

ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH HEALTH AND A MERGED CONGREGATION IN THE KENTUCKY CONFERENCE

Eliseo A. Mejia

Mosaic United Methodist Church was the result of five congregations merged by the Kentucky Conference through New Church and Congregational Development in June 2002. One congregation was African American and the other four were predominately Caucasian. The majority of the merged congregations within the Kentucky conference of the United Methodist Churches have struggled to survive. Nonetheless, the conference continues to merge congregations as they decline in numbers and resources.

This study provided both an understanding of the factors, influences and variables that allowed a merged congregation to become a healthy church. As a result, this study sought to provide an understanding of the factors, influences, and variables that allowed a merged congregation to become a healthy church. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to enhance church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowered leadership, and authentic community. The study analyzed the connection between church health and these five areas in one merged congregation called Mosaic. The findings demonstrate a positive relationship between church health and church merger. The study covered the remaining five healthy characteristics.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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Eliseo A. Mejia-Leiva

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

In June of 2002, the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist church through its New Church and Development program merged five congregations to form the Mosaic United Methodist Church. One congregation was African American and the other four were predominately Caucasian. Merging congregations appears to be the preferred choice when congregations show a consistent declining pattern or cannot continue to meet their own needs. Other options for merging congregations might include, rebirth, adoption, marriage, and ICU (Intensive Care) mergers (Tomberlin and Bird 24).

Autobiographical Introduction

In June of 2009 the Kentucky conference appointed me to serve the Mosaic UMC, a merged congregation made up of one maintaining and four dying congregations. The original plan called for the merger fourteen churches but in the end, only five voted to merge: Aldersgate, Marcus Lindsay, R. E. Jones (African American), Hazelwood, and Shively.

Each individual church had to forego their individual identity. They had one choice to become hybridized. Furthermore, to add salt to the wound, they had to "forget" their past. They were to blot out their history-- their story, symbols, traditions, and memories. Given the circumstances, they did not have sufficient time to grieve, to desecrate a place, to consecrate a new one, and to provide a proper burial for their past with final closure (Scazzero and Bird *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for*

Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives 160). We can't glorify the past, but without history, we don't have a clear picture where we are going since we might not know where we are.

The following statement about merged congregations sheds light on a problem I have observed in Mosaic.

The old math of mergers was too often $1 + 1 = 1$. The combination rarely worked to produce a vibrant, healthy, larger, or growing church. As veteran church consultant Lyle Schaller explains, the newly merged church typically shrinks to the approximate size of the larger of the two former congregations because no one has made any effort to alter the congregational culture. Members were more comfortable in the smaller size environment they knew before the merger, so they keep dropping away until the culture goes back to what it was. As a result, the typical merger of two smaller no-growth churches 'has had a spectacularly poor record in attracting new members,' he says. This situation commonly occurs, according to Schaller, even when there's a good cultural fit between the congregations. One reason for failure is that the old approach often embodied little more than a goal to survive. It was seen as a way of preserving as much as possible. It was not portrayed as a vehicle that could bring significant change. These 'intensive care' mergers of two struggling churches were a last-gasp effort to stay alive but often ended with both going down together, such as in the equation $1 + 1 = 0$ (Tomberlin and Bird 16-17).

In line with this statement, in the opening months Mosaic had over 250 people in attendance, six full time pastors, and five church buildings to sell. All members who

voted against the merger left the merger and thus, create a vacuum difficult to fill. When I came to the merged congregation, Mosaic average attendance was 130 six years after the merger occurred. By September of 2013, Mosaic reached a highpoint of 180 people in average attendance. However, the attendance again dropped because some faithful members went to be with the Lord, and we lost some Hispanic members.

Presently, the church is back to the original 130 in average audience. Given this scenario, we are now focusing on evangelism, discipleship, and retention of guests. We have celebrated two-evangelism retreats for all leaders with the goal of expanding the kingdom of God by bringing new people to Christ.

How can Mosaic reverse history and become a healthy, vital, merged, vision-mission driven congregation? Can Mosaic start new, or restart? What will it take to reverse history?

What are Mosaic's options to become a thriving congregation rather than just surviving? Do we hire a wise, experienced coach to assist in identifying? Should we restart? Do we renew Mosaic's vision, mission, strategies, and short and long-term Kingdom goals? How do we move Mosaic from scarcity mentality to living in kingdom abundance? It is a matter of perspective? It is a matter of priority? To whom will you give the little that you have? It is a matter of posture? Where am I leaning on to multiply?

The answers to these and other questions might be gleaned from a field research study of Mosaic UMC.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years most merged congregations within the Kentucky conference of the United Methodist Churches have struggled to survive. Nonetheless, the conference

continues to merge congregations as they decline in numbers and resources. Added to this demise are the declining of the church in America and the possibility of facing stagnation. George Barna states, “the vast majority of Christian churches in America are either stagnant or declining” (Barna *User Friendly Churches: What Christians Need to Know About the Churches People Love to Go To* p. 15).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to increase church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowered leadership, and authentic community, and to discern factors that might contribute to the health of a merged congregation.

Research Questions

With the goal of increasing church health in a merged congregation and learning factors that might contribute to the health of a merged congregation, I asked three research questions. The eight characteristics are: authentic community, empowering leadership, engaging worship, functional structures, intentional evangelism, mobilized laity, passionate spirituality, and transforming discipleship.

Research Question # 1

What was the level of church health rated on five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics within Mosaic prior to the intervention?

Research Question # 2

What was the level of Mosaic’s health rated on five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics following the intervention?

Research Question # 3

What aspects of the intervention made the greatest difference in Mosaic's health using five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics?

Rationale for the Project

There are several reasons for this proposed study. First, I am working on this research to inform my ministry in a merged congregation in which the Kentucky Annual Conference invested bountiful resources for six years to sustain six fulltime pastors. Nonetheless, by June 2009 only one pastor was left, finances from the Conference stopped and Mosaic UMC could not maintain his salary anymore. I came into this situation in June 2009 at a lower salary.

Second, I pursue this study to understand the factors leading to decreased membership over the last eleven years and the fluctuation in numbers during the eight years of ministry. Attendance had dropped to an average of 135. In the last five years, Mosaic began to grow and reached a high point by September of 2013 with 180 people in average attendance. Conversely, faithful members are enjoying heaven. A significant number of Hispanics left to start a new church. Others chose to find another church. As a result, we are back to the original numbers of 130. The church seems to be repeating its loops in line with a statement made by Henry Cloud in his book *9 Things You Simply Must Do*: "Certain kind of people, given certain circumstances, always face and resolve situations in the same way."

Third, these constant cycles have exacerbated the original financial commitments made at the beginning of the Mosaic merger. At that time, they chose to buy 17 acres of land for \$1.5 million with funds raised by the sale of two buildings, and they accrued a

mortgage of \$2.5 million to build a multipurpose building. Mosaic UMC currently must pay \$10,000 monthly toward the mortgage for the next 16 years. At the present time, Mosaic owes \$1,695,761. The dream of a new sanctuary is shattered and far removed because of pressing financial conditions even when existing members sigh and long to build one. When the merger occurred, Mosaic acquired a debt with the Conference District leadership and Mosaic's membership approval likely did not envision the future internal demographical changes. Finances have taken the energy away from focusing on investing in and transforming our community with our resources. At the time of this study, Mosaic fulfills its financial responsibilities only through an unstable and unsustainability source: namely the income it receives from the Mosaic Child Development Center.

Fourth, the present and the future of Mosaic prompted this study. One wonders whether the writing is on the wall and Mosaic's merger will end. This situation fosters an environment of urgency and a need for a deep cultural shift from "us" to "them;" from a default system of survival to do a hard reset for revival; from waiting for them to come to actively engaging in Kingdom work in the community; and from thinking and learning how to pay daily bills and an accrued mortgage to learn to pray actively to the Lord of the harvest.

Definition of Key Terms

"A *merger* is defined here, *for ecclesiastical purposes*, as involving a congregation giving up its separate identity and uniting with an already existing congregation".

Mark Dever defines a *healthy church* as “a congregation that increasingly reflects God’s character as his character has been revealed in his word” (Dever 40). Leith Anderson allows each church to define what church health is when they engage in a process of “comparison, consultation, and self-evaluation” (Anderson 128). A healthy church, he says, glorifies God, grows disciples, exercises gifts, evangelizes, is open to change, trusts God, and welcomes new members (Anderson 70).

In his book, *Natural Church Development*, Christian Schwartz, who studied hundreds of churches in more than thirty countries, says a church is healthy when the following principles are in place: empowering leadership, spiritual gifts, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, small groups, evangelism, and loving relationships (Schwarz and Logan 38).

The Beeson Church Health Questionnaire identifies some key elements that can be used to identify the health of a local church. Four Doctor of Ministry scholars propose these: authentic community, empowering leadership, engage in worship, functional structures, intentional evangelism, mobilized laity, passionate spirituality, and transforming discipleship (Kinder; Law; McKee; Taylor).

For this study, *church health* is defined as the balance of these eight qualities in a harmonious interaction. *Deficiency of health* is the absence or shallow forms of these quality characteristics.

Delimitations

This research is limited to one church, Mosaic United Methodist Church. The interventions projected in this study were specific to Mosaic UMC. The church was the result of five congregations that the Kentucky Annual Conference through the office of

New Church and Congregational Development merged into one. This study assumed that successful mergers are linked to church health. Enabling a merged congregation like Mosaic to experience health in these eight characteristics areas is a process that might take more than one, three, or five years. Perhaps, the best scenario for Mosaic would be to transform these eight qualities into a lifestyle.

Review of Relevant Literature

Much of the conversation about how one examines the overall health of merged churches is centered on church leadership or church culture professionals. This research focused primarily on books from experienced church pastors and or experts in church culture. The areas considered in this research were centered on church dynamics, models of healthy churches, church mergers and general apostolic leadership.

Martin F. Saarinen's work, *The Life Cycle of a Congregation* provided a fundamental background for understanding factors related to church age, size, group and cultural dynamics. Complex Leadership Systems Theory provided essential tools for understanding the power of church systems.

The quantity of material related to various definitions of church health was astounding. Mark Dever *What Is a Healthy Church?* Vol. 1, Howard Foltz *Healthy Churches in a Sick World*, and Mark DeYmaz's *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* were consulted in the choosing of this project's definition of church health. Five other pastors and church leaders played a prominent role in this research and are referenced by others exploring similar research. Dale Galloway *The Ten Characteristics of Healthy Growing Churches*, and Stephen Macchia *Becoming a Healthy Church*, provide practical

pastoral definitions of church health. Reggie McNeal *Kingdom Come*, and Ken Hemphill *The Antioch Effect* were selected for their prophetic and Biblical definitions.

Peter Scazzero's *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* and *The Emotionally Healthy Church* brought not only clear concepts on what healthy and unhealthy congregations embody, both of the resources add material related to contemplative spirituality, multi-ethnic communities, and theoretical frameworks of health. Scazzero's work is referenced often in both this research and in the contemporary research of church health.

The context of this research is a multi-ethnic, merged church. As such, several books were critical for understanding the unique dimensions of such churches. Dirk Elliott's book, *Vital Merger* and Richard Larabee's dissertation on what constitutes a successful church merger, offered helpful, practical paradigms. Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird's book, *Better Together*, suggested four different types of mergers and how each type affects strategy, leadership and even success.

The final area that was common in the research was general church leadership. This project leaned heavily on Christian Schwarz's work in *Natural Church Development*. His research is wholistic, global and it encompasses many denominations, various church sizes and universal principles of church growth. Aubrey Malphurs provided several books that offered helpful lenses into 21st century pastoral leadership. Other church leadership experts referenced in the study are Edwin Friedman, James Griffith and Bill Easum, and Lyle Schaller, all respected in faith-based leadership cultures.

Research Methodology

The choice of this research design consists of a quantitative, qualitative, and complement methods approach. This research uses both. Its design includes both pre and post intervention research. Thus, it is a mixed method approach. John Creswell states that in the quantitative and qualitative approach there is a distinction where one,

Is framed in terms of using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative), or using closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) rather than open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions). A more complete way to view the gradations of differences between them is in the basic philosophical assumptions researchers bring to the study, the types of research strategies used in the research (e.g., quantitative experiments or qualitative case studies), and the specific methods employed in conducting these strategies (e.g., collecting data quantitatively on instruments versus collecting qualitative data through observing a setting) (Creswell 3).

The research design in this study uses a tool called the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire given as a written test both before and after an intervention used to discover quantitative data. This instrument will be given to participants in three different groups to compare and measure degrees of change as a result of the “intervention, that will fulfill the purpose of the project” (Sensing Kindle Chap. 3). Moreover, the design of this research includes focus groups conversations as instruments to gather qualitative data as a result of a series of open-ended questions related to the purpose of this project (Sensing Kindle Chap. 4). Debra Renee Kaufman asserts that: “Narratives are critical to how we acquire data and how we produce knowledge from that data” (Kaufman 61).

Michael Ornstein calls the focus groups described in chapter 3 of this project the “target population” where, “each member of the population is an element; each element in the sample is a selection; and each selected element for which data were gathered successfully is an observation, case or subject, depending on the discipline” (Ornstein Kindle Chap. 4).

The Beeson Church Health Questionnaire (BCHQ) was given in the pretest phase for participants to fill out. The intervention consisted of a series of sermons that will be delivered over a period of a month and a half. The sermons will address each characteristic biblically and theologically and discuss the implications for the health of Mosaic, a merged congregation. Two months after the sermon series, the same participants responded to the BCHQ questionnaire to analyze the data and how the sermon series improved church health in the life of Mosaic.

Type of Research

The study will use both quantitative and qualitative research methods. It will use an intervention and includes a questionnaire (Beeson Church Health Questionnaire), focus groups, and interviews within these groups to discover the differences seen in the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire before and after the intervention and to analyze what improved in areas such as authentic community, empowering leadership, engage in worship, functional structures, intentional evangelism, mobilized laity, passionate spirituality, and transforming discipleship.

Participants

The participants were all members of Mosaic United Methodist Church. In addition, the study chose three focus groups of active congregants who were part of

Mosaic, and they were divided in three groups: the new members who were not present during the merger, all leaders serving at the time of the research, and a sample of congregants. Each of these three groups provided relevant information from different perspectives and angles based on the time when the merger happened and how it has affected the health of the congregation.

Instrumentation

A research-designed questionnaire called The Beeson Church Health Questionnaire was used. The BCHQ is an inventory that assesses church health in eight dimensions five of which are the focus of this study. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which their church fits with statements about church health. They responded using a five-point Likert scale, where one strongly disagrees and five equals strongly agree. Higher scores suggest greater health.

