature, the results of the survey, and the conclusions, I believe I have provided a compilation of important information as a guide to others who may go through the experience of church merger or who want to consider its unique challenges and opportunities. As one who has been through that experience, I know this study would have helped me immensely. Had I read this study before our merger I would have done several things differently. For example, in my case I would have involved the district superintendent more and let him take the “heat” for misreading the situation here about their readiness for merger. I would have brought in people who had gone through merger to share inspiring testimonies of the positive things they experienced. I would have not taken the conflict and attacks so personally or so hard. I would have studied less about church planting and more about revitalizing an existing church. I would have prayed more fervently earlier in the process and more often overall. I would have had more realistic expectations about the immediate results following merger. I would have considered working with the divided church to consider other churches with which to merge so they would have less of a sense of being forced into a particular merger.

Recommendations for Future Research

As indicated above, this study would have been greatly improved if all of the churches studied had been merged for a longer period of time. I believe it would be helpful for someone to report trends for growth and/or decline in membership, worship and Sunday school attendance for these churches for four or more years before and after merger.

While I found the use of lifecycle theory to be helpful, others may view it as too deterministic to apply to churches. As I indicated in chapter two, if a church or other

organization responds properly to change, then the lifecycle bell curve may be transformed into a recurring dolphin curve that allow the organization to avoid decline and death.

Future studies may attempt to describe the times and situations when this kind of transformation may be possible.

One might also suggest that to radically transform a congregation deep in decline through church merger may constitute a form of organizational euthanasia. Future study may consider how to objectively assess when a congregational is functionally in the death phase of their lifecycle.

This study implies that a Purpose-Driven church orientation may effect the process and results of church merger and/or church revitalization. Future study might attempt to determine relationships between this orientation and church effectiveness/success and/or growth and decline.

Concluding Personal Comments

This study has presented an objective analysis and evaluation of churches merged in the Kentucky Conference from 1983 to 1998. However, it has also been heavily influenced by my personal experience of leading two churches two the process of merger. For me, the experience of leading the process of church merger has been often harrowing, often rewarding, and certainly life changing. I conclude this study with two analogies that have helped me interpret this experience in the hope that they will help others who are engaged in, or who are considering church merger as a strategy for starting new faith communities.

A Map Through the Minefield

During the Persian Gulf War young men in basic training came from Fort Knox to attend a spiritual retreat hosted by the church I was then serving. Many of them spoke with confidence and even excitement about the war. They were sure they had what it took to prevail in the conflict. They were confident and ready to face whatever lay ahead.

This confident attitude has been found in new recruits throughout history. However, I am sure that these soldiers would feel somewhat different as they drew closer to armed conflict and as they anticipated the probable challenges and hardships and loss looming before them. During the fighting itself, I suspect they would just hope to get through it alive, to keep their courage, to do the right thing.

Once in the midst of battle, soldiers must look into the faces of other soldiers; young men much like them, also hoping to get through the war alive, also hoping to keep their courage, also hoping to do the right thing. But these other soldiers have assumed the role of enemies. And while one would rather not be the one that dies, there must be, even if only at a subconscious level, a feeling of remorse for even the death of an enemy.

Imagine how these soldiers might feel after being forced to go with their company through a minefield. It is inevitable, that along the way some mines will be detonated. Soldiers will be wounded, some mortally. The soldiers and many of their company may make it through the minefield alive. They will surely be relieved, but also shell shocked and grieving the cost of the journey.

Imagine someone coming at that moment and saying to them, "The war is over, we've won!" What might be the first thought of that soldier? I suspect that before a

sense of jubilation, there would come a sense of being confused, of being doubtful, of being sad. They might think to themselves, “How can I think about winners and losers now, when so many have lost so much in this journey?”

For such soldiers, a feeling of jubilation will eventually come. But first would come the feeling that they have been through hell. They would conclude that, whatever they might have accomplished in the process, the journey wasn't easy and the price was high.

In many ways, my journey through the minefield of church merger is like the narrative I have just shared. I was both a soldier of the Lord and a leader of others through a very difficult journey. The battles are over; by all appearances we have been victorious, but the journey wasn't easy and the price was high. It is my greatest hope that this study will provide a map through the minefield of church merger so that the journey of others may be easier than ours.

Death and Resurrection

The biblical witness of the early church provides an excellent narrative context in which to interpret the experience of church merger. The members of early church faced many challenges as they tried to build healthy growing congregation. The apostles were arrested again and again. There were repeated plots to kill them. Stephen was eventually stoned to death. Paul became a Christian, but instead of congratulating him, his family, friends, and co-workers put his face on "Wanted: Dead or Alive" posters all over Israel. The Christians lived in hiding, moving their places of worship wherever they could to continue their missionary work. They faced rejection, abuse, misunderstanding, and conflict with other Christians, and it went on and on.

It occurs to me that we often want to claim the promises these disciples clung to in the midst of their trials and tribulations. We also want to claim the victories they celebrated—but we shy away from claiming the suffering that was so common in their lives. But the way of Jesus always goes by way of the cross. We sometimes try to avoid the fact that suffering and death are unavoidable stops on the journey of the faithful to new life. We are like Peter. Notice the remarkable contrast of faith and fear in the story of Peter's great confession. Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter confesses, "You are the Christ." Jesus says, "My Father in heaven has revealed this to you and says on this [kind of faith] I will build my church" (Mark 8:27-29).

But then Jesus begins to describe for Peter and the others the cost of discipleship: the price for building his church, the way that he will travel. Since we are Jesus' disciples, or followers, we must go the way he does—his way to new life goes through the cross—the way of sacrifice, suffering, dying to self, dying to the world.

When Jesus lays out the cost, Peter balks, backpedals, and his new found faith evaporates. Peter tries to find a less transformational way toward new life and Jesus is forced to rebuke him. Jesus tells Peter, that he is being dominated by Satan. Finally, the disciples have to see it done by Jesus himself to believe it is possible and necessary.

I am reminded of the second sermon I preached in 1982. The title was "Flee or Follow." I described the contrast between the frightened disciples after the crucifixion (who fled) and the faithful disciples of the early church (who followed). The latter had a remarkable confidence and peace and power in their lives. I asked, "What happened to

change them?" Quite simply, the answer is found in the message repeated often in the Bible and heard often from the lips of Christians throughout history, "He is Risen!"

In Christ, life comes out of sacrifice, suffering, and death. By way of the cross, Jesus has conquered the power of death and shown us the way to life on the other side.

After sharing a summary of the past accomplishments of the predecessor churches involved in our merger, I shared the following in the closing celebration for those churches. In my opinion, these statements summarize the motivations, obstacles, and hopes associated with our church merger. With these statements, this study ends where it began: with the decision of the Oakdale and Beechmont United Methodist churches to "lay down their lives for their friends" (John 15:13), so they could be reborn as Gateway Community Church, United Methodist.

Our Present: Challenge and Opportunity

Sometimes it is very difficult to recognize the signs of decline as they come upon a church. Sometimes changes overwhelm a church slowly over time-so slowly it is hard to accept the reality of decline. We remember days of growth when each room was filled with bustling activity. We thank God for our glory days. But now we look at a sanctuary each week with more and more empty pews. The majority of attendees are senior adults with the will but not the means to lead us in renewal. We struggle with the reality that we can no longer justify the appointment of a well qualified full-time pastor. Our classrooms have the smell of emptiness. We do see that decline is more the result of changes in the community than anyone's spiritual inadequacy or lack of commitment. We know that we have tried to do the best we could as pastors and people over the past decades. However, regardless of the how or why of decline-we see that we have in fact declined.

We see now that the momentum of growth and vitality has left this place. We are no longer reaching out to our changing community to offer the grace, salvation, healing, and power that Christ has called us to share. The new needs of our community cry out and we are unable to respond. We have come to a

critical point in our decline - we are in danger of losing our heritage of faithful ministry by dying without a future or a hope to enable us to build on our past.

So we have looked for what the Lord would have us do now. We have asked the Lord: "How should we work toward a revitalized church that will be a fitting continuation of the legacy of love and faith that has characterized this church? How can we live on in some way so that the work of the Lord will continue and prosper?" The vision and will of God as we have discerned it may be described in these scriptures:

Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor." John 12:24-26 (NRSV)

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, though they may die, they shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11: 25-26 (NRSV)

We answer, "Yes Lord, we believe." Following the calling and example of our Lord we will die to be born again. Through our faith this day, we will work to see the dawning of a new day of ministry for Jesus Christ. We will preserve our heritage, we will continue building on our legacy, we will remember the saints with thanksgiving, we will change and find new more effective ways to be the church together. Together, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we will be re-born as one new church.