The instrument has fifty-four questions indicated by a number on the left column. Fifteen demographic questions were included and given to each participant. The tool includes the Beeson Church Health Characteristics Scales: (1) Authentic community, (2) Empowering leadership, (3) Engaging worship, (4) Functional structures, (5) Intentional Evangelism, (6) Mobilized laity, (7) Passionate spirituality, and (8) Transforming discipleship. It is central to indicate that Authentic Community and Mobilized Laity contain only six Beeson Church Health Characteristics Scales; the remaining six characteristics include seven Scales under each category. See Appendix B.

The second instrument used was a battery of questions to guide the three focus groups conversations. Please see Appendix C for detailed information of all questions.

Data Collection

The BCHQ was used in the pre-test and post-test. The adjective “health” was not included in the questionnaire and it was not mentioned when giving the tests. I recorded two-hour sessions of one conversation with the three focus groups. Three data collections methods used:

1. The three groups completed the questionnaire data using the Beeson Church Questionnaire. Group number one was composed of new members. Group number two included all leaders who serving at the time, and group number three was a sample group formed from among the rest of the congregants. All groups answered the questions in the BCHQ a month before the sermon series and they completed it again two months after the intervention. Then, I compared Mosaic’s health, what improved and what did not improve before and after the intervention.
2. Focus groups. I had three focus groups that include the same groupings described above. I used the following questions in the focus groups:
 - a. What do you think was the health of the church prior to the sermon series?
 - b. What do you think about the church’s health now?
 - c. What do you think made a difference?
 - d. What do you think we could in the future to advance the church’s health even further?
3. Interviews I had one two-hour interview with each of the focus groups. In order to enrich the dialog, I pursued these questions. There were two methods applied in this research process; one was quantitative because of the use of the Beeson

Church Health Questionnaire given to three specific groups gathered from the pre-intervention and post-intervention. This study also included a qualitative data: the results of the focus groups conversations that took place after the intervention.

Data Analysis

Since I was using the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire, I used statistical analysis to discover differences in church health before and after the sermon series. However, the analysis of the focus group and interviews will involve qualitative methods, particularly a triangulation of the data. This will include highlighting significant words or phrases and discerning different themes.

Generalizability

This study attempted to demonstrate the correlation between church health and the use of descriptive measures to move a merged congregation to vitality. The discoveries of this investigation have direct implications for Mosaic United Methodist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. These findings might help other United Methodist Congregations with similar merger dynamics. This research measured church health indicators by concentrating on the application of five of the eight “Beeson Health Church Questionnaire.” However, the study encountered a weakness due to the absence of no control group to use as comparison.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 reviews selected relevant literature and authors who have done extensive research concerning healthy church mergers. In this chapter the biblical and theological realities of the meaning of consecration of a place, the mission of the church

and how they illuminate church health are applied to church merger. It includes a summary of the eight Beeson Church Health Characteristics.

Chapter 3 explains in detail the project design, the research methods, and methods of analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the results found in Quantitative and Qualitative results from the pre-tests and post-test and the data received from three focus groups.

Chapter 5 reports major findings of the study and practical applications emerging out of the research. Some suggestions are presented for further exploration.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The Kingdom of God, already here but not yet, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus's return are three vital promises that provide help and hope for our communities (McNeal *Kingdom Come: Why We Must Give up Our Obsession with Fixing the Church -- and What We Sould Do Instead* Kindle Chap. 2). These biblical and theological promises are crucial to consider when deliberating merging churches. This process includes people of all races, ethnicities, and denominations seeking unity at the foot of the cross. It also relates to addressing declining issues in the United Methodist Churches. The cross lies at the heart of all human efforts directed toward creating healthy merged environments.

The Kingdom of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus's return are three interconnected promises that will assist this project and will guide this research in the application of the guidelines of the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire introduced by four Doctor of Ministry Beeson graduates in their corresponding academic work (Kinder), (Law), (McKee), and (Taylor).

The purpose of this study was to enhance church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, authentic community, and discern factors that might contribute to the health of a merged congregation.

This project was to discover the role of church health in a merged congregation to discern factors that might contribute to the success and health of Mosaic's future.

Biblical Foundations

Consecration of a Place

Is it possible for merged congregations to consecrate a new building while celebrating a memorial ceremony of the older ones? What relationship does consecration have with new buildings in the life of a new merged congregation that lost the original building for worship? How does Genesis 28:10-22 provide light when merging congregations? This biblical narrative might provide a template to understand consecration of a place. The narrative in this Genesis passage displays God's unconditional promises and protection and how they sparked in people the longing to reclaim sacred spaces.

Bethel a New Place Consecrated for Worship

The most painful decision when merging congregations is leaving a meaningful comfortable location to move to a new site, choosing a new name, and parting with all the agonizing memories left behind. Tomberlin and Bird state, "What is most painful is the potential for the heritage and identity of a church to get lost in the merger process" (Tomberlin and Bird 1). Correspondingly, the losses experienced will mean saying goodbye to people who will choose not to join the merger. Elliot states, "Traditional mergers can be painful and too often lose a significant number of people in ministry" (Elliott 45). However the best merges occur, declares Tomberlin and Bird, "when the joining church is smart enough or desperate enough to be willing to relinquish everything to the lead church—its name, facilities, staff, ministries, and glorious past—all in exchange for a second life" (Tomberlin and Bird 26).

Jacob experienced a parallel situation despairing for survival and eager to leave everything behind to undertake a new phase of his life and enter into an unknown future revealed in Genesis 28:10-22. At the beginning of Genesis 28 Jacob is blessed by his father and sent to a new place with people he will meet for the first time in his life. Jacob's leaves home to travel to Haran (Leupold and Barnes 771) and Genesis 28 ends with his reaffirmation of his vows to God.

Jacob's story echoes the need of an intimate God who can assist and heal members of congregations that will merge and as a result will lose lifelong friends, culture, history, and identity. Jacob's decision to leave allows him to experience the holy presence of God not abandoning him in his new struggle. The journey will allow the transformation of an ordinary place to be reclaimed as sacred. God in a dream offers him promises and protection even after lying Jacob lied to his brother Esau and was running for his life "depressed and fearful" (Williams 213). "The promise of God's presence and protection would bring continued encouragement during the twenty years with Laban" (Ross 485).

This is the same God who offers His presence and protection to all members and congregations choosing to merge as a new church in a new place for the years to come. Nahum Sarna portrays this scene in the following manner,

The home-loving favorite of an overprotective mother is now an exile, utterly alone and friendless, embarking on a long perilous journey that is to take him from Beer-sheba in southern Canaan to Haran in northern Mesopotamia. His character is to be tested and refined, his personality molded and transformed by the experience (Sarna 198).

Jacob escaped his brother's anger, and encountered God. The conflict and tension with Esau did not stop Jacob from receiving God's covenant promises and blessings.

The Esau-Jacob cycle was followed by the Jacob-God, and ended with the Jacob-Laban cycle. These cycles give movement and purpose to the text (Ross 485). He trapped his brother Esau to sell his birthright (Gen. 25:31-33). Later, with the help of his mother, and invoking the name of God, he deceived his father Isaac to rob Esau's blessings (Gen. 25:18-29). Esau bitterly cried out and wept. Anger and bitterness pushed Esau's boundaries. Genesis 27:41 reads, "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" Genesis 27:41 NASB.

To protect Jacob from immediate death, his father sent him to live with relatives in Haran. The night captured him with his heart still racing in his mouth. Jacob was moving from a place of security to an unfamiliar territory where he was about to discover how worshiping God is related to claiming an ordinary place as a sacred one for God (Ross 486). Sometimes, God emerges in the darkest moments of life even during occasions when merged congregations' heritage and identity are lost forever.

God's Promises at Bethel

While Jacob is sleeping, his life turns from dreaming to discovering. In Gen. 28:12-17 God reveals His detailed promises and protection to Jacob through a dream, a vision, where angels were actively engaged in moving up and down a ladder where God was at the top of it. He corroborates the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob:

“The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” Genesis 28:13-15 NRSV.

Jacob received earthly promises from Isaac and heavenly promises from God.

As we open the curtain one more time, we find Jacob’s heart moving in a grand finale from wandering to worshipping God. Ross states; “The literary devices in the passage are designed to show that the vision inspired the manner of Jacob’s worship and gave new meaning to the place of his vision (Ross 486), “Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, *“Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!”*” Sarna paints this emotional picture with the following statement,

This reaction of amazement is unprecedented in the patriarchal stories. Neither Abraham nor Isaac exhibit any surprise at their initial experience of God’s sudden self-revelation. Jacob’s exceptional emotional response requires explanation. Undoubtedly it lies, at least partially, in his realization of the baseness of his behavior toward his father and brother. God and man must have beset him with feelings of complete and deserved abandonment. Having fallen prey to guilt and solitary despair, he is surprised that God is still concerned for him (Sarna 200).

Jacob got up and ran to pour out oil (Sarna 201) on top of a rock reclaiming the place as sacred, a place where he worshiped God. A meaningless rock emerges as an opportunity to worship in the middle of nowhere and inaugurates Bethel as a sacred place from a transformed worshipping heart. Williams portrays God in this fashion:

Always forgiving, always available, always ready to pick us up where we are, and always be with us. Jacob needed acceptance and assurance for he had lost his home, his possessions, and his inheritance. Esau had threatened his life, and for all he knew Esau might be pursuing him. Jacob needed direction for the future. God was there when Jacob needed Him most (Williams 213).

A common ordinary place where a rock lay in open space receives oil and Jacob sanctifies it naming it Bethel (Sarna 200). Both, the place and the rock are redeemed: the first as a new place to worship and meet God in a dream revealed from God. Bethel means and becomes a “House of God, Gate of Heaven.” The second one is redeemed as a milestone to remind him of God’s faithfulness.

It was customary throughout the ancient world, both Near Eastern and classical, for a devotee to sleep in the sacred precincts of a temple in order to induce the deity to reveal its will. However, the present narrative emphatically dissociates Jacob’s experience from this pagan practice by stressing the wholly unplanned nature of his stopover, the complete anonymity of “the place,” and the total unexpectedness of the theophany. Here it is God who freely takes the initiative in revealing Himself to an amazed Jacob (Sarna 199).

The word “stone” can be used with various meanings such as marked points of reference in the Scripture. Scripture offers some examples of these decisions like *Ebenezer* (“Thus far the Lord has helped”) used in 1 Samuel 7:12; the twelve stones in Joshua 4:9 commemorating the crossing of the Jordan River and the entrance into the promise land. And in the New Testament, Jesus is the “Cornerstone” (Matthew 21:42).

He is the foundation and the holding together the body of Christ. Christians are called “living stones” (1Peter 2:4-8).

Places, like Bethel transformed in new worship spaces provide a biblical and theological foundation for congregations before they merge. Perhaps, this Old Testament context offers a possibility for each congregation open to merge. Each can choose to use their old names engraved on concrete or other materials as markers, as sacred places to remind them God never abandoned them in the past. The same God will lead them in the new merged future now at hand. Laribee suggests using visual representations used as a map, they “can plan a special celebration that marks the end of the time of transition, and the full arrival of the new congregation, with its new leaders, new location, new symbols, and its renewed life” (Laribee 26).

Jacob woke from his sleep changed. God’s vision offered him a different perspective concerning his uncertain future. In the same way Tomberlin and Bird declare that, “Mergers today succeed largely because of a united, compelling vision that lifts a church that’s stuck or on a downward slope into a new pattern of life and growth” (Tomberlin and Bird 11).

Consecration and Desecration of Bethel

Conversely, another reality of a consecrated place is that it can be desecrated. In the history of Israel, one finds that the same House of God (Bethel) and the Gate of Heaven, where the Ark of God once rested, became a place of idolatry denounced by three prophets including Amos, Jeremiah, and Hosea (Amos 4:4, 5:5; Jer. 48:13; Hosea 10:15). Bethel was desecrated. It became a house of transgression including Gilgal and

Beersheva (Amos 4:4, 5:5). Sin in Bethel caused God to rebuke Israel for allowing idolatry to happen in their midst.

In the Bible idolatry is a life-threatening sin, an inordinate obsession with supplanting God with something, or someone else. Jeff Christopherson and Mac Lake define an idol as “something that starts out as a worthy thing, until we make it a worshipped thing, and then it ends up becoming a worthless thing” (Christopherson and Lake 51). Anthony B. Robinson expands this concept of idolatry through a wider extent when he states, “Christians are, said James, to abstain from worship of idols. We may not have idols today in the same sense that the ancient world did, but we do have idols - that is, created things to which we ascribe ultimate value (Robinson and Wall 77).

Lessons for Merging Congregations

Nonetheless, when congregations choose to merge, their original sacred place of worship might be moved to a new location not due to idolatry like in the case of Bethel but because the new merged congregation needs a neutral place, or a new location. For Dirk Elliot this is important when he says:

To move to a temporary, rented facility while the new church owns two, three, or four buildings is often hard for church members to understand. They own their buildings where they can worship and have Sunday school and would not have to set up and tear down every week. However, a neutral location is critical for a Vital Merger’s success. The new church home must be home for everyone.

Stories of Vital Mergers show that neutrality is necessary (Elliott 35).

When a neutral place for worship is identified, merged congregations can consecrate it with a preferred future in mind during a special ceremony. A possibility to

consider in the new building could be to build a wall with memoirs, pictures, and names of members, including names of pastors who served in that specific church. Dr. Anthony Headley considers of supreme importance respecting the memories of each congregation since “they are spiritual families, like our families of origin, we can’t erase their memories but we can help them create new ones” (Headley, statement made in conversation).

As they sanctify the new place, it is essential that the new merged congregation focus on their sacred mission and the new preferred future, otherwise “projecting the past into the future proves fatal to those who want to survive” says McNeal (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 75).

They cannot settle for less, because according to pastors Patrick Darrin and Mark DeVine,

When churches settle into extended periods of decline, they sometimes adopt a defensive rhetoric that touts spiritual growth or spiritual health over numerical growth. Such false dichotomy often masks a tragic loss of vision, a lapse into spiritual sloth, and even defeat. Numerical growth can never substitute for spiritual health and may even cloak spiritual rot. But true spiritual health always longs to see the body of Christ grow. It longs to see the joy of the gospel shared (Patrick and DeVine 34).

Theological Foundations

The application of theological foundations for this study, revealed in the promises given to Jacob in the Old Testament and in the promises given to the church in the New Testament particularly in the book of Acts chapter one, is intimately connected to its health to carry the gospel until the ends of the earth. Out of these promises flows a major shift for the church merger. And to be vibrant, one is expected to start with the formation of a new authentic community in mind with a new mission. Dirk Elliot says emphatically that it needs to start:

With a fresh focus on the mission field and new ways of doing ministry. Using a Biblical metaphor, the traditional merger is attempting to pour new wine into old wineskins. The Vital Merger, on the other hand, creates new wine that is poured into a new wineskin. A Vital Merger congregation is a new work. It is a viable new-church-start model (Elliott 35).