Our Future: the Promise of New Life

By faith we believe the legacy of love and ministry that has been carried by our congregations will continue and prosper as it is re-born through the union of our congregations. We will always be Oakdale and Beechmont in our hearts, but together in the new church born from our union, we will be more and better for Christ. For some in our congregations, we will continue ministry in a new place, for all ministry will continue under a new name. For all of us the heritage of faithful ministry represented by our congregations will continue as we build on the past and move toward better days of ministry for Christ. Trusting God, together we will all be part of a church that will grow, prosper, and significantly advance the cause of Christ in the years ahead.

We still have a tremendous amount of work and praying to do; our uniting alone is not the answer to revitalized and effective ministry, but it does give us an awesome opportunity to work toward those goals with the real hope of success and the blessing of God. The prayers, presence, financial resources, and service of our two congregations--when pooled together--provide a real opportunity to turn back the tide of decline that has been overwhelming both congregations. Using our combined resources when can face our greatest challenge yet, making the creative changes and choices necessary to become a church that will offer effective ministry into the 21st century. So help us God.

STUDY OF CHURCHES FORMED THROUGH MERGER / UNION IN THE KENTUCKY CONFERENCE

December 27, 1999

Dear Friend in Christ,

Would you be kind enough to use your experience to help another congregation? Taking a few minutes to answer the questions of this survey will be a great benefit to others.

Since your church was formed through a merger or unification process I am writing to ask you to share what you have learned about this process with others who are considering the strengths, weakness, and opportunities associated with church merger or union. For at least the past 15 years church mergers / unions have been the most frequently used method for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference. However, there has been little research about this process to help those engaged in it or considering its use.

This survey is part of my Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary. The results of the study will also be used by the task team on New Church and Congregational Development of the Kentucky Conference. A summary of this study is also expected to be published in "Net Results," a national publication for pastors and lay church leaders.

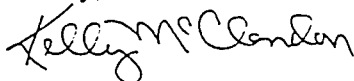
Your Pastor shared your name with me in the hope that you would help in this survey since you were an active member of the church prior to the merger / union and are now an active member of the new church formed through this process.

This survey should take no more than fifteen or twenty minutes to complete. Your identity and that of your church will not be revealed to anyone in the reporting of survey results. The code numbers at the top of the survey will be used to protect your privacy and to follow-up on unreturned surveys only.

I know this is a busy time of the year, but I need you to complete the survey as soon as possible. Please return to me no later than January 5, 2000 using the enclosed stamped envelope.

I am grateful for your time and assistance with this important survey. May God bless you for your willingness to bless others.

Sincerely,



Kelly McClendon, Pastor of Gateway Community Church, UM
Doctor of Ministry Student at Asbury Theological Seminary

P.S. I am aware that some of you used the term "union" exclusively to describe the creation of your church as opposed to "merger." However, a part of this study involves comparing results with previous studies that used the term "merger" exclusively. To make this comparison possible I must use the same terms, therefore the term "merger" will be used primarily in this survey. Please forgive any offense this may cause. Thank you.

Study of Churches Formed Through Merger In the Kentucky Conference

PLEASE RETURN BY JANUARY 5, 2000

1. To what extent were the following people involved in the final decision to merge?
- | | <u>Greatly</u> | <u>Moderately</u> | <u>Little</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| a. Denominational Representatives: | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| b. Pastor(s) of the Congregations: | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| c. Local Church Governing Bodies: | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| d. Individual Lay People: | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| e. Entire Membership: | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| f. Other _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 |
2. Please answer the following questions about the new congregation:
- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Don't Know</u> |
|--|------------|-----------|-------------------|
| a. Is the new congregation in a desirable location? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| b. Is the new congregation financially more stable than one or both of its predecessors? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| c. Are you hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| d. Does the new congregation use the facilities of one of the predecessor churches? | 1 | 2 | 3 |
3. Did your former congregation have the larger or smaller attendance before the merger?
(Check one) _____ Larger attendance _____ Smaller Attendance
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The two former congregations have now genuinely become one.
_____ Strongly agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly disagree
5. Did you have to leave the facility of your predecessor local church _____ Yes _____ No
6. What was your role in the congregation? (Check all that apply)
_____ Pastor _____ Church member _____ Officer / Leader _____ Other: _____
7. Who emerged as the most influential leader(s) during the process of merger -- from the consideration of the idea, through the decision to merge, and then creation of the new church identity? (Check one)
- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| _____ The pastor (or pastors) | _____ Denominational representative |
| _____ A lay person | _____ A team, committee, or task group |
| _____ Church consultant | _____ Other: _____ |

8. Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important motivations for merger starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only five.

In your situation, the greatest motivations for merging were:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other forms of change did not improve conditions and opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to move to a new location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to create a growing congregation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To better fulfill the purpose of the church | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to help a small, struggling congregation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Size of the congregation | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to join a larger, stronger congregation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changing neighborhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to try something new |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial stress | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of the denomination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capital/building needs | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of pastor(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Similarities between the congregations | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of lay leaders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to undertake new mission | Other: _____ |
| | Other: _____ |

9. Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important obstacles experienced starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only five.

During your merger process, from the consideration of the idea, through the decision to merge, and then creation of the new church identity, the greatest obstacles experienced were:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information about changes | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to maintain size of your former church fellowship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient reasons given for this type of change | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of losing congregational identity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-personal conflicts resulting from changes | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desirable neighborhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Too little leadership or vision for merging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Control of combined financial resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Too little congregational participation in decision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Affection for church building or property | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of the denomination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Differences between the congregations | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of pastor(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to existing ministries | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of lay leaders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to current location | Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty to existing congregation and its history | Other: _____ |

10. Which of the following biblical comparisons were used to describe the experience of merger? (Check the one most frequently used):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birth (New church as baby) | <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage (The two become one) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death (End of an era) | <input type="checkbox"/> Death and Resurrection (Dying to be reborn) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

11. How important was the role of the pastor(s) in facilitating the process of merger?

- Very Important Somewhat important Unimportant Don't know

12. "Vision" can be defined as a specific image of what the church may become or what it will be at some point in the future that provides a sense of direction and motivation to move forward in ministry.
- a. To what extent did "Vision" play an important role in your decision to merge?
 Very Important Somewhat important Unimportant Don't know
- b. To what extent did "Vision" play an important role in completing the process of merger?
 Very Important Somewhat important Unimportant Don't know
13. On a scale of one to ten, rate the success of the merger in your opinion (Circle one number):
- a. Unsuccessful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly Successful
- b. Why do you consider it successful or unsuccessful?
14. What would you do differently if you had the chance?
15. What recommendations would you make to other congregations considering a merger?
16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Church merger is a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference. (Please check one)
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree
17. To what extent do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the merger process in your church? (please check one):
 Very knowledgeable Somewhat knowledgeable Little knowledge of process

Please mail this survey to: **Pastor Kelly D. McClendon,**
c/o Gateway Community Church, U.M.,
4623 Southern Parkway, Louisville, KY 40214

BY JANUARY 5, 2000

Code _____

APPENDIX B

date _____

name and address _____

Dear _____,

Would you use your experience to help another congregation? Answering 12 simple questions will be a benefit to others. As your congregation is the result of a merger, I am writing to ask if you would share what you have learned about merging congregations with others considering the same process.

Congregational mergers affect the very life of a church. In our denomination, approximately 10 new congregations are formed by mergers each year. Despite the importance and frequency of mergers, little is written on this topic. As a Doctor of Ministry student at Princeton Theological Seminary, I hope to gather information from people such as yourself to help others as they discuss the possibilities of merging.

Your congregation is listed in the General Assembly Statistics as one which is the result of a recent merger. Would you and two other lay people from the church be willing to fill out the enclosed survey? I would like the current clerk of session and one lay person from each of the predecessor congregations fill out the survey so that I may have different points of view on your particular situation. These surveys should be returned to me in the envelopes provided by March 1, 1995.

I am grateful for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Carol M. Gregg
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
at Princeton Theological Seminary

APPENDIX B

"SHALL THE TWO BECOME ONE?"
A Survey on the Decision to Merge

Please mail this survey to Rev. Carol Gregg, First Presbyterian Church, 333 Spring Garden St., Easton, PA 18042 by March 1, 1995.

Name of Merged Congregation _____

City and State _____

Names of Predecessor Congregations:

1. Please answer each of the following pertaining to the similarities and differences of the predecessor congregations.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. Were the two congregations of similar size?	1	2	3
b. Were the two congregations of similar racial composition?	1	2	3
c. Did the two congregations have a similar average age?	1	2	3
d. Were the two congregations equally friendly?	1	2	3
e. Did the two congregations have similar styles of worship?	1	2	3
f. Did the two congregations have similar theological views? (conservative/liberal)	1	2	3
g. Were the two churches located in similar types of neighborhoods?	1	2	3
h. Was the financial situation of the two congregations similar?	1	2	3
i. Were the properties of the two congregations in similar condition?	1	2	3
j. Were the missions of the congregations similar?	1	2	3

7. Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important factors starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only 5 in each section.