This shift marks one of the core transitions delineated in the book of Acts. William Bridges in his book *Managing Transitions* defines them as “A process by which people unplug from an old world *and now* can plug into a new world, we can say that transitions starts with an ending in finishes with a beginning” (Bridges 5). This shifts demands empowered leadership when merging congregation because “reactive leadership must be replaced with leadership that anticipates new realities” says McNeal (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 75). Nick Page claims the beginning of the church in the book of Acts is led by a group of radicals, fools, rebels crazy leaders willing to die declaring alliance to a new King (Page Kindle introduction).

Therefore, the *ekklesia*, the new community, the people without walls, books, buildings, institutions, social media, TV shows, radio, satellites, Facebook, and Internet changed the world and fulfilled the mission “not as a place *where* they arrived at but a direction *they* were moving” (Culver 816-820), (McNeal *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* 38). A community where people are called to enjoy new relationships with God and one another, was lost in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve became strangers (Stanley and Willits 27). Andy Stanley, in his book “*Creating Community*” offers a vivid illustration how one business in this new century speaks God’s language,

‘Create Community. Make a difference in someone’s day.’ Since the subject of community not only intrigues me but also employs me, I immediately picked it up. On the back of the card it went on: ‘When you work at Starbucks, you can make a difference in someone’s day by creating an environment where neighbors and friends can get together and reconnect while enjoying a great coffee experience.’ (Stanley and Willits 20).

The *ekklesia* is called to offer more than a coffee experience. It is the body of Christ offering conviviality, hope, life, and unconditional love to all humanity (Pohl Ch. 11). The *ekklesia*, the people of God ready to offer deep healing and wholeness. For instance, Jean Vanier explains it in his own words,

Experience has shown that one person, all alone, can never heal another. A one-to-one situation is not a good situation. It is important to bring broken people into a community of love, a place where they feel accepted and recognized in their gifts,

and have a sense of belonging. That is what most wounded people need and want most (Vanier 28).

However, this newly formed environment was far from perfect. In the book of Acts, one can find how it revealed cracks, vulnerabilities, and struggles when an old culture (*old wine*) clashed intending to keep an entire new people group marginalized (*new wine*). Judaism was no longer the dominant factor. Gentiles and Jews had to learn to be a new authentic community, namely the body of Christ to experience healing and wholeness as a result of being Kingdom agents. This aspect shows how the new home experienced tensions since “there is first of all the conflict between the values of the world and the values of community, between togetherness and independence” (Vanier 29).

The new assembly also lived in the context of uncertainties. They faced powerful transitional moves in leadership: Jesus leaves, the Holy Spirit comes, and the apostles are assigned the tasks to carry the mission of the newly formed community.

One can conclude that a process of merging churches, creating a new authentic community needs to be considered with a true heart of worship able to invite the other one lost in a sea of loneliness (Stanley and Willits 21). It has to be bathed with prayers, and agreements that will include painful leavings from historical, memorable locations to form a new community of worship.

Therefore, a merged congregation can reclaim a new sacred place with a true worshipping heart, and exclaim with Jacob, “Surely the LORD is in this place, *in this family, in this church, in this city, in this country*, —and we did not know it! ‘How

awesome is this place, *this family, this church, this city, this country!* This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” Genesis 28:16-17 NASB.

Missio Dei

Evangelism.

The true spiritual health of a growing merged congregation can be measured by purposeful evangelism (Kinder 60). Christopher and Lake make quite a distinction “The art of planting *from* evangelism needs to be quickly rediscovered for the sake of a waiting harvest” (Christopherson and Lake 2) not *for* evangelism but *from* evangelism where numbers are not the main drivers; mission is. Galindo proposes, “Reaching the lost for Christ *is* the ultimate value and highest good” (Galindo 53). Evangelism has to be at the forefront of every authentic community with a clear vision and strategies to reach the lost at any cost.

Therefore, every church merger needs to start with evangelism as a main objective of the vision-mission of the church. Tomberlin and Bird believe that “Mergers today succeed largely because of a united, compelling vision that lifts a church that’s stuck or on a downward slope into a new pattern of life and growth” (Tomberlin and Bird 11). The mission breathes and bleeds evangelism, and evangelism offers life and healthy growth to every church involved in a merger.

In the New Testament, one finds the church as the heartbeat of missions (Robinson and Wall 43-45). It is where evangelism becomes a lifestyle not another program. Consequently, every merged congregation is at the epicenter of the heartbeat of missions. Anthony Robinson and Robert Wall in their book “Called to Be Church” clarify this effort when they assert,

The church does not *have* a mission – it *is* a mission. The church is in its nature and its total life a mission and missionary endeavor; in its very essence it seeks to be, and is called to be, Jesus' witness in all its words and deeds, in all its life, whether gathered or scattered (Robinson and Wall 43-45).

This is a vital sign of a healthy merged congregation. Thus, evangelism is not doing, it is being the very life of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke draws attention to Jesus calling the church to be outwardly focused and to evangelize and preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins...proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. We are *witnesses* of these things. And see, I'm sending you what my father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with *power* from on high" (Luke 24:47 NRSB).

The central moment of the narrative is Jesus' prophecy concerning the Holy Spirit (v. 4-5), whose arrival in the Holy City portends the restoration of Israel (v. 6) and empowers the mission of the church (v. 7-8). According to Acts, the hope of Israel's restoration and the mission of the church are integral features of "the last days" of salvation's history soon to be inaugurated by God during Pentecost (see Acts 2). The departure of the glorified Jesus into heaven concludes the first stage of his messianic mission, and it also creates the circumstances that require an apostolic succession. But this succession from Messiah to his apostles is not without problems (Robinson and Wall 11).

Missions and the Kingdom of God.

A major change has to happen says McNeal, "The shift from the church at the center to the kingdom of God is the theological and philosophical underpinning of the

move from an internal to an external focus (McNeal *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* 42).

The foundation for this evangelistic missional endeavor is born in the context of three healthy biblical promises for authentic merged congregations or for churches praying and planning to take this step. These promises are: The Kingdom of God, the promise of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of Jesus' return in Acts 1:6-14 (Bock 61). These three promises introduce new paradigm shifts, "the shift from a refuge mentality to a mission mentality; a kingdom focus away from churchianity" (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 76).

Luke writes the book of Acts to show how this new shift moves from Jerusalem all the way to Rome, a mission to share the gospel not only in Israel but also to the whole world. Acts can boost every merged congregation to become externally driven and genuinely missional to engage their neighborhoods here and the world as bountiful mission fields (McKee 60). Bock articulates this determination when he states,

The mission is defined in verse 8. They are to receive power in the Spirit of God. As a result, they can be witnesses to Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and finally to the end of the earth. Instead of worrying about when God will consummate the program, they are to take to the world the news of salvation's coming (Bock 60).

In Acts 1:8 Jesus is telling the apostles that they will "receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them." and they will be His witnesses. In Acts 2:1, after the Holy Spirit descended upon them, Peter addresses the crowd accusing them of being drunken with wine but he explains to them the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

In verse 21 Peter declares: "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Later in verse 37, when the people heard Peter's sermon and his explanation, they asked him, "What should we do? Peter said to them, 'repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Wesley captures the salvation motif as the crucial element presented throughout the Scriptures, he states, "—faith and salvation— summarize the core substance and central teachings of the entire Bible" (Wesley, Kinlaw and Kinghorn 1).

Luke supports this faith and salvation endeavor in the very beginning in the book of Acts. He guides the reader to observe how the first promise of the Kingdom of God in Acts 1:6-14 communicates to Israel that His agenda was and is beyond to simply eliminating the Roman Empire from their lives, or daily life problems. God's heart is to offer His love and His eternal life to the whole world!

The first promise of the Kingdom of God reveals His loving and gracious heart to restore the *imago Dei* in all persons in all nations. He is passionate about restoring all people to the original relationship He had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they sinned; the exquisite garden of fellowship and fun where all humanity can enjoy the benefits of the King and His Kingdom. The *imago Dei* can be re-created in people's hearts. God's Kingdom is about them and not just about a special selected group of people. God was, is, and will be concerned with all nations of the world and with here and now.

In this "Kingdom-centric movement" (Christopherson and Lake 22), even the leaders of this new movement are taken by surprise when they asked Jesus: "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" and his answer was, "It is not for you

to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” Acts 1:6-8 NASB.

Mission: The Kingdom of God, and Israel.

Does Jesus’ answer mean God has forsaken Israel? The apostle Paul in Romans 11:1 answers this question “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? *May it never be!* For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 1:1 NASB). Timothy Johnson supports this perspective when he writes,

In the Jerusalem narrative of Acts (chaps. 1–8), Luke must answer the fundamental question of God’s fidelity to his promises, so that his readers will find assurance (*asphaleia*). He must show that God kept his promise to Israel and can be trusted to keep his word to the Gentiles who now believe in him. To do this, Luke must demonstrate that there was a restored Israel, which received the blessings God had promised to Abraham, blessings that reached the gentile world as well. His story must make clear the identity of the authentic people, the nature of the leadership over it, and how the Gospel was transferred with essential continuity from Jew to gentile believer” (Johnson 237-238).

What this means for dying churches in America is that God has not forsaken them as long as they “are consumed with a singular passion for the Kingdom of God” (Christopherson and Lake 6) and remain obedient to keep the flame of the mission alive and healthy, “Reaching the lost for Christ as the ultimate value and highest good”

(Galindo 53). Obedience to Jesus' Great Commission not only will revitalize declining congregations but it will keep merged churches externally focused on evangelism and staying on task preaching, "repentance and forgiveness of sins...proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Leith Anderson paints a sense of urgency about evangelism when he states, "Most people would agree that churches should reproduce through evangelism. We all recognize that the threat of extinction is only one spiritual generation away" (Anderson 48).

Mission, the Holy Spirit, and prayer.

"The acts of the Holy Spirit in this contemporary Kingdom adventure" (Christopherson and Lake 6) is the second healthy promise and the criteria for every merged congregation to follow. The manifestation and guidance of the Holy Spirit provides guidance in every step; the energy to sustain all people's efforts; the wisdom and the power to persevere when congregations decide to merge and embrace a new mission field to become *witnesses* of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

This is the Gospel: witnesses testifying with Holy Spirit's power ready to give their lives for the sake of an expansive Gospel movement (Christopherson and Lake 5). The Greek word often used for witness is "μαρτυς." The meaning of the noun is one of a martyr "one who witnesses at cost of life" (Bromiley and Friedrich 620). The implications of facing death and agony are here. Wesley states, "*and shall be witnesses to me*—That is, ye shall be empowered to witness my Gospel, both by your preaching and suffering" (Wesley 283).

For the sake of the gospel in order to reach new people, merged churches can recover a new evangelistic missional focus. Each merger needs to trust the Holy Spirit. He will guide them through new waters and correspondingly prayer will assist the leaders and church members to seek God's wisdom and direction for all decisions involved in any church merger (Tomberlin and Bird 71).

They will experience a conundrum of emotions as a consequence of giving up their buildings by merging with new people, and relocating into a neutral place like Elliot suggests in his book *Vital Church* (Elliott 35), but this one is a decision worth giving up knowing they are not alone. Others, like Stephen died as a martyr after he was stoned to death for the sake of the gospel (Acts 7:60-8:1). The motivation has to be a profound obedience to be witnesses of Jesus' life and resurrection. Such courage positioned the disciples in constant perilous situations. Yet their mission gave them a passion to face death.

Subsequently, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit and prayer gave them boldness to preach the gospel in every evangelistic effort in the book of Acts (1:14; 3:1; 4:31; 8:15; 9:40; 13:3). Under the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit the church became the heartbeat of mission. It became the most powerful evangelistic movement generating new faith communities from Jerusalem all the way to Rome!

Anthony B. Robinson defines this process as,

The central moment of the narrative is Jesus' prophecy concerning the Holy Spirit (v. 4-5), whose arrival in the Holy City portends the restoration of Israel (v. 6) and empowers the mission of the church (v. 7-8). According to Acts, the hope of Israel's restoration and the mission of the church are integral features of "the last

days" of salvation's history soon to be inaugurated by God during Pentecost (see Acts 2) (Robinson and Wall 11).

Congregations considering merging will find it fascinating to read and examine in the book of Acts how the Holy Spirit guides this "salvation history" from the start. While the disciples are praying and waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit they choose a new disciple named Matthias (Acts 2:24-26) but it is captivating to discover he is never mentioned again in any church setting. Instead the Holy Spirit chooses Paul. The apostles had to learn to not get ahead of the leading of the Holy Spirit (González 14). In another incident, Ananias with his wife Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and died one after the other instantly while pretending to give sacrificially while keeping the rest with them. They lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3).

However, life in the new community was not perfect, when all things appeared to be going well a leadership conflict happened when the Greek-speaking widows whose needs were not met by the Hebrew-speaking believers brought this matter to the apostles' attention. "Paradigm shifts are accompanied by conflict," says McNeal (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 74). The disciples presented a different resolution to the larger assembly and they selected seven men, deacons (Lumby 153), filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The names of the new deacons reflected a new openness to include new ethnic leaders in this new movement. Tom Constable explains this scene revealing that,

All seven men whom the congregation chose had Greek names. Luke gave the impression by using only Greek names that these seven were from the Hellenistic group in the church, though many Palestinian Jews at this time had Greek names.

Thus Hellenists appear to have been given responsibility for settling a Hellenist complaint, a wise approach (Constable 108).

Darrel Bock also focus on this authentic diversity when he emphatically says, The fact that so many Hellenist leaders exist points to the early church's multiethnic and multicultural makeup. The adopted solution is also revealing at another level. The disciples do not fragment along ethnic lines or suggest that separate communities be formed along ethnic lines. Rather, they are committed to working together. They may well have recognized that there is strength in numbers, and a powerful testimony is created when different groups can be seen as working together in a world often divided along ethnic lines (Bock 262).

This is powerful lesson for churches severely declining surrounded with new ethnic groups. They belong to the Kingdom of God as well. This might be a strategic decision to implement when evangelism is the new model to follow. It can be a compass to point new merged congregations how to resolve conflicts of various groups represented in each of the spiritual assemblies willing to merge.

When reading the solution to this problem in the immediate context in Acts chapters 6 and 7, it is quite evident that the disciples' definition of their main responsibilities was not to serve the tables but to continue preaching and teaching God's word. Yet, the Holy Spirit selects Stephen as a powerful communicator of God's word Acts 7 (Bengel et al. 568). The Holy Spirit gives Stephen wisdom to answer to the religious leaders with the longest sermon recorded in the book of Acts.