The greatest stimuli for merging were:

- _____ size of the congregations
- _____ changing neighborhood
- _____ financial stress
- _____ capital/building needs
- _____ similarities between the two congregations
- _____ desire to undertake new mission
- _____ desire to move to a new location
- _____ desire to create a growing congregation
- _____ willingness to help a small, struggling congregation
- _____ willingness to join a larger, stronger congregation
- _____ willingness to try something new
- _____ thorough discussions between congregations
- _____ influence of the presbytery
- _____ influence of pastor(s)
- _____ influence of lay leaders
- _____ other

The greatest obstacles to merging were:

- _____ desirable size of congregations
- _____ desirable neighborhood
- _____ financial strength, special memorial gifts
- _____ affection for church building or property
- _____ differences between the two congregations
- _____ commitment to existing ministries
- _____ commitment to current location
- _____ loyalty to existing congregation and its history
- _____ ability to maintain current congregational size
- _____ fear of losing congregational identity
- _____ fear of change
- _____ too little leadership or vision for merging
- _____ too little congregational participation in decision
- _____ influence of the presbytery
- _____ influence of pastor(s)
- _____ influence of lay leaders
- _____ other

Other Comments:

2. How many months (or years) passed between the time merging was first suggested and the first service of the new congregation?

3. To what extent were the following people involved in the merger discussions?

	greatly involved	moderately involved	little involvement
a. Presbytery representatives:	1	2	3
b. Pastors of the congregations:	1	2	3
c. Sessions:	1	2	3
d. Individual lay people:	1	2	3
e. Entire Membership:	1	2	3

4. Describe the process by which the two congregations chose to merge.

5. What resources, print or human, did you use to facilitate the process?

6. Please answer the following questions about the new congregation.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. Is the new congregation in a desirable location?	1	2	3
b. Is the new congregation growing numerically?	1	2	3
c. Has worship attendance increased since the merger?	1	2	3
d. Is the congregation financially more stable than its predecessors?	1	2	3
e. Do you believe the location of the new congregation is an asset?	1	2	3
f. Do you think the two congregations have genuinely become one?	1	2	3
g. Are you hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries?	1	2	3

8. On a scale of one to ten, rate the success of the merger in your opinion.

unsuccessful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 highly successful

Why do you consider it successful or unsuccessful?

9. What would you do differently if you had the chance?

10. What recommendations would you make to other congregations considering a merger?

11. With which congregation did you worship prior to the merger?

12. What was your role in the congregation? (Pastor, elder, deacon, etc.)

Optional: If you would be willing to fill out a second, more in depth questionnaire, please fill in your name and address below.

Name: _____

Address: _____

THANK YOU !

Appendix C

Study of Churches Formed Through Merger In the Kentucky Conference (*FIRST DRAFT*)

Please mail this survey to: Pastor Kelly D. McClendon, c/o Gateway Community Church, U.M.,
 4623 Southern Parkway, Louisville, KY 40214

PLEASE RETURN BY JANUARY 5, 2000

1. To what extent were the following people involved in the decision to merge?

	<u>Greatly</u>	<u>Moderately</u>	<u>Little</u>
a. Denominational Representatives:	1	2	3
b. Pastor(s) of the Congregations:	1	2	3
c. Local Church Governing Bodies:	1	2	3
d. Individual Lay People:	1	2	3
e. Entire Membership:	1	2	3

2. Please answer the following questions about the new congregation:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
a. Is the new congregation in a desirable location?	1	2	3
b. Do you believe the location of the new congregation is an asset?	1	2	3
c. Is the new congregation financially more stable than its predecessors?	1	2	3
d. Do you think the two congregations have genuinely become one?	1	2	3
e. Are you hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries?	1	2	3

3. With which congregation did you worship prior to the merger? _____

4. Did you have to leave the facility of your predecessor local church ___ Yes ___ No

5. What was your role in the congregation? (Check all that apply)

___ Pastor ___ Church member ___ Officer / Leader ___ Other: _____

6. Who emerged as the most influential leader(s) during the process of merger? (Check one)

___ The pastor ___ A lay person ___ Church consultant
 ___ Denominational representative ___ A team, committee, or task group
 ___ Other: _____

7. To what extent do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the merger process in your church? (please check one):
 Very knowledgeable Somewhat knowledgable Little knowlege of process

8. Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important factors starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only five in each section.

The greatest motivations for merging were:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other forms of change did not improve conditions and opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to move to a new location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to create a growing congregation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To better fulfill the purpose of the church | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to help a small, struggling congregation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Size of the congregation | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to join a larger, stronger congregation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changing neighborhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to try something new |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial stress | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of the denomination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capital/building needs | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of pastor(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Similarities between the congregations | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of lay leaders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to undertake new mission | Other: _____ |

9. Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important factors starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only five in each section.

The greatest obstacles experienced during the merger process were:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information about changes | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to maintain size of <u>your</u> church fellowship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient reasons given for this type of change | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of losing congregational identity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-personal conflicts resulting from changes | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desirable neighborhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Too little leadership or vision for merging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combining financial resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Too little congregational participation in decision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Affection for church building or property | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of the denomination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Differences between the congregations | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of pastor(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to existing ministries | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence of lay leaders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to current location | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty to existing congregation and its history | |

10. Which of the following biblical comparisons were used to describe the experience of merger?
 (Check the one most frequently used):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birth (New church as baby) | <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage (The two become one) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death (End of an era) | <input type="checkbox"/> Death and Resurrection (Dying to be reborn) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

11. How important was the role of the pastor in facilitating the process of merger?

- Very Important Somewhat important Unimportant Don't know

12. "Vision" can be defined as a specific image of where the church is going or what it will be at some point in the future that provides a sense of direction and motivation to move forward in ministry.

- a. To what extent did "Vision" play an important role in your decision to merge?
 Very Important Somewhat important Unimportant Don't know
- b. To what extent did "Vision" play an important role in completing the process of merger?
 Very Important Somewhat important Unimportant Don't know

13. On a scale of one to ten, rate the success of the merger in your opinion (Circle one number):

- a. Unsuccessful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly Successful
- b. Why do you consider it successful or unsuccessful?

14. What would you do differently if you had the chance?

15. What recommendations would you make to other congregations considering a merger?

16. To what extent would you consider church merger a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference? (Please check one)

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

Code _____

Pre-Test of Survey

Instructions to group. You have just received this in the mail. At approximately the same time there should be listing in your bulletin and /or newsletter from the Pastor encouraging you to complete the survey. Please read the cover letter and then complete the survey at this time.

Clarity / Format Issues

1. Now, please go back through the survey and mark any questions that you may want to discuss.
 - a. Mark any questions that were unclear
 - b. Mark any questions that you want to know more about
2. Was this a difficult or easy survey?
3. What do you think of the length? It is reasonable?
4. Do you have suggestions about making it more user friendly?

Content Issues

Note you will gathering data from Conference journals regarding attendance and membership an correlating this to various survey questions.

1. With this question I want to know who was involved in making the decision to merge.

Does this question help provide this information?

2. With this question I wanted to know:
 - a. / b. Your opinion about the location of your new congregation
 - c. The financial strength of the new congregation
 - d. The degree of unity of identity in the new congregation.
 - e. Your attitude about the future of the church.

Do these questions help provide this information?

3. This question identifies the predecessor church of respondent for purpose of correlation with other questions. (Correlation relates to differences between the size of predecessor churches -- another way to ask this?)

Does this question help provide this information?

4. This question identifies the respondents who had to leave the facility of their former church for purpose of correlation with other questions (Correlation relates to sacrifice involved in leaving facility and its influence on opinions of merger process)

Does this question help provide this information?

5. This question identifies the respondent (Main necessity is distinguishing between pastor and church leaders / officers in contrast to regular members).

Does this question help provide this information?

6. This question is intended to determine your opinion regarding the most influential leader during the process of merger (as opposed to in the decision to merge only)

Does this question help provide this information?

7. This question identifies respondents self-assessment of their knowledgeability about the merger.

Does this question help provide this information?

8. This question is intended to determine respondents opinion of the five most important motivations for merger.

Does this question help provide this information?

9. This question is intended to determine respondents opinion of the five most important obstacles encountered during the merger process itself.

Does this question help provide this information?

10. This question is intended to identify what biblical comparisons, if any, were used to describe the experience of merger.

Does this question help provide this information?

11. This question is intended to determine the importance of the role the pastor played in facilitating the process of merger.

Does this question help provide this information?

12. This question first offers a definition of "Vision".

a. Was this definition clear? Useful?

b. This question is also intended to determine the role of vision in the decision to merger, and in the facilitating the process of merger..

Does this question help provide this information?

13. a. This question is intended to determine the respondents opinion about the success of the merger ("success" is not defined)

Does this question help provide this information?

b. This question is intended to allow respondent to define success or the lack thereof in relation to their experience of merger.

Does this question help provide this information?

14. This question is intended to provide respondents with an opportunity to constructively critique their experience of merger.

Does this question help provide this information?

15. This question is intended to allow respondents to offer open-ended advice to other congregations based on their experience.

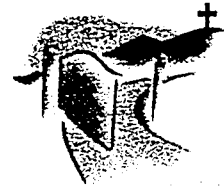
Does this question help provide this information?

16. This question is intended to determine the extent to which respondents consider church merger a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference.

Does this question help provide this information?

Gateway Community Church

United Methodist



4623 Southern Parkway, Louisville, KY 40214 Phone: (502) 363-0493; Fax: (502) 363-9976
Email: kellymac@aye.net Website: <http://members.aye.net/~gateway>

January 10, 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Just before Christmas, you received a copy of this survey about church mergers/unions in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church. I know my timing was terrible, the holidays are so often hectic, but it was also unavoidable. We have had a great response from many churches, however, we have not yet received your completed survey.

Please use the enclosed replacement copy of the survey and stamped envelope and return your completed survey as soon as possible. Your response is very important and is essential to increase the usefulness of this survey.

This survey will help me in my doctoral program, but more importantly, I trust it will help the Kentucky Conference as well as pastors and church leaders throughout our nation who are evaluating church mergers or unions.

Thank you for spending a few minutes sharing from your unique experience to help others.

With you in Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly McClendon". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Kelly McClendon
Pastor, and Doctor of Ministry Candidate,
Asbury Theological Seminary

Pastor Kelly McClendon

Appendix F

FREQUENCIES FOR ALL RESPONSES TO FINAL SURVEY

Study of Churches Formed Through Merger In the Kentucky Conference
All Frequencies are in percentages.

Note: "No Response" was not a choice on the final survey, the results are simply printed here since they were used in analyzing responses.

1. To what extent were the following people involved in the final decision to merge?

	<u>Greatly</u>	<u>Moderately</u>	<u>Little</u>	<u>No Response</u>
a. Denominational Representatives:	(29.7)	(23.4)	(11.7)	(35 %)
b. Pastor(s) of the Congregations:	(68.2)	(8.8)	(2.6)	(20 %)
c. Local Church Governing Bodies:	(44.9)	(23.4)	(3.7)	(27.8 %)
d. Individual Lay People:	(35.4)	(25.5)	(9.5)	(29.2 %)
e. Entire Membership:	(37.2)	(27.4)	(14.2)	(20.8 %)
f. Other _____	(3.6)	(0.4)	(0.7)	(95.2 %)

2. Please answer the following questions about the new congregation:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>No Response</u>
a. Is the new congregation in a desirable location?	(87.2)	(1.8)	(2.2)	(8.4 %)
b. Is the new congregation financially more stable than one or both of its predecessors?	(75.8)	(2.9)	(12.1)	(9.2 %)
c. Are you hopeful about the future of the church and its ministries?	(85.8)	(1.8)	(2.9)	(9.2%)
d. Does the new congregation use the facilities of one of the predecessor churches?	(69.7)	(19.0)	(0.7)	(10.3 %)

3. Did your former congregation have the larger or smaller attendance before the merger?
(Check one)

(41.8) Larger attendance (44.0) Smaller Attendance (0.7%) No Response

4. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The two former congregations have now genuinely become one.**

(38.0) Strongly agree (48.2) Agree (6.6) Disagree (0.4) Strongly disagree
(6.6 %) No Response

5. **Did you have to leave the facility of your predecessor local church**

(32.5) Yes (58.6) No (9.2 %) No Response

6. **What was your role in the congregation? (Check all that apply)**

(4.0) Pastor (67.5) Church member (15.7) Officer / Leader (4.7) Other: ____
(7.7%) No Response

7. **Who emerged as the most influential leader(s) during the process of merger – from the consideration of the idea, through the decision to merge, and then creation of the new church identity? (Check one)**

(47.3) The pastor (or pastors) (3.7) Denominational representative
(2.9) A lay person (26.3) A team/committee/task group
(0.0) Church consultant (3.3) Other: _____

8. **Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important motivations for merger starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only five.**

In your situation, the greatest motivations for merging were:

Other forms of change did not improve conditions and opportunities
1 (3.3) 2 (4.0) 3 (1.5) 4 (2.9) 5 (1.8) No Response (86.4)

Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources
1 (16.5) 2 (11.4) 3 (10.3) 4 (8.1) 5 (5.5) No Response (48.4)

To better fulfill the purpose of the church
1 (22.3) 2 (9.9) 3 (8.4) 4 (4.0) 5 (6.2) No Response (49.1)

Size of the congregation
1 (13.2) 2 (6.6) 3 (6.6) 4 (6.2) 5 (1.8) No Response (65.6)

Changing neighborhood						
1 (6.2)	2 (0.7)	3 (1.1)	4 (2.2)	5 (2.9)	No Response (86.8)	
Financial stress						
1 (14.6)	2 (6.9)	3 (6.2)	4 (3.3)	5 (3.7)	No Response (65.2)	
Capital/building needs						
1 (5.1)	2 (3.7)	3 (4.4)	4 (1.8)	5 (3.7)	No Response (81.3)	
Similarities between the congregations						
1 (5.1)	2 (5.8)	3 (6.2)	4 (5.1)	5 (4.4)	No Response (73.3)	
Desire to undertake new mission						
1 (4.0)	2 (1.5)	3 (3.3)	4 (3.3)	5 (2.9)	No Response (85.0)	
Desire to move to a new location						
1 (3.6)	2 (1.8)	3 (1.5)	4 (1.1)	5 (2.2)	No Response (89.7)	
Desire to create a growing congregation						
1 (15)	2 (9.2)	3 (10.3)	4 (13.9)	5 (8.1)	No Response (43.6)	
Willingness to help a small, struggling congregation						
1(5.8)	2 (4.4)	3 (5.1)	4 (3.3)	5 (6.2)	No Response (75.1)	
Willingness to join a larger, stronger congregation						
1 (3.3)	2 (2.2)	3 (2.2)	4 (2.2)	5 (1.8)	No Response (90.5)	
Willingness to try something new						
1 (2.6)	2 (1.1)	3 (1.8)	4 (4.0)	5 (3.7)	No Response (86.8)	
Influence of the denomination						
1 (0.7)	2 (2.6)	3 (1.5)	4 (3.3)	5 (3.7)	No Response (88.3)	
Influence of pastor(s)						
1 (7.0)	2 (4.0)	3 (5.9)	4 (5.5)	5 (9.5)	No Response (68.1)	
Influence of lay leaders						
1 (0.7)	2 (0.4)	3 (1.8)	4 (2.2)	5 (2.9)	No Response (91.6)	
Other:						
1 (1.8)	2 (0.7)	3 (0.0)	4 (0.4)	5 (0.0)	No Response (97.3)	

9. Using the numerals 1 through 5, please rank the five most important obstacles experienced starting with "1" as the most important. Mark only five.