Afterwards, in Acts 8:4, the Holy Spirit sends Philip, another deacon who was serving at the tables, to deliver God's word to the Samaritans. While preaching in

Samaria, the Holy Spirit tells him to join an Ethiopian who is reading the prophet Isaiah. Now the gospel is going viral. The Kingdom of God is expanded to include people from other nationalities. A new paradigm emerges in this whirlwind. Later, in Acts 12:1-8, the Holy Spirit speaks to the Antioch church to select new leaders who will take the gospel from Jerusalem all the way to Rome selecting Paul as the main catalyst to fulfill the church's mission on earth.

All these efforts concur with prayer. One can observe how the church in the New Testament expanded from a group of 120 people praying in the upper room (Acts 1:14). Edmond Hiebert believes prayer is a spiritual authority believers have as they expand God's mission where persecution, threats, beatings, jail, stoning, riots, opposition, arrests, and disastrous failures of merged congregations lure in the horizon. Prayer propelled the gospel and the church became unstoppable. Hiebert portrays this picture as follows,

Prayer is the most powerful and effective means of service in the Kingdom of God . . . It is the most dynamic work which God has entrusted to His saints, but it is also the most neglected ministry open to the believer. We may marvel at the spiritual power and glorious victories of the early apostolic church, but we often forget that its constant prayer life was the secret of its strength. (Hiebert 19, 20).

The disciples learned to pray from the supreme model Jesus the Son of God. Some had seen Him communicating with His father regularly (Luke 5:16; 9:18 Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:13). They relied on the Holy Spirit while practicing the model they had seen in Jesus (1:14).

Prayer brings merged congregations closer to God and the potential for a preferred future which “do not come randomly. They are intentionally established at

times when you are close to God” (Cordeiro 147). Through prayer egos are surrendered to the will of God; strongholds hidden in the spiritual, physical, and emotional dynamics of every congregation agreeing to merge are broken. Furthermore, prayer aligns church merger to the will of God say Tomberlin and Bird, “It is unlikely that God will answer the prayers to bless a merger unless such a merger is the will of God. It is rather less that a merger is the will of God when pursued arrogantly, ignorantly, or for the wrong motivations” (Tomberlin and Bird 36).

The dangers to merged congregations are profuse; the hurts might be deep, and the results perhaps not what one expected, but every one of them has the potential to become mirrors of God’s Kingdom values by being the church to the whole world (Tomberlin and Bird ch. 4). A new passion is ignited by the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit as new merged communities of faith reach new people with the gospel. All nations have unqualified access to benefit from the Kingdom where thriving merged churches grow and multiply as “the church regains the spiritual power of the early church and practice prayer as a vital working force” (Hiebert 20). Praying like the early church is moving away “from a traditional church ministry to an apostolic church” (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 74).

Mission and Jesus’s Return.

A third essential promise when considering merging churches is faithfully supported by the promise of Jesus’s return. The Kingdom of God is here and now. The presence, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit are freely given to every believer to witness until the ends of the earth.

This promise justifies asking, when will Jesus return? Much speculation has been presented regarding this subject. Dates have been set and failed. Nevertheless, one thing is clear and is the focus of Luke's theology in Acts 1:9-11, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" Acts 1:11 NRSV.

When a decision is made concerning merging churches there is hope. The process needs to point people toward heaven, not to one another. Evangelism, reaching new people for Christ is natural and supernatural. Entire communities are transformed by the gospel. There is no place for exclusiveness when every person involved in a merger's painful process is looking up to heaven. God desires to reach all people groups in all nations. The gospel is for all people not just for a few selected individuals and it requires obedience, submission, and a life of obedience to follow God's direction. It is essential to seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to obey and fulfill the great commission vision in all generations. The future belongs to God and Jesus's return confirms it as a living hope to look forward.

Jesus Christ lived fully and disclosed the father's nature. Jesus did all what He saw the father doing. He went to the cross, resurrected and ascended into heaven. After His resurrection, He appeared to the apostles alive with many convincing proofs of His resurrection. And he is coming back!

The apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 encourages living believers with this promise. Those who have died will be resurrected when Jesus "descends from heaven" and those who are living "will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air" 1 Thessalonians 4:17 NRSV.

This is a call to hope against hope. It is therefore, essential for a merged congregation to make this shift sustained by the Kingdom of God, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and the living hope of Jesus' return. It is hope against hope because it calls the congregation's mission, budget, evangelism from, nominations, programs, and leadership formation, before they reach a point of declining because "once plateau and decline have set in, the energy and resources needed to move to the new paradigm might be harder to marshal" (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 75).

The theological and experiential difference with what happened at Bethel and in the book of Acts 1 is that the buildings of the congregations choosing to merge are not necessarily under God's judgment like in the biblical foundations in the Old and New Testament. They open new possibilities to consider various options when a new location needs to be consecrated. The process for merging congregations calls for a worshipping heart prepared to consecrate the new place and obedience to fulfill God's mission in the new church merger with an external focus; the harvest.

Church Mergers

Since the year 2000, the literature has increased its focus on church mergers. It offers clarity and direction for the implementation of these practices. This is a common phenomena—taking place in the USA and the interest is rising. Concerning church mergers, Warren Bird said: "2% of America's 300,000 Protestant churches have been involved in a merger and that 8% are looking into the possibility of a future merger. While 2% may sound like a small amount, that adds up to 6,000 churches!" (Elliott 27).

Furthermore, the context of declining churches and denominations offer a scope of opportunities to consider merging congregations. According to Tomberlin and Bird: Roughly 80 percent of the three hundred thousand Protestant churches in the United States have plateaued or are declining, and many of them are in desperate need of a vibrant ministry. Among the 20 percent of growing congregations across the United States, many are in desperate need of space. These conditions present a potential win-win for forward-thinking church leaders who believe that “we can do better together than separate,” and it is revitalizing church topography (Tomberlin and Bird 11).

However, one needs to cautiously examine the goal, process, and direction of the mergers. Some mergers are driven for the purpose of survival. E. H. Friedman offers a keen perspective about it when he says, “In institutions, the presence of the past can be seen both in their ability to survive crisis and in their inability to change” (Friedman *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* 116). Merged churches might show an emphasis on survival and persisting in keeping and doing what has been done in the past. Growth is not pursued intentionally with nimble staffing and structures. Elliot asks,

Why is this so? Mergers that are based on financial problems and survival of the institution do not attract new people or help them to come to a vital faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, within a couple of years most mergers drop in average worship attendance in an amount equal to or exceeding the size of the smaller church before the merger (Elliott 12).

If survival drives some mergers, change also plays a major role. Laribee goes even further to say that the inability to change will show in a span of five years, “any merger in which one or more of the congregations discover that the merger fails to accomplish its desired objective within five years” (Laribee 12). Marshall Meyer portrays this inability to change as a “permanent failure” (Meyer and Zucker 19). This choice of permanency as a failure might be a cultural resistance to change or inability to confront reality as it is, or define it as a new one (Covey 185).

Therefore, for a merger to be successful it requires for all laity and leaders to be committed to twelve principles afore, during, and after the merger. Dirk Elliot states:

1. To bathe the merger in prayer. This spiritual discipline is essential for the churches to be synchronized with the movement of God (*Worship*).
2. To reach more people for Christ. Church leaders are motivated by a desire to better reach new people with the love and grace of God (*Empowering leaders*). New ministries are designed to reach the new mission field (*Intentional evangelism*).
3. To view itself as a new church. The merger is not viewed as a revitalization effort, but as the planting of a new church to reach more young people and diverse groups (*Intentional evangelism*).
4. To unify all ministry around mission through a new vision. The new congregation’s focus is clearly on reaching its mission field (*Intentional evangelism*).
5. To imbed new DNA quickly through new values. Unhealthy DNA is transformed by embracing new values and habits that are aligned with Jesus’ teaching (*Empowering leaders*).
6. To eliminate turf issues. All existing church buildings are sold and the merged church relocates to a new location. In addition, the new church’s name doesn’t contain the names of any of the merging churches.
7. To remove majority ruling post-merger. After the merger, there is equal representation and equal decision-making power. No church has a majority voice.

8. To receive a new church-planting pastor. A pastor who has been assessed and trained as a church planter is assigned or appointed to the new church (Tomberlin and Bird Ch. 1; Elliott Ch. 10).
9. To worship at a neutral location. Worship is conducted in a neutral location from the day of the official merger (*Worship*).
10. To organize the new structure with a team-based, mission-driven format. Creating nimble, flexible, permission-giving structures that support mission-driven ministry.
11. To make room for guests. New churches are especially guest-friendly because they intentionally design everything with the guest in mind (*Intentional evangelism*).
12. To provide adequate staffing for growth. The merger of one or more churches yields a different organizational size— one which needs a different type of staffing model than that of any of the churches before the merger (Elliott 12).

In any merger process, these are essential principles clergy and lay leaders need to follow. The implementation of these principles and a consistent communication will largely influence success of the merged congregations (Elliott Ch. 3), (Tomberlin and Bird Ch. 4). It is essential to lead the merger as a team because, “The results transcend what any individual from that team could have produced alone” (Barna "The Power of Team Leadership: Finding Strength in Shared Responsibility" 11). Furthermore, Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird consider that the significant component for the success of church mergers is to have in place a “postmerger leadership team and an integration process before the merger is approved” (Tomberlin and Bird 44).

Peter Scazzero paints a clear picture of how important it is for leaders to be emotionally healthy spiritually, “the sad reality is that most of us will not go forward until the pain of staying where we are is unbearable” (Scazzero 22). He explains emotional unhealthy spirituality with ten principles:

1. Using God to run from God

2. Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear
3. Dying to the wrong things
4. Denying the past's impact on the present
5. Dividing our lives into "secular" and "sacred" compartments
6. Doing for God instead of being with God
7. Spiritualizing away conflict
8. Covering our brokenness, weakness, and failure
9. Living without limits
10. Judging other people's spiritual Journey (Scazzero 23).

In addition he delineates the relationship between leadership and the church when he declares, "The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. As go the leaders, so goes the church" (Scazzero and Bird "The Emotionally Healthy Church" 20).

A greater distress is added when the effort to merge churches comprises people from other ethnicities, Mark DeYmaz adds a prophetic voice when he states that, Multi-ethnic churches are drastically different from all other forms of church and, as such, cannot be established through human ingenuity, self-directed effort, conventional wisdom, or church growth techniques. Apart from prayer, patience, and perseverance, you will not be able to get the job done (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138).

Also, the unspoken space in this dialog according to DeYmaz is how to measure the success of multiethnic churches because; "multi-ethnic church planters must

recognize that success is not to be defined by the number of people who attend but by the collective spirit of those who attend” (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 139).”

The ethnocentric system in place in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church influences how lay and clergy people of diverse ethnic backgrounds relate to the itinerant system (Howell and Paris 33), (Olson 264-265). It adds more variables to consider when the merger is seeking to become a multiethnic merged congregation. In Mosaic’s case, four Caucasians churches and one African American merged.

DeYmaz helps us understand this dynamic when he says, “multi-ethnic church planters should be commissioned (when possible) by leaders of an established multi-ethnic church that can serve as a model of the intended outcome” (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 139). None of these proceedings was taken into consideration when Mosaic was merged. The path demands a humble heart, “the point is to humbly engage cultures in the church different from your own” (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 142).

It will serve well to intentionally empower multiethnic clergy and laity so they have ownership before, during, and after the initial conversations to merge (Schaller and Hamilton 182) (Schaller 127).

The need is to have these clear distinctions in a process in place where laity becomes the driving energy. In regard to this, Aubrey Malphurs writes:

In first Corinthians 12, Paul compares the church to a vibrant, healthy human body. Just as it's critical that all parts of the human body be present and functioning in their proper places, so it is in the life of the church. This is the task of lay mobilization. This principle is placing the right people in the right places for the right reasons with the result that every member becomes a minister (Malphurs 151).

Perhaps, when Bishops and Cabinet members consider a new pastor for a merged congregation, full consideration might be extended to bring a multiethnic church planter pastor who will lead the new multiethnic church merger as a new church plant effort (DeYmaz *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices* 139; Elliott 46).

Often in the traditions of United Methodist Churches, The Lord's Prayer is heard echoing in the hearts of people of all races, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Yet, the kingdom of heaven seems compartmentalized and far away from this spiritual longing aspiration. DeYmaz accentuates how far removed is this prayer from realities when he announces,

If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated, why on earth is the Church? Surely, it must break the heart of God to see so many churches throughout this country segregated ethnically and economically from one another and that little has changed since it was first observed that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in the land (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 4). To support this claim, McManners declares,

White Protestants, however, did little to build bonds with [Black Protestant] churches, and racially there were at least two Americas or Christianities.

Doctrinal and practical similarity counted for little.... Critics noted that the Sunday Protestant worship hour was the most segregated time of the week.

Indeed, the once righteous churches of the North, after proclaiming triumph over the evils of slavery and the South, came during the next century to adopt southern styles of regard for Blacks and their churches, and there was little positive contact even within denominational families” (McManners 423).

These statements have long lasting repercussions as one considers metaphors and church health in merging congregations with different ethnic groups.

Models and Metaphors for Church Mergers

It is fundamentally important to examine how various authors use appropriate metaphors, some biblical, others more practical, to portray church mergers and the implications these images may have in it.

Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird propose four models and describe them as:

Rebirth mergers: A struggling or dying church that gets a second life by being restarted under a stronger, vibrant, and typically larger church. *Adoption mergers:* A stable or stuck church that is integrated under the vision of a stronger, vibrant, and typically larger church. *Marriage mergers:* Two churches, both strong and growing, that realign with each other under a united vision and new leadership configuration. *ICU (intensive care unit) mergers:* Two churches that know they're in trouble and try to turn around their critical situation but are more survival driven and often fail (Tomberlin and Bird 24).

Tomberlin and Bird explain how this graphic match up with the four models they propose. They state, “how do these terms relate to each other? Each has distinctive elements but they’re not exclusive from each other. On one spectrum, an adoption merger is in the middle between a rebirth merger and a marriage merger. An ICU merger is usually a merger of two near equals, both on life support. These are more reflective of the typical failed mergers of the past” (Tomberlin and Bird 28).

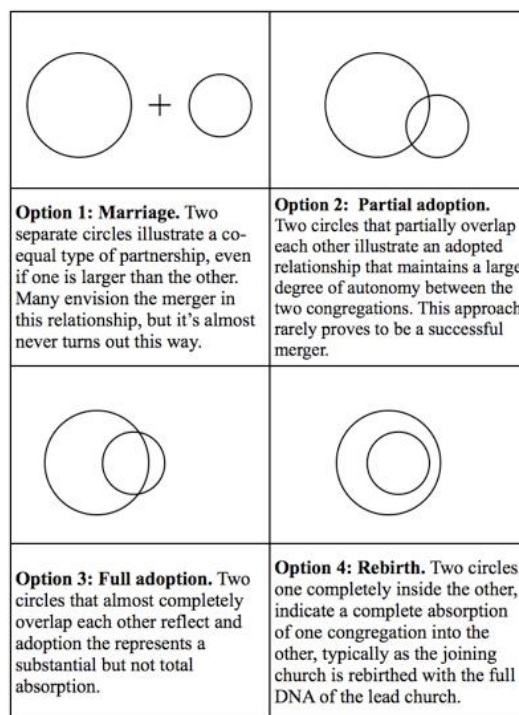


Figure 2.1 Four Ways to Visualize a Church Merger. (Tomberlin and Bird 56).