During your merger process, from the consideration of the idea, through the decision to merge, and then creation of the new church identity, the greatest obstacles experienced were:

Lack of information about changes							
1 (7.7)	2 (2.6)	3 (1.5)	4 (2.2)	5 (2.6)		No Response (83.5)	
Insufficient reasons given for this type of change							
1 (0.7)	2 (1.1)	3 (0.7)	4 (1.1)	5 (1.1)		No Response (95.2)	
Inter-personal conflicts resulting from changes							
1 (13.6)	2 (5.5)	3 (7.3)	4 (7.0)	5 (9.9)		No Response (56.8)	
Desirable neighborhood							
1 (2.2)	2 (0.4)	3 (0.7)	4 (0.0)	5 (0.0)		No Response (96.7)	
Control of combined financial resources							
1 (2.6)	2 (2.6)	3 (1.8)	4 (2.6)	5 (4.0)		No Response (86.4)	
Affection for church building or property							
1 (15)	2 (12.1)	3 (11.0)	4 (6.6)	5 (5.1)		No Response (50.2)	
Differences between the congregations							
1 (7.3)	2 (5.9)	3 (7.3)	4 (5.1)	5 (2.9)		No Response (71.4)	
Commitment to existing ministries							
1 (1.8)	2 (2.2)	3 (0.7)	4 (0.7)	5 (2.2)		No Response (92.3)	
Commitment to current location							
1 (3.3)	2 (3.7)	3 (2.2)	4 (2.2)	5 (4.8)		No Response (83.9)	
Loyalty to existing congregation and its history							
1 (17.2)	2 (9.5)	3 (15.8)	4 (12.5)	5 (6.2)		No Response (38.5)	
Desire to maintain size of your former church fellowship							
1 (4.8)	2 (0.7)	3 (2.2)	4 (2.2)	5 (1.8)		No Response (88.3)	
Fear of losing congregational identity							
1 (17.6)	2 (11.0)	3 (9.5)	4 (8.4)	5 (8.4)		No Response (45.1)	
Fear of change							
1 (12.8)	2 (9.2)	3 (6.2)	4 (8.4)	5 (9.9)		No Response (53.5)	
Too little leadership or vision for merging							
1 (1.5)	2 (0.4)	3 (1.1)	4 (2.2)	5 (0.7)		No Response (94.1)	

Too little congregational participation in decision

1 (6.2) 2 (2.9) 3 (2.2) 4 (2.6) 5 (2.6) No Response (83.5)

Influence of the denomination

1 (1.1) 2 (0.4) 3 (1.1) 4 (0.7) 5 (1.8) No Response (94.9)

Influence of pastor(s)

1 (3.7) 2 (2.6) 3 (2.6) 4 (2.2) 5 (2.9) No Response (86.1)

Influence of lay leaders

1 (0.7) 2 (1.1) 3 (0.4) 4 (1.1) 5 (2.2) No Response (94.5)

Other:

1 (4.0) 2 (0.4) 3 (0.0) 4 (0.4) 5 (1.1) No Response (94.1)

Other:

1 (0.4) 2 (1.1) 3 (0.0) 4 (0.0) 5 (0.0) No Response (98.5)

**10. Which of the following biblical comparisons were used to describe the experience of merger?
(Check the one most frequently used):**

(11.7) Birth (New church as baby)

(3.3) Death (End of an era)

(39.6) Marriage (The two become one)

(9.9) Death and Resurrection (Dying to be reborn)

(19.8) Don't Know

(2.9) Other: ____

(12.8 %) No Response

11. How important was the role of the pastor(s) in facilitating the process of merger?

(74.1) Very Important

(13.2) Somewhat important

(2.9) Unimportant

(2.6) Don't know

(7.0) No Response

12. "Vision" can be defined as a specific image of what the church may become or what it will be at some point in the future that provides a sense of direction and motivation to move forward in ministry.

a. To what extent did "Vision" play an important role in your decision to merge?

- (59.0) Very Important
- (17.9) Somewhat important
- (5.5) Unimportant
- (7.3) Don't know
- (10.3) No Response

b. To what extent did "Vision" play an important role in completing the process of merger?

- (56.4) Very Important
- (22.0) Somewhat important
- (3.7) Unimportant
- (8.1) Don't know
- (9.9) No Response

1. a. On a scale of one to ten, rate the success of the merger in your opinion (Circle one number):

Unsuccessful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly Successful
Response %	.4	1.5	2.9	1.1	10.3	6.6	3.3	19.8	13.6	33.	7.7 (none)

b. Why do you consider it successful or unsuccessful?

14. What would you do differently if you had the chance?

15. What recommendations would you make to other congregations considering a merger?

16. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Church merger is a desirable strategy for starting new faith communities in the Kentucky Conference.**
(Please check one)

(19.4) Strongly agree
(54.6) Agree
(10.6) Disagree
(2.6) Strongly disagree
(12.8) No Response

17. **To what extent do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the merger process in your church? (please check one):**

(28.2) Very knowledgeable
(51.6) Somewhat knowledgeable
(13.2) Little knowledge of process
(7.0) No Response

**Key Questions / Issues to Consider
Oakdale and Beechmont Vision and Uniting Team**

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- ◆ **Time-line for decision making process.**
- ◆ **Time-line for actual uniting and/or worship in one place**
 - a. January 5 or 12, 1997 (the 12th would prevent the "last" service being also the pre- or post- Christmas service at each location).
 - b. Leave open -- present a couple of dates at the uniting conference (like this year in October or November of 1996 or dates in January of 1997). If the decision is made to worship "in one place" at the Southern Parkway facility beginning sometime this fall, then both congregations would cohabit the space as separate entities through the end of the calendar year (preserving separate budgets, leaders, etc.). The "new church" with the name change, new structure, ministry plans, etc.
- ◆ **What issues must be settled before the actual vote to unite takes place?**
 - a. Form of actual proposal for Sept 29 and Oct 6 mtgs (see preliminary form).
 - b. Efforts to help bring people to closure so that healing and redirection of energy can begin.
 - c.. Assignment and proposals for various task groups. Their work will begin immediately after the uniting vote and for proposals to be made at the fall Charge Conference.
- ◆ **Name for new congregation**
 - a. This group will present several choices with the criteria for selection to the fall Charge Conference.
- ◆ **Administrative structure of new congregation (1996 General Conference granted authority to local churches to determine structure based on missional priorities)**
 - a. Will need a task force for this. Recommend waiting until after uniting votes to design. Have uniting conference set up group to do this by the fall Charge Conference. Generally plan to pattern after new streamlined structure for the Kentucky Annual Conference.
- ◆ **Nominating process for new church leadership.**
 - a. Use combined existing nominating groups from both congregations. This group will begin working after the new structure is designed and will fill positions based on the new structure. Nominations will be based on

members spiritual maturity, spiritual gifts, leadership ability and experience, calling of God etc.

- ◆ **Vision statement for new congregation (or establishment of process for discernment and articulation).**
- ◆ **Procedure for establishing new membership rolls (removing inactives)**
 - a. As soon as vote is secured the Charge administrative secretary will write to all members of both congregations. We will strongly encourage inactive to return to full participation, transfer to another UMC or other evangelical denomination,, or withdraw as soon as possible. We will enclose stamped cards with options to check and a place for signatures. We will move names of all who choose to withdraw without transfer to constituency roll (prospect and care list). Move names of all who fail to respond to list for public reading at Charge Conference.
- ◆ **Recommendations for use of funds generated from the sale of properties and other assets**
 - a. Uniting motion simply needs to authorize transfer of trust and/or control of all property and assets to the new church effective by a certain date (official uniting date -- this will probably be end of calendar year, date of Charge Conference, or date of first joint service of worship). The motion about all property and assets, prior to the formal opening of new church, must be that they continue being used as previously designated until the needs and priorities of the new church are determined.
 - b. We must be sure that *Discipline* is followed (before and after uniting). Proceeds from sales of property can only be used in certain ways and must be approved by Administrative Council of new church (or equivalent body), Pastor, D.S., Trustees, District Board of Church location and building.

FACILITIES

- ◆ **Rationale for probable plan to use the Southern Parkway location at least for the next few years.**
 - a. Need to wait on positive momentum to develop and for people to accept "new identity" before seriously exploring needs and opportunities for relocation.
- ◆ **Any stipulations on the sale of the Oakdale property (i.e. recommendations for types of buyers) currently being used as a sanctuary, education, and fellowship activities?**

- a. Can recommend preference to realtor on buyer and their use of property. For example: try first to sell to another congregation (perhaps Ethnic); church might assume cost for razing structure to prevent long-term neglect; could limit sale to include or exclude certain interior items, etc.

◆ **What renovations / repairs are needed for the Southern Parkway location (short-term or 1st year and projection for 5 years).**

We must try to remember that we will need funds available for staff and program development and/or possible relocation over the next few years. We must do what is essential, with frugality *and* excellence, while leaving open as many options as possible for short and long term ministry. Examples of essentials include:

- a. New main church signs.
- b. Paint and remodel outside of building to reflect reality of start of "new church."
- c. General cleaning, repair, and "sprucing up" all areas (i.e. entryways, bathrooms, nursery and childcare areas, Sunday School rooms, parking areas, high traffic areas, "first impression" areas).
- d. Directional signs in and outside of church.
- e. Improvement of outside children's area currently used primarily by South Louisville Day Care.

Preferred options -- may be less than essential at outset.

- e. New equipment for sound, music, worship and teaching (i.e. effective, low maintenance sound board and microphones; "Midi" capable synthesizer [may also require additional speakers]; video / computerized projection system; music equipment -- i.e. synthesizer).
- f. Improve and upgrade office equipment (computers, copier etc.)
- g. Set time-line and final plan for developing property adjacent to main Southern Parkway buildings for use as additional parking area. Time-line for this will be responsive to plans of the City of Louisville for converting streetside parking to green-space. Currently the City has no plan or time-line for converting that property and prohibiting parking.

WORSHIP AND PROGRAM

◆ **What will be the Sunday morning schedule?**

- a. Continue with current Beechmont schedule.
- b. Consider beginning Sunday School at 9:30am to increase fellowship before 11:00am service of worship.

◆ **How will Sunday School programs be united?**

- a. Allow each adult Sunday school class to decide on their future (i.e. join with another class, change name, change location, or stay as is).

- b. Classes currently established at Beechmont will have the option to remain in their current meeting space. Oakdale classes that remain intact may choose from any available rooms or space in the Southern Parkway facility or they may petition a former Beechmont class about using their current space (if they have special needs related to things like accessibility, size of class etc.).

◆ **How will the Women's and Men's groups be united?**

- a. Large Groups may be joined together with co-chairpersons in each area for unit meeting and program planning purposes.
- b. "Circles" will decide on their own future (i.e. join with another circle, change name, change location, stay as is).
- c. Groups may elect to go through a new nomination and election process to form one new group.

◆ **How will the choirs be united?**

- a. Mildred Creager will serve as a director for the new choir.
- b. A combined task force composed of representatives of the SPRC of each congregation will consider and/or develop new job responsibilities for current part-time music person at Oakdale.

◆ **What will be support for "Our Mission Together" or conference apportionments (short-term and long-term plans)**

- a. For 1997 the new church will attempt to receive a new "asking" from the Annual Conference authorities that reflects changes made. If not forthcoming - - we will attempt to pay 100% of the 1996 asking level for the former Beechmont congregation.

◆ **What program priorities can be recommended for first six months?**

- a. Lay Visitation / Pastoral Care giving group.
- b. Transportation for senior citizens unable to drive.
- c. Transportation for children whose parents who will not or cannot attend.
- d. Telephone team to call all members on a regular basis for prayer and encouragement.
- e. Expand ministry to children and youth.
- f. Expand ministry to young adults with formation of one or more small groups.
- e. Develop comprehensive plan for the "launch" or "grand opening" for the new church. This will involve a massive promotion and advertising campaign as well as training in faith sharing for all members.

◆ **What about an "opening" and a "grand opening" or new church "launch"?**

- a. Opening -- first worship together -- January 5 or 12 (or sometime in November / December based on spirit of Uniting Vote).
- b. *Grand opening* -- June 15 (or wait until fall???)

- ◆ **What special events, ministries, or traditions will be continued and why?**
 - a. Recycling group
 - b. Friendship Club
 - c. Wednesday night meal and study
 - d. Men's and Women's groups
 - e. Choir program
 - f. ??
 - g. ??
 - h. ??

FURNISHINGS AND MEMORIAL ITEMS

- ◆ **Authorize a thorough inventory of both facilities.**
- ◆ **What will be done with unneeded goods (and who will decide whether they are needed)?** *[Note that the former Beechmont congregation must also take this opportunity to "clean out the house" from top to bottom]*
 - a. Delegate to a combined group composed of members of Trustees of both congregations.
 - b. Maybe consider making available certain articles to be "given" to members (especially those members who chose to transfer to another local church).
- ◆ **How will items of historical or sentimental importance be used and preserved?**
 - a. What are items of significant historical or sentimental importance?
 - b. Delegate to task force or combined Trustee group.
- ◆ **How will memorial funds or items be use to honor intent of donor?**
 - a. Trustees of both congregations will have to identify any memorial items with pre-existing stipulations and/or limitations that are still binding. Insofar as possible these limitations and restrictions will be honored.
 - b. In case where the limitations and restrictions cannot be honored an effort will be made to contact the family of the donor or donor for directions.
- ◆ **What important symbols or names will need to be incorporated into new church?**
 - a. Consider renaming educational building at Southern Parkway facility the "Oakdale Christian Education Center."
 - b. Consider incorporating the stained glass windows from the former Oakdale sanctuary into the sanctuary of Southern Parkway facility.
 - c. Consider the creation or designation of space or a room for "Our Heritage" which would display mementos from the former congregations who now live on through the new church.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

- ◆ **Banking accounts -- policies and plans for opening.**
 - a. Delegate to Vision and Uniting team or combined Trustees and/or, Combined Finance Groups, or to new finance / trustee group in new administrative structure.

- ◆ **How will bequests be handled?**
 - a. Delegate to new Trustees (or equivalent group in new structure) .

- ◆ **What about capital campaign funds already designated (i.e. parking plan at Southern Parkway).**
 - a. Responsibility of combined Trustees (or equivalent group in new church structure). May need to replace those funds with funds from proceeds of the sale of property with permission of donors to "Dream Team" campaign (we can make blanket statement asking people to express dissent or be silent to approve). This would allow the existing trustee funds (Dream Team) to be used for staff and program development without the interference of the District Board of Church location and property or other restrictions of the *Book of Discipline*.

- ◆ **Establishment of 1997 budget or process for determining**
 - a. Set up a budget subcommittee of the combined finance committees of both congregations. The budget will be officially set at the fall Charge Conference.
 - b. Likely we will recommend that the new budget be close to or equal to the 1996 budget for Beechmont. New funds for staff and program development will likely need to come from sources outside the general fund for 1997. One option we hope for, is to transfer all money remaining in operating budget or general fund accounts (if any) into a program development contingency fund that can carry over for use in 1997.

- ◆ **Recommendations for stewardship campaign for 1997**
 - a. Set up task group at Uniting Conferences. Membership may be Vision and Uniting team or any other combination of members from former congregations.

STAFF ISSUES

- ◆ **Changes for current staff (pastor's and support) in responsibilities and/or compensation.**
 - a. Assign to task group from combined SPRC groups to study these issues and report with recommendations to the fall Charge Conference.
- ◆ **New program staff possibilities for creation of momentum and growth**
 - a. Youth - part-time (Between 1/2 and 1/4 time).
 - b. Christian education - part-time (Between 1/2 time and 1/4 time.)
 - c. Contemporary music leader / keyboard player - (Between 1/4 time and 1/10 time).
 - d. Part-time visitation and care giving coordinator (Between 1/4 time or 1/10 time).
 - e. Part-time financial / administrative secretary or receptionist / clerk typist (Between 1/2 and 1/4 time.

TASK GROUPS

What new task groups and tasks are needed to work prior to and/or after fall Charge Conference?

Vision and Uniting Team (*continue existing group*)

- Task: Design and propose new administrative structure by fall Charge Conference. This must include recommendations for all groups on membership, scope of authority, relationships between groups, etc.
- Task: Determine proposals for new church name for fall Charge Conference.
- Task: Create proposal for program priorities and emphasis for 1997 for presentation at fall Charge Conference.

Joint Trustee Task Force (5-8 persons selected from combined membership of both existing trustee groups)

- Task: Plan building renovation, repair, redesign. Present comprehensive proposal to fall Charge Conference.

Joint SPRC Task Force (5-8 persons selected from combined membership of both existing SPRC groups)

- Task: Recommend new staff positions and compensation as needed for growth and time-line for establishing those positions.
- Task: Review and redevelop job descriptions, staff policies, and compensation packages for all existing staff.

Joint Nominating Committee (Combine existing committees on nominations and personnel).

- Task: Secure leadership for new structure to be election at fall Charge Conference.

Budget and Stewardship Campaign Task Force

- Task: Prepare comprehensive budget for presentation to fall Charge Conference.
- Task: Conduct a stewardship campaign to secure adequate underwriting of 1997 budget for new church.

Membership of Task Force groups

- *Selection:* Will be selected by the combined nominations committees of the existing congregations immediately after the vote to unite is secured. Selection by nominations committee and acceptance by nominees will complete authorization for groups to begin work.
- *Composition of task force groups:* Minimum of 1/3 current Oakdale members, 2/3 current Beechmont members (subject to availability and willingness of people to serve).
- *Life-span of groups* -- through the end of 1996 only (certain groups may continue into 1997 but only if they are part of new administrative structure and are elected by the fall Charge Conference).

What activities or ministries can we offer to help people deal with grief and sense of loss? What will help healing process begin so that we can invest energy in positive future focus?

- a. Homecoming Sunday for each congregation this fall *after* uniting vote.
- b. Special closing worship ceremony -- perhaps utilizing former pastors.
- c. Historical / musical video, choir presentations, guest speakers representing the past of each congregation for presentation at fall Charge Conference.
- d. Go through list of "most heard" complaints at Administrative Council meeting tomorrow night.
- e. Arrange "tour" of Beechmont / Southern Parkway facilities for people from Oakdale (i.e. scout out options for Sunday School room, location for recyclers etc.).
- f. Personal visitation to express love in the midst of disagreement and /or as we struggle with changes.
- g. ??.