Additional models are the multi-site revolution with satellites in different locations (Surratt, Ligon and Bird Surratt et al. pp;; Schaller 153-168). In these congregations, the main church acts as a mother and gives birth to other congregation considered as mother-daughter relationships. This model happens more often when doing

church planting. Surrat, Ligon, and Bird see the expansion of multi-site as a revolution in the following terms,

The real power of the multi-site revolution is not simply in opening a second or even a third location; the power begins as churches get a vision for five sites, ten sites, and a reproducing movement of campuses that cross regional and cultural boundaries, reaching people well beyond the four walls of the original campus (Surratt, Ligon and Bird 65).

Besides the models of Tomberlin and Bird and others such as Surrat, Ligon, and Bird, Dirk Elliot introduced another model church merger as a marriage, as a group dating and marrying one another. Elliot introduces this unique thread throughout his book *Vital Church* (Elliott 108). His marriage approach is extensive and intensive starting from chapter four all the way up to chapter 13. Kelly D. McClendon also includes it as a biblical metaphor (McClendon 50, 51).

Elliot adds another biblical image to study as mergers are considered, one related with pouring new wine in new wineskins. He states,

Using a Biblical metaphor, the traditional merger is attempting to pour new wine into old wineskins. The Vital Merger, on the other hand, creates new wine that is poured into a new wineskin. A Vital Merger congregation is a new work. It is a viable new-church-start model (Elliott 35).

These metaphors paint different perspectives when merging congregations. The practice is more than just getting people to vote and join hands across the aisles. This procedure is filled with landmines says McClendon when describing it, The title of his research dissertation is, *A Map Through a Minefield* (McClendon abstract).

Therefore, for a church merger to be healthy and thriving it is essential to apply the Biblical and theological foundations mentioned in this study, understand the dynamics of church mergers, and use and apply the Beeson Church Characteristics Scales to discover what church health looks like before, during, and after the merged has happened.

Church Health.

Church health is fundamental for church mergers to succeed. Healthy mergers will be prone to thrive particularly when the motives to merge are healthy (Tomberlin and Bird 32). Peter Scazzero offers an emotional perspective about church health, he explains,

In emotionally healthy churches, people live and lead out of brokenness and vulnerability. They understand that leadership in the Kingdom of God is from the bottom up, not a grasping, controlling, or lording over others. It is leading out of failure and pain, questions and struggles – a serving that lets go (Scazzero and Bird *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* 114).

Consequently, the use of a tool to measure the health of a church is necessary and its implications for church mergers. In this research, the author chose the Beeson Church Health Characteristics Scales to assess the level of church health within Mosaic United Methodist Church, a merged church in the Kentucky Conference.

Church Health Defined

The path to define Church health is intimately related to the biblical church's mission and purposes studied in the Old and New Testament examples, to the practical

characteristics discovered through the years by authors focusing on this theme, and to the research about church health characteristics by the four Doctor of Ministry graduates of the Beeson program from Asbury Seminary—James Vernon Kinder, Brian Allen Law, Scott B. McKee, and by Keith C. Taylor. They agreed to research church health characteristics and in the process developed their own set of eight qualities to examine church health.

The eight characteristics for a healthier church are,

1. Authentic community,
2. Empowering leadership,
3. Engaging worship,
4. Functional structures,
5. Intentional evangelism,
6. Mobilized laity,
7. Passionate spirituality,
8. Transforming discipleship (Kinder).

They worked as a team and their observations and conclusions had a wide context and covered different denominations. Their research was also deep and meticulous. The choice to use these eight qualities will be implemented after assessing the contributions of various authors regarding church health.

This research exposes the significance of a congruent interaction amongst all of the health characteristics. What follows is a narrative description of four models of church health. These four models were chosen because they offer a comparison of how different authors see church health.

The new movement of Christians in the book of Acts particularly its local expression in Antioch (Acts 13) is a classic example of what church health looks like says Ken Hemphill where (1) supernatural power, (2) Christ-Exalting worship, (3) God-connecting prayer, (4) servant leaders, (5) Kingdom family relationships, (6) God-sized vision, (7) passion for the lost, and (8) maturation of believers (Hemphill and Hemphill) take place.

Church health is the key to church growth says Rick Warren, a pioneer in church planting and now a renowned pastor and writer. He writes:

Church health is the key to church growth. All living things grow *if* they're healthy. You don't have to *make* them grow – it's just natural for living organisms. As a parent, I didn't have to *force* my three children to grow. They naturally grew up. As long as I removed the hindrances, such as poor nutrition or an unsafe environment, their growth was automatic. The same principle is true for the church. Since the church is a living organism, it's natural for it to grow if it's healthy. The church is a Body, not a business – an organism, not an organization. It's alive. If a church is not growing, it is dying (Warren).

When the church as the body of Christ experiences health, one can find the following axioms functioning says Stephen A. Macchia: (1) God's empowering presence, (2) God-exalting worship, (3) spiritual disciplines, (4) learning and growing community, (5) commitment to loving and caring relationships, (6) outward focus, (7) wise administration and accountability, (8) networking with the Body of Christ, (9) stewardship and generosity (Macchia 27-197).

Church health is not a new subject. Wagner initiated this dialog from the late 1970's in his book titled, *Your Church Can Be Healthy*. Peter Wagner who is meticulous and a church growth consultant offers seven evidences that a healthy church must live and practice: (1) a positive pastor, (2) a well-mobilized laity, (3) meeting the needs of members, (4) the celebration, the congregation, the cell functions, (5) homogenous denominator, (6) evangelistic methods, and (7) biblical priorities (Wagner "The Healthy Church: Avoiding and Curing the 9 Diseases That Can Afflict Any Church" 15-19).

In this effort to explain church health, it was the German researcher Christian A. Schwarz who led the way by presenting eight universal principles in his book *Natural Church Development*. These healthy qualities are: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, inspiring worship service, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. These are central proofs for church health. He connects them to church growth as well (Schwarz and Logan 22-36). He conducted his research in one thousand churches in thirty-two countries in five continents (McKee 2). This effort gave him a greater range to observe how church health is unequivocally related with church growth. He states that,

“We should concentrate on the removal of obstacles to church growth and multiplication within churches. Then church growth can happen ‘all by itself.’ God would do what he promised to do. He will grant growth (1 Corinthians 3:6)” (Schwarz and Logan 10), and if the church body is healthy, it will eventually reproduce (Schwarz and Logan 124). In addition, drawing from the church in Thessalonica, Howard Foltz draws out five principles every healthy church must practice; namely, proclamation, testimony, conversion, service, and an attitude of expectancy (Foltz 70-71).

Other authors when defining church health introduce similar qualities like Dale E. Galloway who list ten characteristics of healthy growing congregations (Galloway). Ken Hemphill proposes eight characteristics of highly effective churches: Supernatural power, Christ-Exalting worship, God-connecting prayer, Servant leaders, Kingdom family relationships, God-sized vision, Passion for the lost, and maturation of believers (Hemphill and Hemphill). Stephen A. Macchia lists ten foundations necessary for a healthy church. These are God's empowering presence, God-exalting worship, spiritual disciplines, learning and growing community, a commitment to loving and caring relationships, servant – leadership development, and outward focus, wise administration and accountability, networking with the body of Christ, stewardship and generosity (Macchia 27-197).

Each of the named authors offers a myriad of biblical and theological characteristics of church health. From them, one can conclude that only healthy organisms grow and multiply. The church is an organism “the body of Christ” revealing the living nature of the Church. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:6 declares how he and Apollos were used by God to serve in the expansion of the church, but God gave the growth.

A summary of the previous four descriptions of church health can be seen in Table 2.1. In addition to Hemphill, Macchia, Schwarz and Galloway, table 2.1. it also includes the Beeson Characteristics for this project. Following the table there is a more robust description of the each of these Beeson Characteristics.

Table 2.2 Comparative Lists of Church Health Characteristics

Hemphill	Macchia	Schwarz	Galloway	Beeson Characteristics
Servant leaders	Servant-leadership development	Gift-oriented ministry	Clear-cut vision	Mobilized laity
Christ-exalting worship	God-exalting worship	Inspiring worship service	Passion for the lost	Engaging worship
Passion for the lost	Outward focus	Need-oriented evangelism	Shared ministry together	Intentional evangelism
Kingdom family relationships	Loving and caring relationships	Loving relationships	Empowering leadership	Authentic community
Maturation of believers	Learning and growing in community	Holistic small groups	Fervent spirituality	Transforming discipleship
God-Connecting prayer	Spiritual Disciplines	Passionate spirituality	Flexible and functional structures	Passionate spirituality
God-sized vision	Wise administration and accountability	Empowering leadership	Celebrative worship	Empowering leadership
Supernatural power	God's empowering presence		Connecting small groups	
	Stewardship and generosity		Seeker-friendly evangelism	
	Networking with the body of Christ		Loving relationships	Functional structures

Summary of the Eight Beeson Church Health Questionnaire Characteristics

Authentic Community

An authentic community in the words of Keith Taylor is “the expression of the Christian life in the context of relationships” (Taylor 28). Health in merged congregations generates this kind of milieu where relationships are cultivated in deep long-lasting love. This is the divine environment to live in integrity, grace, mercy, justice, love, and where people can learn to face conflicts, experience losses, heal from grief, and to forgive one another.

Jesus Christ’s life became the original pattern Christians can follow to form loving lasting unconditional relationships with Him and with one another. He taught his disciples how to love and live in this kind of community. A thief and a tax collector were part of his first community.

John, the gospel of love, the loved disciple personally experienced Jesus’ love. He quotes Jesus saying: “to love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12) and said that this was the greatest commandment of all.

In the book of Acts the jewels of a new community takes center stage on earth. The hallmarks of this new community practiced unity, sharing to meet specific needs, fellowshiping, eating together, devoting time to the word, praying, and worshipping God (1:14; 2:42-47; 5:12; 6:2-3; 9:19, 26, 30) (Lloyd-Jones).

Empowering Leadership

Bill Hybels and Lynne Hybels in their book “Rediscovering Church” define what empowered leadership is. They introduce eight descriptions. These are: (1) Leaders have the ability to cast a vision, (2) Leaders have the ability to coalesce people, (3) Leaders

have the ability to inspire and motivate people, (4) Leaders have the ability to identify the need for positive change and then bring it about, (5) leaders establish core values, (6) leaders allocate resources effectively, (7) leaders have the ability to identify entropy, (8) leaders love to create a leadership culture (Hybels and Hybels 151-154).

The new leaders in the book of Acts suggest how they lived these principles. This was a major shift for the disciples. They were the ones creating a new future (Johansen and Johansen 1). They had to be faithful expanding its mission from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth in the middle of an unpredictable realm. However, when the church in Jerusalem stopped moving according to God's evangelistic geographical plan, God not only relocated the missionary epicenter from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch (Acts 13), but he also raised Paul as one of the new leaders willing to go to the ends of the earth (Rome). Empowering leadership then is about loving, knowing, touching, and living like Jesus to multiply their lives in other leaders willing to follow Jesus and willing to be open to being held accountable as they lead others. To lead like Jesus, writes Blanchard, is to be the "heart, the head, the hands, the habits of Jesus" (Blanchard 51).

Engaging worship.

Worship is a two-way communication of love between the Creator and his creation. In a healthy church merger is essential to make the distinction between engaging in worship and evangelism. Marva Dawn defines *engaging in worship* as the language of love, but one needs to differentiate the two,

Worship is the language of love and growth between believers and God;

evangelism is the language of introduction between those who believe and those

who don't. To confuse the two and put on worship the burden of evangelism robs the people of God of their responsibility to care about the neighbor, defrauds the believers of transforming depth, and steals from God the profound praise of which [God] is worthy (Dawn 124).

This language of love is woven from Genesis to Revelation. Engaging Worship began as a participatory interaction between God, Adam, and Eve in the Garden of Eden it and will continue for eternity. Worship then, is an act between the Creator and his creatures with eternity in the heart of every participant. The test in a healthy merger is when all people of all ages engage in worship. Engaging worship then involves vertical and horizontal relationships with God and with one another.

Functional Structures.

One of the twelve commitments stated by Dirk Elliot is “to organize the new structure with a team-based, mission-driven format. Creating nimble, flexible, permission-giving structures that support mission-driven ministry” (Elliott 43-44). The need is for adaptable worship spaces easily moved according to mission, vision, values, and strategies. Gene Getz describes it allowing “non-absolutes to become absolute. We allow ourselves to get locked into patterns and structures which are no longer relevant and adequate, to help us minister to people who live in our contemporary culture” (Getz 209). An overview in the Old Testaments quickly reveals Israel worshiping God who inhabited in a tabernacle and all tribes were organized around it. Every tribe had its own place. However, However, in the New Testament did not have this structure.

As the church began to grow, it created opportunities to serve as deacons. However, the deacons did more than just serve tables. Stephen became a great expositor

of God's word perhaps as a directive from the Holy Spirit leading him to do so after the apostles said that they were not going to attend the tables, but to pray and to preach the word.

Later in Acts 15, the Jews had to choose flexibility and a new mind set by allowing non-Jews to be included in the new authentic community. These are vital signs of healthy congregations, of merged churches. Nevertheless, in the words of Henry H. Friedman "a hierarchy often provides the continuous set of feedback loops through which unresolved issues in the faith system are transmitted from one congregation to another, and from one generation to another" (Friedman *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* 253). Perhaps, identifying and trying to offer health to those unresolved issues may be one of the most difficult tasks for a pastor of a merged congregation.

A question remains for future research, how do the present institutions or denominations preclude healthy environments for new possible merged congregations? This question, raises another one worth studying in detail, why the difference between clergy and laity?

Intentional Evangelism.

Dirk Elliot's main proposal to merge a congregation is by planting a new church. Every merger then has to be a new church, and this effort involves the pastor functioning as a church planter. This model of a new church plant will include, but not be limited to, relocation which involves finding an impartial site not related to any of the merged congregations and the initiation of new ministries to evangelize new people with a new name not associated with the former churches (Elliott 3). According to Peter Wagner this

is the most effective method for evangelism (Wagner *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* 7).