VISION AND UNITING TEAM UPDATE -- August 25, 1996

We had our second "marathon" (3+ hours) meeting this past week and we continue to be excited about the opportunity for new life ahead of us. We believe we are moving in the direction of the Holy Spirit toward the unfolding plan of God.

We want to share a few of the reasons why we believe God is leading us in the direction of uniting the Oakdale and Beechmont congregations to form one new church. We believe God has placed before us an open door to an opportunity for a new and better day for ministry and outreach in Louisville.

- ◆ *"New" churches have been proven in study after study to be the most effective way to reach new people for Christ.* Reaching people for Christ is primary reason why the church was created according to the great commission of our Lord found in Matthew 28:20. *"Go therefore and make disciples..."* The uniting of our congregations gives us a unique opportunity to form a "new" church, building on foundation provided by the shared resources of both congregations.
- ◆ *This is more of an opportunity than it is a sacrifice.* There is real sacrifice and emotional pain involved -- for *both* congregations -- but that sacrifice pales in comparison in light of the opportunity to have a major infusion of energy to increase our potential to reach new people for Christ. There is sadness in this change, but for those who place the cause of Christ as their highest priority, this is an omen full of "good news."
- ◆ *This is a tremendous opportunity to generate a new positive momentum.* We will now have available new resources for making the creative choices required for successful ministry. The prayers, presence, gifts, and service, including the material resources of both congregations -- *when pooled together* -- provide a real opportunity to turn back the tide of decline being experienced by both congregations.
- ◆ *Finally, we have prayerfully concluded that uniting to form a new church is God's will and God's vision for our future.* This is not the mandate of the Annual Conference, the Bishop, the District Superintendent, or our Pastor -- this is the will of God for us. It is truly our choice to be faithful to the will and calling of God for our lives. We believe we must choose to move forward as an act of faith and obedience to the calling of God - we must choose to say "Yes" to God.

Please join us in prayer and pray for us and our Pastor as we continue to discern God's will and move toward the future God has planned for us.

We also discussed some activities that we may share in to help us say goodbye to our past and look forward to our new future together. One such activity that we will recommend for each congregation is that they have a *"Homecoming" Sunday Celebration* sometime in October or November. This will involve a special worship service and may include a meal at the church site and other special activities. Special invitations will be made to former members, inactive members, and former pastors. This "Homecoming" event will be an opportunity to remember our past, give thanks to God, and celebrate the fact that the loving legacy of each congregation will continue in and through the new church we form.

NEW "TASK TEAMS" TO BEGIN WORK

(As mandated in our Resolution to Unite / Merge)

We've said we have much work to do now that we have decided to unite our congregations and be born-again as one new church -- here is a glimpse of what we will do by the end of the year. This is just the beginning, but these are several steps in the right direction. Someone has said "*If you have the faith -- God has the power.*" We are moving forward by faith and we trust that God will supply the power we need to be successful for Christ in our work together.

Members for the following task teams will be selected by the combined Committee on Nominations and will include members of both congregations. They will begin work immediately and complete their tasks by our fall Charge Conference, scheduled for Sunday November 24 at 6:00pm. Please pray for and encourage these teams as they engage in this important ministry for the Lord.

Vision and Uniting Team *(continue existing group)*

- Task: Design and propose a new administrative structure by fall Charge Conference to begin in January of 1997. This new administrative structure will be designed according to the guidelines for the "*Interactive Organizational Process*" approved by the 1996 General Conference of the UMC.
- Task: Determine proposals for a new church name for decision at fall Charge Conference.
- Task: Present a preliminary plan for the use or holding of all funds that are not tied to yearly operating budgets and that are *not* subject to the property and capital expense restrictions of the *Book of Discipline* of the UMC.
- Task: Create preliminary proposal for program priorities and emphases for 1997 for presentation at fall Charge Conference.

Joint Trustee Task Team (6-9 persons selected from combined membership of both existing Trustee groups)

- Task: Plan building renovation, repair, redesign of facilities at and adjacent to the 4623 Southern Parkway facilities. Present comprehensive proposal to fall Charge Conference.
- Task: Present plan to fall Charge Conference for the preservation of sentimental and historically significant items from each congregation to promote an awareness of the heritage of the Oakdale and Beechmont Churches in the ongoing ministry of the new church.
- Task: Present a preliminary plan for the use or holding of funds generated from the sale of properties subject to the restrictions of the *Book of Discipline* of the UMC.
- Task: Present plan to fall Charge Conference regarding management of memorial funds, memorial items, and pending bequests.
- Task: Present plan to fall Charge Conference regarding the creation of additional parking area in light of the City's reclamation of property in front of the current

Beechmont Sanctuary.

Joint SPRC Task Team (6-9 persons selected from combined membership of both existing SPRC groups)

- Task: Recommend new staff positions and compensation as needed for growth and time-line for establishing those positions.
- Task: Review and redevelop job descriptions, staff policies, and compensation packages for all existing staff.

Joint Nominating Committee Task Team (Combine existing committees on nominations and personnel)

- Task: Secure nominations for all leadership positions for new structure to be elected at fall Charge Conference.

Budget and Stewardship Campaign Task Team (6-9 persons [total] selected from each church)

- Task: Prepare comprehensive budget for presentation to fall Charge Conference.
- Task: Present a plan to the fall Charge Conference regarding the establishment of new banking accounts, the transfer of funds to those new accounts from the existing accounts of both churches, and policies regarding the use of said new accounts.
- Task: Conduct a stewardship campaign to secure adequate underwriting of 1997 budget for new church.

BECOMING A CHURCH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY***Pastor Kelly McClendon's "Vision Catalyst"***

Once again, I am including a part of my "Vision" for being a faithful and effective church into the 21st Century. I want this vision to stimulate your own praying, dreaming, and vision formation. Continue to live with this vision and consider where we are and where we need to be in relationship to the commitment it describes. These are just the most basic elements of my vision. However, they will give you some sense of the kind of ministry commitments I believe must be present now in faithful, growing, and effective congregations. Will the "we" in this vision include you? Let us pray that it will!

We will win people to Christ. We will have one essential and non-negotiable priority -- we will reach people where they are and lead them into a personal life-giving relationship of faith in Jesus Christ. We will believe that numerical growth is important because every number represents a person that needs to come to faith in Christ and grow through His church. Therefore we will continually strive to be a church that grows in the number of participants as well as in spiritual depth.

We will be culturally relevant. We will reach out to those who are unattracted to, offended by, or afraid of traditional forms of worship, ministry, and church life. We will design and use forms that are designed for maximum cultural relevance -- while still being doctrinally and biblically sound (*Examples of "forms" which must change as our culture changes include music and worship styles, administrative structures, facilities, preaching and teaching emphases and methods, etc.*).

We will mend broken lives. As a community of faith we will seek to mend broken lives by the power of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. One expression of this commitment will be an intentional healing and recovery ministry for those struggling with addictions or other forms of emotional, physical, relational, or spiritual brokenness.

We will grow in spiritual depth. We will be a praying community of faith in which people grow as disciples of Christ as He becomes more fully their Lord and Savior day by day. Our discipling ministry will be centered in a *church-wide small group ministry* involving people in evangelism, caring ministry, discipling one another, and service. These groups will meet on Sunday mornings at the church and also throughout the week in the evening or day at homes, businesses and other locations.

We will send people out in ministry. All people will be trained and sent out to witness to Christ in word and deed ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of people in our community and world.

Sustaining all these commitments are these essential convictions -

We are:

Christ centered,

Holy Spirit led and empowered,

Biblically faithful,

Oriented toward Outreach and Growth.

TOP TEN LIST

Criteria for Choosing a New Church Name

Please Note: These criteria reflect the changes and challenges of contemporary culture. Many current churches, thriving and declining, have names which fail to meet these criteria -- but most were named many decades past and their names reflect a different cultural situation. This criteria suggests no criticism of pre-existing names. "New" or reborn churches have the opportunity to maximize the cultural relevance and effectiveness of their church name. These criteria, gleaned from the best church growth and renewal material, will help guide our consideration of this *important opportunity*.

1. **Name should evoke a positive reaction.** The name should be ambiguously positive for the average disinterested unchurched person, i.e. hope, love, life, joy, peace, community, faith, etc.
2. **Use common, understandable, terms.** Avoid theologically obscure terms. In our culture we can no longer assume people have a Christian vocabulary. Words like "redemption", "redeemer", "epiphany", "sanctification", and "holiness" are part of a "*foreign language*" to most unchurched people.
3. **Refrain from obscure historical orientation.** Many Methodists and virtually all non-Methodists are unaware of the significance of names like Asbury, Aldersgate, Epworth, Coke, Cokesbury, etc. While important, the name is not the best place to teach denominational history, unless you only want to reach people who are *already* committed Methodists.
4. **Avoid combined names.** Such names only have meaning for the current "in crowd" and they focus on where we've already been instead of where we are going now. They distract attention from a necessary orientation toward the future and growth. Names like "Oakmont" or "Beechdale" would mean as little as "Cokesbury" does to the average non-Methodist. Such combined names also fail to meet criteria 1,2,3,5.
5. **Name should reflect an important emphasis.** Insofar as possible, try to make the name reflect one or more elements of the guiding vision or emphasis for the future of the new congregation.
6. **Avoid overemphasis on denominational affiliation or identity.** Unchurched people are more likely to be put off by "baggage" associated with a specific denominational identity. We won't deny our affiliation or apologize for our denomination. However, our unique local identity, vision and character must come first.

7. **Keep the name as short and simple as possible**, i.e. "Lifeway." It should be easy to spell and pronounce. If longer, use names that are easy to abbreviate. For example "Living Hope Community Church" can be shortened to "Living Hope" or "Living Hope Church" for conversation, mailings, promotion, etc.
8. **Avoid names that automatically alienate certain groups of people.** Some names are considered implicitly derogatory or prejudiced. Also avoid unique and potentially divisive doctrinal emphases. While important, unique doctrines are probably not best found in the name.
9. **Avoid a geographic limitation - unless you're making a long-term commitment to location.** If God blesses this church with significant growth we may re-locate in the next 20 years. In that event names like "Southern Parkway," or "Iroquois, "Southside" may be inappropriate. Consider the difficulty of "Virginia Ave. UMC" on Stone Street, or "Walnut Street Baptist" on 3rd and St. Catherine. *Also*, we must communicate a desire to reach people *over a wide area* of our community like the whole city or at least the entire Southern, Central, or South Central areas. If we are sure that we will remain at this location for 20 - 50 years then a name like "Southern Parkway" would be very good.
10. **Avoid duplication or confusion with other church names.** Avoid a name that is the same or similar to other church names in the community or region.

Please note: This criteria was gleaned from the following books, which you might enjoy reading, as well as the Pastor's general education and experience.

- ▶ Hunter, George (1996), Church for the Unchurched, Nashville: Abingdon
- ▶ Hunter, George (1992), How to Reach Secular People, Nashville: Abingdon
- ▶ Hybels, Bill & Lynn, (1995), Rediscovering Church, Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- ▶ Malphurs, Aubrey (1992), Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century, Grand Rapids: Baker.

Please Note: No name will be able to satisfy all of the above criteria equally well.
*Relax and have fun praying, dreaming, and being creative
 as you consider our new name.*

**The combined congregations will vote on the
 new church name at our fall Charge Conference.**

EXAMPLES TO STIMULATE YOUR CREATIVITY:

These are some examples of church names which fit many of the above criteria. In some cases, commitment to one criteria will overshadow others. Those with an "*" are already being used in Louisville and are included only as examples. Examples are listed alphabetically.**

Abundant Life	Hope Community Church	New Start
Abundant Joy	Hope Fellowship	Parkway
Church of Hope	Horizon Fellowship	People of Joy
Church of Love	Horizon Church	People of Hope
Church of Joy	Joy Fellowship	People of Faith
Church of Faith	Lifeway Church	Praise Church
Community of Faith	Lifeway Community	Restoration Community
Community of Hope	Living Hope Church	Solid Rock*
Community of Trust	Living Hope Community	South Central
Community of Love	Living Faith	Community Church
Community of Joy	New Song	Southern Parkway
Community Church	New Promise	Community Church
Community of Renewal	New Faith Church	Southern Parkway
Faith Community Church	New Beginnings	Church
Faith Church	New Century Church	Church on Southern
Family of Faith	New Hope*	Parkway
Fellowship of Hope	New Vision	Southland*
Fellowship Church	New Horizon*	Southwest Christian
Fresh Start Church	New Day	Church
Gateway Community	New Spirit	
Gateway Fellowship	New Life Church*	
Hope Church	New Century Church	

**Please note: Many, if not all, church names which fit this criteria might end with "Church" or "Community Church," i.e. "New Century Church" or "New Century Community Church."

(Clip here if you intend to mail, or mail whole insert)

NOW WHAT NEW NAME WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?

What do you believe we should name "our" new church? Please pray about this decision, consult the criteria above, and then share your ideas with the Vision and Uniting Team. Please do the following:

1. Pray and study criteria
2. Select one or more names from the list of examples above.
3. Suggest other names which fit many of the criteria listed above.

Then:

1. Complete and mail the enclosed form to the charge office (4623 Southern Parkway, 40214)
2. or -- Phone in your idea to the charge office (363-0493).
3. or -- Share your idea with a member of the Vision and Uniting

 Your Name _____ (Optional)

Appendix H

Increases or Decreases for Churches in Population

COVENANT (Middlesboro) – Formed by Merger in 1989

Predecessor Churches	Final year membership (1988)	Final year worship attendance (1988)	Sunday school attendance (1988)
Middlesboro First	239	94	54
Middlesboro Trinity	185	50	30
Combined Figures	424	144	84
New church created by merger: COVENANT (Middlesboro)	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
	395	153	56
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(-) 29	(+) 9	(-) 29
Percent Increase / Decrease	(-) 6.8 %	(+) 6.2 %	(-) 34 %

EPIPHANY – Formed by Merger in 1990

Predecessor churches	Final year membership (1989)	Final year worship attendance (1989)	Sunday school attendance (1989)
Jones Memorial	276	78	58
Kenwood	311	71	31
Combined Figures	587	149	89
New church created by merger: EPIPHANY	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
	384	187	90
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(-) 203	(+) 38	(+) 1
Percent Increase / Decrease	(-) 34.5%	(+) 25.5 %	(+) 1 %

Appendix H

GENESIS – Formed by Merger in 1991

Predecessor Churches	Final year membership (1990)	Final year worship attendance (1990)	Sunday school attendance (1990)
Calvary East	170	100	25
Shawnee / Parkland	134	11	8
Calvary West	57	30	3
Combined Figures	361	141	46
New Church Created by Merger: GENESIS	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
	301	185	25
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(-) 60	(+) 44	(-) 21
Percent Increase / Decrease	(-) 16.66 %	(+) 31 %	(-) 45.6 %

GRACE – Formed by Merger in 1994

Predecessor churches	Final year membership (1993)	Final year worship attendance (1993)	Sunday school attendance (1993)
Russell First	196	97	50
Raceland / Henderson	146	36	26
Combined Figures	342	133	76
New church created by merger: GRACE	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
	356	130	54
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(+) 14	(-) 3	(-) 22
Percent Increase / Decrease	(+) 4 %	(-) 2 %	(-) 29 %

Appendix H

COVENANT (La Grange) – Formed by Merger in 1996

Predecessor churches	Final year membership (1995)	Final year worship attendance (1995)	Sunday school attendance (1995)
Kinnett	110	45	20
La Grange	744	249	143
Combined Figures	854	294	163
New church created by merger:	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
COVENANT (La Grange)	926	282	131
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(+) 72	(-) 12	(-) 32
Percent Increase / Decrease	(+) 8.4 %	(-) 4 %	(-) 19.6 %

GATEWAY COMMUNITY CHURCH – Formed by Merger in 1997

Predecessor churches	Final year membership (1996)	Final year worship attendance (1996)	Sunday school attendance (1996)
Oakdale	176	43	20
Beechmont	334	126	70
Combined Figures	510	169	90
New church created by merger:	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
GATEWAY COMMUNITY CHURCH	514	166	104
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(+) 4	(-) 3	(+) 14
Percent Increase / Decrease	(+) .7 %	(-) .01 %	(+) 15 .5%

Appendix H

FAITH - Formed by Merger in 1998
(This church declined to participate in survey)

Predecessor churches	Final year membership (1997)	Final year worship attendance (1997)	Sunday school attendance (1997)
Kerr Memorial	158	55	27
Westside	290	105	67
Combined Figures	448	160	94
New church created by merger: FAITH	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
	431	150	81
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(-) 17	(-) 10	(-) 13
Percent Increase / Decrease	(-) 3.8 %	(-) 6 %	(-) 14 %

RESURRECTION – Formed by Merger in 1998

Predecessor churches	Final year membership (1997)	Final year worship attendance (1997)	Sunday school attendance (1997)
Eastwood	49	25	10
Advent	179	75	38
Combined Figures	228	100	48
New church created by merger: RESURRECTION	1998 Membership	1998 Worship attendance	1998 Sunday school attendance
	180	41	18
Number Increase (+) Decrease (-)	(-) 48	(-) 59	(-) 30
Percent Increase / Decrease	(-) 21 %	(-) 59 %	(-) 62.5 %

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