James Griffith writes evangelism must be continuous before, during, and after the church plant or merger ceases to do evangelism. “Evangelism is not a phase of church life; it is the life of the church... Evangelism must be embedded as part of the DNA of the plant for it to be successful, much less biblical” (Griffith and Easum 51).

Evangelism is not limited to few skilled people and it is not an occasional. As every believer understands and obeys the Great Commission vision for the church sharing, the gospel is part of being the light and salt of the earth (Harney and Bouwer 153).

Mobilized Laity.

A healthy church, or a healthy merged congregation, regardless of the denomination, provides nimble functional structures and an authentic community where all members are to be free to be ministers. Methodism was originally and essentially a movement of the laity. Yet, historically, the moment Constantine blessed Christianity, the laity sat on the pews and the clergy stood behind the pulpit (Wilson 47-63).

In the Scripture, the Old Testament is a reminder of the priesthood of just one tribe, the Levites. Only the Levites offered sacrifices entered the Holy of Holies. Conversely, the New Testament opens the curtains of the temple, to offer the priesthood to all believers (1 Peter 2:5; 2:5-9; Ephesians 2:10). Healthy churches have structures open to organize and mobilize a movement of all believers carrying on the church’s mission. These congregations help new believers discover their gifts and talents, and the

congregations connect the believers with existing or new ministries that the believers feel God is calling them to fulfill.

Passionate Spirituality.

Jim Kinder defines passionate spirituality as “an intense intentional seeking and reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide and work within the church” (Kinder 54). This is the church in the book of Acts totally depending on Holy Spirit’s guidance.

It is quite a surprising to look at the moment when they took matters into their own hands and chose between two disciples by casting lots while praying. They selected Mathias to takeover the ministry of Judas. Nonetheless, Mathias is mentioned only once in the whole New Testament. Perhaps the Holy Spirit was correcting, or not accepting the decision of the apostles (González 14).

Later, this passionate spirituality materializes in the context where the church faced its first racial and cultural conflict (Acts 6). The Hebrews were not taking care of the daily needs of the Hellenists widows. This example shows how the apostles asked the congregation to choose seven men filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Stephen was among those willing to serve tables. Yet, he preached the greatest sermon and died as the first martyr, and his garments fell at Saul’s feet.

Passionate spirituality is about seeking God and his presence and his power over human lethargic traditions devoid of hunger for revival. Prayer has a center stage. Everything in the church is sustained by a consistent spirit of prayer. It is about *La Iglesia Caliente*, The Hot Church. The church is on fire for God and for the world, willing to love unconditionally every human being who seeks God (Schwarz and Logan 26).

Transforming Discipleship.

The transformation of lives happens in the context of intentional discipleship process in healthy church mergers. The life cycles of churches are related to how consistent and clear this process is in the formation of new disciples. When the formation of disciples stops, the church's cycle of death is awaiting around the corner (Adizes; Saarinen; Adizes and Naiman).

Jesus Christ commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations in his Name (Matt. 28:18-20). Following Jesus as his disciples has a high cost (Bonhoeffer).

Jesus prayed before he chose his disciples; he proceeded to invite them to follow him; then he asked to be with him; and later he sent them to the world to make more disciples in his name. It was a path for transformation.

Quite intriguing is the fact that the gospel of Mark describes them as disciples with hardened hearts (Mark 4:10-13; 6:51-52; 8:17), and it ends stating that they still had hardened hearts (Mark 16:14). This topic is outside the scope of this study, but it could be a point for further research.

Research Design Literature

This research design uses a mixed method approach that employs both quantitative and qualitative data. The study collects data both before and after an intervention. Sensing states that in the quantitative and qualitative approach there is a distinction where one,

Is framed in terms of using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative), or using closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) rather than open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions). A more complete way to view the

gradations of differences between them is in the basic philosophical assumptions researchers bring to the study, the types of research strategies used in the research (e.g., quantitative experiments or qualitative case studies), and the specific methods employed in conducting these strategies (e.g., collecting data quantitatively on instruments versus collecting qualitative data through observing a setting) (Creswell 3).

The research design for this study uses a tool called the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire given in a written pre and post-test with an intervention to discover quantitative data. This instrument will be given to participants in three different groups to compare and measure degrees of change as a result of the “intervention, that will fulfill the purpose of the project” (Sensing Chap. 3). Moreover, the design of this research includes focus groups conversations as instruments to gather qualitative data as a result of a series of open-ended questions related to the purpose of this project (Sensing Chap. 4). Kaufman asserts that: “Narratives are critical to how we acquire data and how we produce knowledge from that data” (Kaufman 61).

Michael Ornstein says that the focus groups are the “target population” where, “each member of the population is an element; each element in the sample is a selection; and each selected element for which data were gathered successfully is an observation, case or subject, depending on the discipline” (Ornstein Kindle Chapter 4).

T.L. Brink offers an integrative synthesis where both “qualitative and quantitative approaches proceed on the same topic, in separate phases, with each correction for the blind spots of the other” (Brink 470).

Summary of Literature

The biblical and theological foundations are crucial for the study of church health in a merged church. For instance, in the Old Testament, God encountered Jacob, a deceiver whose heart was transformed, and Jacob worshipped God by consecrating an unimportant place and called it “Bethel,” the house of God.

Furthermore, the application of biblical and theological foundations for this study revealed in the promises given to Jacob in the Old Testament and the promises given to the church in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Acts chapter one, are intimately connected to its health to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. A major shift for the church merger flows out of these promises. Merged congregations need to understand that they do not exist for the sake of the church alone but for the expansion of the Kingdom of God by bringing people to be fully restored in the “Imago Dei.”

For example, in the New Testament, the theology of Kingdom of God already here but not yet, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus’s return are three vital promises that provide help and hope for our communities. This process includes people of all races, ethnicities, and denominations seeking unity at the foot of the cross. It also relates to addressing issues of decline in the United Methodist Churches. The cross lies at the heart of all human efforts directed toward creating healthy merged environments. The *Missio Dei* will be accomplished only then. This is the basis for the theology of missions.

Additionally, the presence and implementation of the quality characteristics of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community will contribute to the health of a merged congregation.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This research focused on enhancing church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community. The purpose of this study was to enhance church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, authentic community, and discerning factors that might contribute to the health of a merged congregation.

This research utilized the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire to assess the level of health within the life of Mosaic UMC. The church was the result of a merger of five congregations the Kentucky Annual Conference through the office of New Church and Congregational Development started in June 2002. The five merged congregations had a long struggle to survive.

To accomplish this task, three groups completed the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire (BCHQ) at two separate times: a pre-test and a post-test following an intervention. The intervention was a series of sermons over a period of five weeks lecturing on each characteristic biblically and theologically. The outcomes of church health addressed during a period of five Sundays might assist a merged congregation to thrive, not just to survive. Two months later, after the sermon series, the same participants responded to a post-test using the BCHQ questionnaire to analyze the data and show how the sermon series improved church health in the life of Mosaic.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to enhance church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, authentic community, and discern factors that might contribute to the health of a merged congregation.

Research Questions

Three main research questions directed the scope of this study.

Research Question # 1

Prior to the intervention, what was the level of church health within Mosaic as rated in five areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics?

These five characteristics were chosen in this order of priorities to create a positive relationship between the expression of church health indicated in these five areas and suggest how the Mosaic merger might benefit by implementing them in the long run. The long-term benefits of implementation are beyond scope of this research, but could be part of other research.

Three groups made up of active members of Mosaic UMC answered a pre-test survey tool called the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire across the five health factors. The first group was composed of new members who were not members of the five congregations that merged, and did not have a past history with the former churches. They had only the new relationships they enjoyed at Mosaic at the time of the research. The second group included all functioning leaders serving in any area of ministry at Mosaic at the time of the research. The third group was a sample of functional members

from the congregation embodying different ethnic and cultural expressions, distinctive ages, and unique socio-demographic backgrounds.

Research Question # 2

What was the level of Mosaic's health rated in five areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics following the intervention? This is the post-test.

The same described groups under question number one listened to a five sermon series over a period of five Sundays by using and expanding one characteristic each Sunday; biblically, theologically, and pragmatically. Two months later the three groups described under question number one answered the same questionnaire followed by a series of conversations with the three focus groups. This is the post intervention of the research process.

Research Question # 3

What aspects of the intervention made the most difference or the greatest difference in Mosaic's health using five characteristics: evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics?

In order to identify motifs and key qualitative data the same three groups described earlier formed three focus groups and answered an array of open-ended questions during a two-hour session (see list of questions in Appendix C). These interviews will provide the qualitative data.

Ministry Context

Mosaic UMC is situated in the southwest Louisville area in the Louisville District. It started in 2002 as a merger of five congregations: R.E. Jones UMC the only African American church and four Caucasians churches—Marcus Lindsay UMC, Shively UMC, Hazelwood UMC, and Aldersgate UMC.

Aldersgate UMC had the highest attendance of the five. Their members have expressed how painful the merger was since this was the only church building demolished and renovated as a car lot. All five congregations voted to merge but they lost many members who did not agree with the merger. Others who voted against the merger remained a part of Mosaic to the present in spite of their opposition to the merger?.

When Mosaic was started as a merger, they had six full-time pastors paid by the conference serving this community. When Pastor Mejia, arrived in June 2009, there was only one left: Rev. Keith Switzer. His salary was no longer sustainable.

The median age at Mosaic is fifty-five. Two percent have a doctorate degree and they are African Americans. About 85% of the congregation has a high school diploma. Forty percent have undergraduate and/or a master's degree. Mosaic has lost older members through celebration homecoming. It is an aging older congregation.

Mosaic has experienced major losses in the area of finances. Consequently, they have had to cut staff members over the last five years. At the present time, only Rev. Mejia, a fully bilingual Hispanic is on staff. The church has a monthly mortgage payment of \$10,000 for the next 30 years. A big uncertainty is linked with applying for a second loan (\$450,000) to pay back interests and legal settlement with a present legal case residing on the hands of the Court of Appeals in Frankfort, Kentucky.

Mosaic's worship is a hybrid of contemporary and traditional and it is intentional in creating an environment where worship touches and reflects a multicultural and multigenerational profile.

Mosaic leaders are well represented from our ethnic groups and are influencing the life of the church. This is an intentional effort and it represents how well Mosaic has been able to move beyond prevalent racism (Howell and Paris 34). This is an ongoing conversation (Howell and Paris 41). Culture can't be discounted. It helps us to discern God's own heart (Vanhoozer, et al. 34).

Mosaic does not have nominations based on how many people were representing each one of the five congregations that merged. Mosaic is one church. This has required a consistent effort from the pulpit, home visitations, interaction with leaders, and lovingly telling people that the pastor was appointed to serve Mosaic not five congregations.

Mosaic fosters an international membership. Nine nations are represented in the congregation. "This is our world behind the work" (Vanhoozer, et al. 49). Mosaic emerges in that context. Mosaic is a multicultural – multiethnic environment embracing and interacting with diverse people groups, ages, races, ethnicities, and languages in a fluid way.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

The three groups chosen for this study represented three different classifications. In the first group, sixteen new members were preferred because they did not have any past connected with all the pains, hurts, issues, struggles, and unresolved anger the other two groups have experienced. They are like tabula rasa. They joined Mosaic attracted by the

multiethnic environment willing to embrace and serve a variety of people groups, ages, races, ethnicities, and languages.

The second group was chosen with seventeen leaders serving at the time of the study. The third group was a sample of twelve members and were chosen because each has been at Mosaic from the time of the merger. Also, they were faithfully participating in all areas of ministries.

Description of Participants

The demographic of the groups is as follows where M is the mean of the average age and SD is the standard deviation and how much around the average they varied.

Table 3.1 **Demographic of the groups**

Gender	24 females (55.8%) 19 males (44.2%)
Marital Status	1 Divorced (2.3%), 27 married (62.8%), 8 Single (18.6%) 4 widowed (9.3%)
Age (ranging from 32 to 84)	M= 59.20 SD = 13.91
Years in church (from 1 to 52)	M = 10.90, SD= 9.29 (Note the two charter members were counted as having 30 years)
Involvement	11 attendee only (25.5%) 16 leadership board member (37.2%) 15 ministry leader/teacher (34.9%) 1 pastoral staff (2.3%)

The first group was comprised of new members who were not present at the time of the merger. It was made up of sixteen Caucasian adults. It had six married couples, two singles (one male and female) and two divorced (females). Eight were young adults, and six seniors, and all were employed.

The second group included all leaders serving at Mosaic at the time of the research. The total number of participants was seventeen. Six of the leaders were African Americans all of whom were seniors. Three were males, and three were females. Five of the African Americans were retired, but one is still employed. Four were married, one (female) was divorced and another (female) was widowed. The remaining eleven group members were Caucasian. The rest of the group members, eleven are Caucasian. Seven of the Caucasians were females, and four were males. Twelve were salaried and five were retired. One was widowed, one divorced, one single, and nine are married. Everyone represented a plethora of years serving God in different capacities and roles.

The third group was made up of members who were present at the time of the merger. It was composed of twelve people, six males and six females. Five were retired, and seven were presently employed. Two were African American, one of the African Americans was retired (male) and the other one was working, and both were singles. Ten were Caucasians, three of whom were retired and seven were working. The ages of the group members ranged from fifty all the way up to eighty. Seven of the twelve were married; one was divorced (female), two were widows (females), and two were singles (female and male). Most enjoyed average good health and all were mentally competent. One person was experiencing radiation and chemotherapy.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain strict confidentiality, every person answering the BCHQ, and participating in the focus groups discussions signed a letter of consent. The ethical considerations, informed consent letter, and informed consent statement are under appendix B.

Instrumentation

A research-designed questionnaire called The Beeson Church Health Questionnaire was used. The BCHQ is an inventory that assesses church health in eight dimensions five of which are the focus of this study. Participants rated the degree to which their church fits with statements about church health. They responded using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 strongly disagrees and 5 equals strongly agree. Higher scores suggest greater health.

The BCHQ has fifty-four questions indicated by a number on the left column. Every number in each question in the BCHQ relates to the BCH Scales to determine the level of health under each of the Church Health Characteristics. The Beeson Church Health Characteristics Scales is in the Appendix B and include: (1) Authentic community, (2) Empowering leadership, (3) Engaging worship, (4) Functional structures, (5) Intentional Evangelism, (6) Mobilized laity, (7) Passionate spirituality, and (8) Transforming discipleship. It is central to indicate that Authentic Community and Mobilized Laity contain only six Beeson Church Health Characteristics Scales; the remaining six characteristics include seven scales under each category.

The second instrument used was a battery of questions to guide the three focus groups conversations. Refer to Appendix A for detailed information of all questions.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The concept validity relies on various foundations of evidence (Yin 34). This research is an evaluation study in the descriptive mode, which uses researcher-designed surveys to measure church health in a merged congregation. The main tool consisted of a self-administered questionnaire with sixty-eight elements determining church health (see Appendix A).

Reliability was established by using five of eight characteristics of the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire, a tool elaborated and tested in four specific research projects related with church health designed by four Doctor of Ministry graduates of the Beeson program from Asbury Seminary, James Vernon Kinder, Brian Allen Law, Scott B. McKee, and by Keith C. Taylor. The use of a recording device during the focus group conversations enhanced the reliability of the data gathering.

The outcomes of the quantitative data assisted in the interpretation of the various aspects of Mosaic's health. The open-ended conversations using the questions presented under question research number three allowed the participants and observant to discover a clear picture of the health of the church. These outcomes provided the qualitative data. The results from the three different focus groups collectively revealed an overall picture of church health from three different lenses. The data took into account the uniqueness of each group and how each group's experience in the merger indicated perception.

Data Collection

A formal letter (informed consent letter) was mailed to each participant inviting them to strengthen the vitality of Mosaic UMC by answering the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire and by interacting in a dialog in three focus groups.

Groups taking the test met during Saturday mornings with 1½ hour designated to answer all questions. Each person received a paper copy of the BCHQ and they answered the questions in the facility where Mosaic worships every Sunday. They sat together, leaving enough space from each other to feel comfortable where they were not able to see how the other person made his or her own choices when answering the questions.

Each person participating in the pre-test, post-test, and focus groups was identified by having at the top of the survey two important questions for collecting and identifying the data. Before you start answering the BCHQ, please answer two questions: What are the last four digits of your cell phone number? And what is the month and year of your birthday?

Each person participating in the three focus groups attended a two-hour session Saturday morning at the facility where Mosaic conducts its services. Each group met separately on a different Saturday; this meant that I had three two-hour sessions with each focus group.

Additionally, in the church bulletin the three groups previously identified and Mosaic members experienced a new sermon series that covered five of the eight characteristics in a month and a half.

Data Analysis

This research included descriptive statistics to paint the picture of where groups were at the pre and post interventions. Further, to make comparisons between groups I utilized a series of one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA) and examine the comparison of five congregations for each factor on the questionnaire. Similarly, to assess change from pre-tests to post-tests, I ran a series of repeated measures ANOVAS for each factor on the questionnaire. Finally, I analyzed the focus group interviews by pulling out themes and examples from the interviews.

Research Design

The research chosen for this study is a Quantitative and Qualitative design. It is quantitative because it analyses a self-report by using the Likert scale data from participants between the pre-test and post-test. It included a pre-intervention (BCHQ test given before the intervention), intervention (comprised of five sermon series), and a post-intervention using the same BCHQ test given after the intervention.

It is qualitative in that participants discussed questions about church health in a group interview process. Themes across interviews were highlighted. I then compared the results of the three focus groups that interacted with open-ended questions: What do you think was the health of the church prior to the sermon series? What do you think about the church's health now? What do you think made a difference? What do you think we could do in the future to advance the church's health even further?

One weakness in this study is that there was no control group to use as comparison to those participants hearing the sermon series. However, to somewhat

account for this, participants were tested before and after the sermon series to allow for some understanding of how they had changed.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to enhance church health in a merged congregation in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, authentic community, and discern factors that might contribute to the health of a merged congregation.

In order to protect the confidentiality of each participant in the focus groups dialogs, fictitious names were used under Qualitative Research when using quotes from participants.

Following the analysis of the data, it seems important to consider all eight of the scale of the BCHQ even though sermons preached covered only five topics. The other three: engaging worship, functional structures, and passionate spirituality were actually part of the whole worship experience. They were contextual in some ways. For instance, passionate spirituality and engaged worship are healthy expressions of any vibrant church life. Notwithstanding, although they were not directly expressed, they were actually present.

These three areas are also part of the mechanics of worship because functional structures mean that Mosaic has persons to facilitate worship, like a worship team, or a choir. These three happen in worship anyhow. Furthermore, people indeed raised those issues in the focus groups conversations even when I did not include them in the preaching series.

Moreover, one can observe after assessing tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, that the research could have missed two high scores in passionate spirituality, and engaging worship. Additionally, the comparison of strengths and weaknesses demonstrated the importance of including these three characteristics.

The three following research questions directed this study: 1. What was the level of church health rated on five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics within Mosaic prior to the intervention? 2. What was the level of Mosaic's health rated on five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics following the intervention? 3. What aspects of the intervention made the most difference or the greatest difference in Mosaic's health using five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics?

The results that follow review the data on church health at Mosaic from the pre-test and the post-test along with the outcomes from the focus groups conversations. The discoveries of this investigation have direct implications for Mosaic United Methodist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. These findings might help other United Methodist congregations with similar merger dynamics. This research measured church health indicators by concentrating on the application of five of the eight Beeson Church Health Questionnaire.

Participants

The demographic of the groups is as follows. The first group is comprised of new members who were not present at the time of the merger. It is made up of sixteen Caucasian adults. It has six married couples, two singles (one male and female) and two divorced persons (females). Eight are young adults, and six seniors, and all are employed.

In the second group the total of participants is seventeen. This group represented all leaders presently serving at Mosaic. Six were African Americans—three females and three males. All six of the African Americans were seniors. Two of them—one male and one female—have a PhD. Five of the six are retired and one is employed. Four were married. One is divorced (female) and one is widowed (female). The remaining eleven the group members were Caucasian. Seven of the Caucasians were females, and four were males. Twelve are salaried and five are retired. One is widowed, one divorced, one single, and nine are married. Everyone, but Caucasians and African Americans represented a plethora of years serving God in different capacities and roles.

The third group was made up of members who were present at the time of the merger. It was composed of twelve people—six males and six females. Five are retired, and seven are presently employed. Two were African American, one of whom is retired (male) and the other one is working, and both are single. Ten are Caucasians, three are retired and seven are working. Their age varied from fifty all the way up to eighty. Seven are married; one is divorced (female), two are widows (females), and two are singles (female and male). Most of the twelve members of the third group enjoy average good health and all are mentally competent. One person was experiencing radiation and chemotherapy.

Table 4.1 **Demographics**

Gender	24 Females (55.8%) 19 Males (44.2%)
Marital Status	1 Divorced (2.3%) 27 Married (62.8%) 3 O (7.0%) 8 Single (18.6%) 4 Widowed (9.3%)
Age Range (32 to 84)	Mean = 59.20, Standard Deviation = 13.91
Number of Years in church From 1 to 52	Mean = 10.90, Standard Deviation = 9.29, (Note the two charter members were counted as having 30 years)
Involvement	11 Attendee only (25.5%) 16 Leadership board member (37.2%) 15 Ministry leader/teacher (34.9%) 1 Pastoral staff (2.3%)

Table 4.2 **Participant's perceptions of the church**

Personal Spiritual Life	38 Growing (88.4%) 5 Plateaued (11.6%) 0 Declining
Small Group	14 No (32.5%) 29 Yes (67.4%)
Community around church	17 Growing and thriving (39.5%) 23 Plateaued (53.5%) 3 Declining (7%)
Size of Church Facility	7 Adequate (16.3%), 36 Inadequate (83.7%)

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What was the level of church health rated on five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics within Mosaic prior to the intervention?

Quantitative Data: Level of Church Health at Pre-Test

All participants completed the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire before and after the intervention. Means and standard deviations for the pre-test assessment of each of the church health characteristics are given in Table 4.3.

In order to better understand any differences among new members, longstanding members who went through the merger, and church leaders, a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) was conducted. There were no differences among the three groups in their responses for most of the church health characteristics. The only exception was found in the perception of *Mobilized Laity*, $F(2, 36) = 4.55, p = .017$. The numbers in parenthesis are called degrees of freedom; they are based on sample size and tell which F to use. The p tells whether it is significant or not and it shows that there is a real difference.

The longstanding church members ($M = 4.48, SD = 0.53$) rated their church higher in the mobilization of laity than did either new members ($M = 4.08, SD = .57$), $t(30) = -2.04, p = 0.05$, or leaders ($M = 3.77, SD = 0.52$), $t(21) = -2.93, p = 0.008$. There was no difference in ratings for *Mobilized Laity* between longstanding church members and leaders, $t(21) = -1.20, p = 0.24$.

Table 4.3. Pretest means and standard deviations for the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire across New Members, Longstanding Members, and Church Leaders.

	Total (<i>n</i> = 39)	New Members (<i>n</i> = 16)	Longstanding Members (<i>n</i> = 16)	Church Leaders (<i>n</i> = 7)	<i>F</i> (<i>df</i>)
Authentic Community	4.19 (0.50)	4.08 (0.48)	4.30 (0.57)	4.17 (0.36)	0.76 (2, 36)
Empowering Leadership	3.51 (0.47)	3.61 (0.37)	3.62 (0.53)	3.39 (0.53)	0.65 (2, 36)
Engaged Worship	4.38 (0.52)	4.47 (0.43)	4.35 (0.62)	4.27 (0.49)	0.42 (2, 36)
Functional Structures	3.95 (0.54)	3.86 (0.59)	4.01 (0.55)	4.02 (0.39)	0.39 (2, 36)
Intentional Evangelism	4.07 (0.51)	4.04 (0.52)	4.20 (0.46)	3.84 (0.54)	1.30 (2, 36)
Mobilized Laity	4.18 (0.59)	4.08 (0.57)	4.47 (0.53)	3.77 (0.52)	4.55 (2, 36)*
Passionate Spirituality	4.21 (0.53)	4.15 (0.54)	4.33 (0.54)	4.08 (0.49)	0.70 (2, 36)
Transforming Discipleship	3.88 (0.50)	3.78 (0.51)	3.94 (0.49)	3.96 (0.54)	0.54 (2, 36)

* $p \leq 0.05$

Table 4.3. Reflects an average of what all the responses look like altogether. The *F* is the test and it shows all results under that column. The numbers in parenthesis are called degrees of freedom; they are based on sample size and tell which *F* to use. The *p* tells whether it is significant or not and it shows that there is a real difference.

This idea of mobilized laity was significantly different, indicated by the asterisk. None of the rest was significant. So there was a difference in how they understand or perceived it. The long-standing church members graded the church significantly higher in mobilization laity than did the new church members. But in order to identify this

significant difference, a battery of smaller test had to be run and it is demonstrated in this long sentence with the letter t indicating the results of this difference is indeed true. ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .57$), $t(30) = -2.04$, $p = 0.05$, or leaders ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.52$), $t(21) = -2.93$, $p = 0.008$.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What was the level of Mosaic's health rated on five of the eight Beeson Church Health Characteristics following the intervention?

Research Question # 2: Level of Church Health at Post-Test

All participants also completed the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire after the intervention. Means and standard deviations for the post-test assessment of each of the church health characteristics are given in Table 4.4.

In order to better understand any differences among new members, longstanding members who went through the merger, and church leaders, a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. There are differences among the three groups in their responses of the church health characteristics.

Table 4.4. Post-test means and standard deviations for the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire across New Members, Longstanding Members, and Church Leaders.

	Total (<i>n</i> = 35)	New Members (<i>n</i> = 14)	Longstanding Members (<i>n</i> = 14)	Church Leaders (<i>n</i> = 7)	<i>F</i> (<i>df</i>)
Authentic Community	4.33 (0.52)	4.25 (0.57)	4.36 (0.56)	4.33 (0.40)	0.15 (2, 32)
Empowering Leadership	3.50 (0.47)	3.52 (0.32)	3.50 (0.69)	4.26 (0.77)	0.02 (2, 36)
Engaging Worship	4.49 (0.54)	4.70 (0.29)	4.28 (0.77)	4.51 (0.26)	2.37 (2, 36)*
Functional Structures	3.95 (0.55)	4.00 (0.44)	4.26 (0.77)	4.51 (0.26)	0.24 (2, 36)
Intentional Evangelism	4.06 (0.44)	4.09 (0.50)	4.14 (0.49)	3.92 (0.25)	0.58 (2, 36)
Mobilized Laity	4.21 (0.51)	4.13 (0.65)	4.39 (0.40)	4.14 (0.30)	1.05 (2, 36)
Passionate Spirituality	4.41 (0.47)	4.51 (0.29)	4.38 (0.57)	4.27 (0.54)	0.69 (2, 36)
Transforming Discipleship	3.90 (0.48)	3.99 (0.46)	3.85 (0.52)	3.96 (0.51)	0.29 (2, 36)

* $p \leq 0.05$

Given that there were no significant differences among the three groups of participants, with only one exception at pre-test, the groups were pooled together to explore changes in ratings of the church health characteristics from before to after the intervention, the sermon series. Engaged worship showed a higher score in the post-test. Also, a series of paired-samples *t*-tests showed a significant change in rating in only one area of church health, *Passionate Spirituality*. Ratings of spirituality increased from pretest ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.53$) to posttest ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.47$), $t(34) = -2.66$, $p = 0.012$. See Table 4.5. for means and standard deviations.

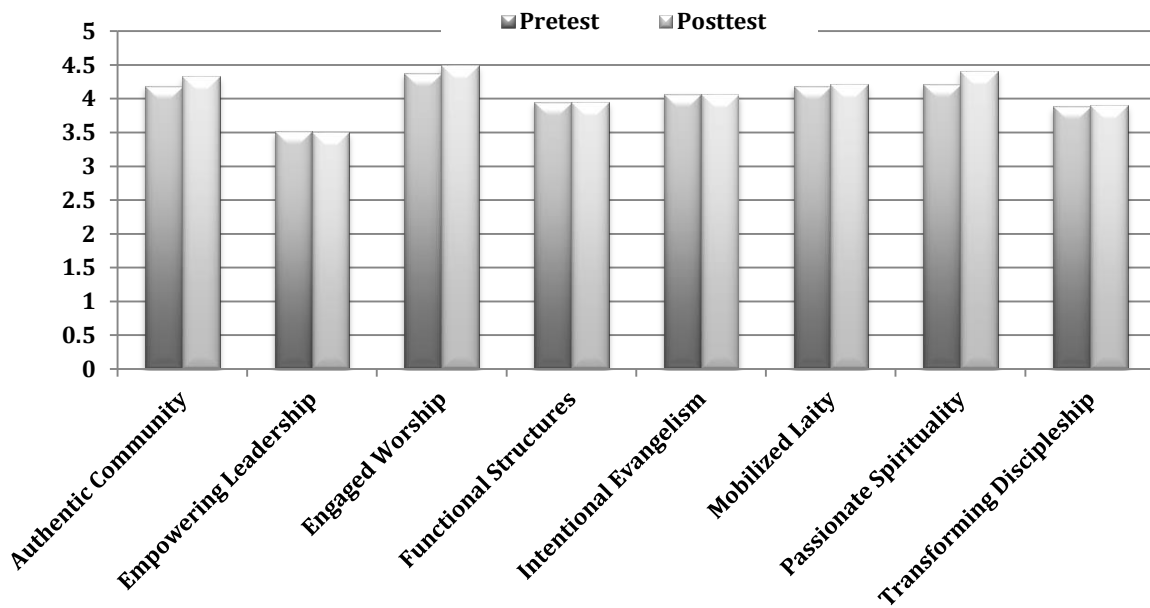
Table 4.5 Means and standard deviations for the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire before and after intervention.

	Pretest (<i>n</i> = 39)	Posttest (<i>n</i> = 35)	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)
Authentic Community	4.19 (0.50)	4.33 (0.52)	1.47 (34)
Empowering Leadership	3.51 (0.47)	3.50 (0.47)	-0.88 (34)
Engaged Worship	4.38 (0.52)	4.49 (0.54)	1.62 (34)
Functional Structures	3.95 (0.54)	3.95 (0.55)	-0.05 (34)
Intentional Evangelism	4.07 (0.51)	4.06 (0.44)	0.00 (34)
Mobilized Laity	4.18 (0.59)	4.21 (0.51)	0.86 (34)
Passionate Spirituality	4.21 (0.53)	4.41 (0.47)	2.66 (34)*
Transforming Discipleship	3.88 (0.50)	3.90 (0.48)	0.52 (34)

* $p \leq 0.05$

To better understand how the church members viewed these characteristics of their congregation, a repeated measure ANOVA compared posttest scores across each of the eight church health characteristics. A significant difference across these characteristics was found, $F(7, 266) = 31.70, p < .001$, suggesting there may be strengths and weaknesses. For comparison, Table 4.6 shows both pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 4.6. Pretest and Posttest Means and Standard Deviations on the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire.



To determine these relative strengths and weaknesses, a series of paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted. *Empowering Leadership* was significantly scored lower than all of the other characteristics, suggesting it is perceived as the weakest area for this congregation (*t*-values ranged between 4.90 and 13.75, with $p < .001$). This is the lower factor. *Engaging Worship*, the relative strength, was significantly higher than all other characteristics (*t*-values ranged between 2.79 and 13.75, with $p < .01$), except for *Passionate Spirituality*, $t(38) = 1.19, p = .241$.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

Qualitative Data

What aspects of the intervention made the most difference or the greatest difference in Mosaic's health using five of the eight Beeson Church Health characteristics?

After investigating the qualitative data a number of themes emerged. The table below introduces a list of the themes that emerged with the first three responses to research question number three. A comprehensive discussion of these themes follows after the table. In order to protect the confidentiality of each participant in the focus groups dialogs, fictitious names are used when quoting participants.

The answers to research question number three exhibited three findings listed on this table. Other themes emerged from answers to research questions number one and two. Please see summary of major findings at the end of chapter 4.

After the sermon series and in the focus groups conversations three characteristics exhibited a slightly higher level of church health. These are intentional evangelism, authentic community, and distresses arising from the merged congregation.

Major Findings

Table 4.7. Findings from the qualitative data

1. Intentional Evangelism
2. Creating Authentic Community
3. Distresses arising from the merged congregation

Intentional Evangelism is the purposeful priority of all leaders and laypersons to love God and love others so they can embrace the cross and enjoy the transformational power of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Intentional evangelism was the focal point at various times of group discussions. Participants felt encouraged to go out and engage in evangelism. For instance, Georgina said, "The series challenged us to be evangelistic. We

need to be on fire with evangelism.” Others felt more comfortable after the intervention and were open to share the Gospel and provided an open door to share the gospel with audacity. Denise Smith articulated this confidence when she said: “We are ready to share and invite people to Christ. We need to be intentional in inviting people to Christ.” Mosaic has been proactively celebrating evangelistic community events on a quarterly basis.

Authentic Community is a sustainable effort for recreating and cultivating healthy relationships with God and with others to find a place of refuge and redemption to restore the *imago Dei* where love is the bridge and foundation of all. Creating authentic community emerged through participants engaging with the church and with the community at large. Mosaic’s participation in creating authentic community in Louisville covers justice ministries, assisting persons in need of a shelter, a Nar-Anon program, school reading programs, \$3 Dollars Be a Blessing, social services in one High School, food pantry and clothes closet in conjunction with southwest ministries, and Food for the Soul. Joseph described, “these efforts as opportunities to create community, and they paint a picture of what an authentic community is.”

Distresses arising from the merged congregations convey all the anxieties, emotions, losses, confusions, and internal and external forces at work hindering the health of a merged congregation to break away from just surviving and fulfill its mission. Distresses arising from the merged congregation are revealed in different areas of concerns a merged congregation experiences before, during and after the unification are depicted in table 4.7.1.

Table 4.7.1 Distresses arising from the merged congregation

Misguided Priorities

Emotional Wounds

Insufficient Communication

Unhealth and Health

Declining Attendance

Financial Struggles

The Presence of Clicks

Limited Leadership

For example, “a misguided priority was created when the demographic study done and presented by New Church and Congregational Development to the future merging congregations demonstrated a high population of African American people one mile away from R. E. Jones. Nonetheless, Mosaic UMC was moved to a different location seven miles away from the study presented to the future congregations,” stated Peter.

Another case happened when “we had to vote twice,” said Andrew. He added: “The first time we needed $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people voting for the merger to take place, it did not pass. A couple of weekends later, we were asked to vote again with a simple majority vote and the merger was approved.”

A few instances of emotional wounds were mentioned when Jolene carefully explained, as she took a deep breath: “We felt abandoned, victimized, angry, and a lot of us are hurting. It saddens all of us to see what happened to this congregation. People got disgusted bouncing from church to church.” Others repeatedly expressed how, “they threw us under in the bus, along with the Book of Discipline.” “They expected us to fail from the start,” said Christine.

Another subject that came up was insufficient communication. Sonia stated, “We believed what they were telling us, but they didn't tell us the truth. We had no say on anything. The conference called the shots. We were mandated to build this multipurpose building. And I blame the conference for the biggest part of that” believed Sonia.

The dynamics of the focus conversations showed other concerns related with the dis-health and the health of the church. Gloria affirmed that, “Prior to the merger, my church was previously unhealthy. I think part of my confusion in the beginning was that I thought by bringing together five churches, we would make a big healthy church. We became a larger unhealthy church.” This distress was perceived as “Mosaic’s merger as fragile, getting worse, and deteriorating fast,” agreed Carl.

On the other hand, other church members affirmed the health of the church as improving and good overall. Samantha ventured to say, “It is bright, it is encouraging, and we need to accept hope in spite of fear.” Latonia added, “Mosaic is a multiethnic, multicultural and a diverse congregation. I don't know that any of the five merged churches had a mixture of ethnicities, but when we formed mosaic we came together as one. We survived as one, and we love each other. Our music reflects how unique we are in our own diversity.” This environment has been intentionally respected and created in supernatural ways, and it is attracting mixed marriages, added other members.

Other concerns were brought up as members noticed Mosaic merger as declining, “Signs can be seen as trustees place less chairs every Sunday, and in the last eight years many members have gone to be with the Lord, declared Juanita. Associated with this topic was the issue of finances, “You can see it in the finances. We borrow monies from daycare to cover bill expenses. Mosaic Child Development Center is sustaining church’s

staff salary and paying other bills,” said George. The church was sued in 2010 and lost the case. The final decision is still pending in the court of appeals as we see the future, and “whatever decision is made, it will kill what we have. We will need to borrow nearly half a million dollars to pay for the whole thing,” said others.

Furthermore, other concerns were mentioned, “A fragmentation can be observed within the merger as I witness where people choose to seat in the church every Sunday. Perhaps, they feel comfortable in their little groups, or it only shows the church where they came from when the merger happened,” said Christine. “Your observation makes sense because our merger was not a marriage either,” stated Bryan.

A couple of instances of limited leadership can be observed, Eunice Allen described it as: “Always the same people planning, working, serving, and executing outreach events at Mosaic.” Albert agrees with her as he has noticed how the: “Same ones are doing the same things and are bouncing from different committees. On the other hand, you have the group that only comes on Sundays, and they are satisfied with that. But the people who do the same thing get burned out and frustrated. It is so overwhelming.” Mary said that: “All boils down to when all the churches came together, the majority was older people. That's the basis of what we're dealing with.”

Findings from answers to research questions number one and two in the pre-test and post-test reflected the following themes: passionate spirituality, engaging worship, mobilized laity, and empowering leadership.

Summary of Major Findings

1. Passionate spirituality was higher in the pre-test and post-test.
2. Engaging worship was also higher in the pre-test and post-test.

3. There is a difference in how the research participants understand or perceive mobilized laity. The long-standing church members graded the church higher in the mobilization of laity than did the new church members (Table 4.3, 4.5).

4. The research participants rated empowering leadership as the lowest in both the pre-test and the post-test (Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6).

5. Intentional evangelism shows the same score in the pre-test and the post-test (refer to table 4.6).

6. Authentic community was scored lower in the pre-test, and somewhat higher in the post-test (see table 4.6).

7. Distresses arising from the merged congregations in the focus groups conversations included misguided priorities, emotional wounds, unhealth and health, declining attendance, financial struggles, the presence of clicks, and limited leadership.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter further relates the seven major findings rising from the quantitative and qualitative investigation and their significance for helping merged congregations within the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Churches. Church health is fundamental in this process. The application of these seven major findings should benefit Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist churches in the process of merging and hopefully provide a pathway for them to grow.

This study affirmed the importance of church health when considering all possibilities for mergers to be successful and thriving. The research confirmed and postulated how health is vital for a merged congregation to succeed. It is my prayer that the findings will help Mosaic and future church mergers to thrive.

Based on the Quantitative and Qualitative data, seven major findings surfaced and are presented in this study following the order described on the list at the end of chapter 4. These are: Passionate Spirituality, Engaging Worship, Mobilized Laity, Empowering Leadership, Intentional Evangelism, Authentic Community, and Distresses Arising from the Merged Congregation.

Major Findings

First Finding: Passionate Spirituality

Passionate spirituality was the first characteristic of a healthy church merger that emerged in the quantitative data. The congregation appraised passionate spirituality high on both the pre and post-test. Passionate spirituality is defined as a fervent intentional

prayer and reliance on the power and presence of God to undertake His vision guided by the Holy Spirit where persons can enjoy an intimacy with Him permeating all human aspects of life (Kinder 52). Therefore, spiritual health cannot occur without fully depending on God before, during, and after the merger.

Passionate spirituality must saturate every effort when considering merging a church because the risks to merge congregations are copious. The hurts might go deep, and the results may not be what one expected. Congregations will face a conundrum of emotions as a result of letting go of their buildings by merging with people they might not know, and then, relocating into an impartial place (Elliott 35); (Tomberlin and Bird ch. 4).

Various authors offer a direct link between biblical foundations and theological foundations (Page introduction); (Elliott 35) (Robinson and Wall 43-45). It is difficult to separate these two. They suggest discovering and applying principles of how churches started in the book of Acts; how the Holy Spirit spearheaded a redemptive story after Jesus Christ ascends into heavens. For instance, the first decision the disciples made at the end of chapter one is to choose a new disciple named Matthias (Acts 1:24-26). Yet, this person is never mentioned again in the whole narrative of the entire book of Acts and the New Testament. This was a supernatural movement of God creating a new paradigm shift from us to them. This requires a consistent effort to move from an internal focus to an external mission driven passion. It is possible to initiate a new path with new merged communities of faith to reach new people with the gospel.

Prayer, an important spiritual discipline, is the bedrock for the movement of God to lead when considering merging (Elliott 11). It is about being with God to align all

human efforts to the heart of God. It is to discover His will for a preferred future. Prayer kept Jesus Christ's heart closer to His father's voice. In fact, Jesus Christ spent fasting and praying before he began His ministry, previous to calling His disciples, during His few years of ministry, and ahead of His crucifixion.

How does prayer help to foster a healthy merger? From the review in chapter two, it's evident that it is only through prayer that personal agendas, attitudes, ideas, particular preferences, and selfishness are submitted to the will of God. Prayer destroys unseen influences in the spiritual, physical, and emotional dynamics of every congregation that will merge or is already merged (Tomberlin and Bird 36).

The church was born in the middle of prayer (Acts 1:14). It was the most powerful secret of their strength when they met with persecution, intimidations, whippings, prison, revolts, apprehensions, as they preached the gospel to all nations. They gave up their lives for advancing the mission of Jesus Christ (Hiebert 19, 20).

As prayer aligns devotees to God's will, the Holy Spirit guides and sustains our efforts in every conversation, voting process, and covenant agreements. The Holy Spirit will provide prudence and energy to proceed when parishioners decide to merge. Dreadful failures lurk on the horizon when our postures, priorities, and practices leave prayer on the sideline, or at the end of meaningful gatherings particularly when considering uniting different congregations under one roof. If prayer is about hearing and enjoying God's voice and presence, then worship is entering into His presence to transform our lives in community.

When I was appointed to Mosaic in June 2009, I had some knowledge about church mergers but I had not led one before. Additionally, Mosaic was six years into the

merger when I came in. The inner dynamics of Mosaic these last three years prompted a deep desire to understand the distinctions to lead a church merger. However, the number and complexities of assorted internal and external battles demanded our full attention and energy (please see autobiographical introduction on pages 1-3). Our day-to-day encounters to solve them and move forward drained our energies and resources in the church. All leaders, and church members have endured all the storms with resilience and with an unfathomable faith in God.

The main change initiative Mosaic faces is to shift from a church mentality – us – to a Kingdom mindset – them (Christopherson and Lake 22). We are daily seeking God with fervent prayer and a consistent group of people meets weekly. Given the high appraisal of this characteristic by the congregation on both the pre and post-test, and the positive findings in the literature, Mosaic shows some promise.

Second Finding: Engaging Worship

The second feature for a healthier church merger that rated higher in the quantitative on both the pre and the post-test data was engaging worship. Engaging Worship can be defined as God's supernatural invitation to adore Him with our minds, souls, spirits, and bodies to experience His presence and power while deeply connecting with others. It is manifested in a mutual interaction with God and others (McKee 60). In the process we are transformed to the *imago Dei*. And our names are changed forever. We are a new creation!

Marva Dawn describes engaging worship as the language of love between the Creator and his creatures with eternity in the heart of every participant (Dawn 124). Engaging worship then comprises a continual communication with God and with one

another (Kinder 64). This characteristic provides a positive environment in which to successfully accomplish healthy growth in merged congregations and it must be a priority for the Body of Christ to experience God and as a result of bonding with one another. Worship then, is the offering of our hearts to allow God to invade them to satisfy our spiritual hunger. It is opening the gates of heaven to partake of a deeper disclosure of the importance of God.

In the New Testament, in (Acts 2:43-47) one finds a worshipping new community living for God and for one another. All in one sacred place: Jerusalem. However, later in (Acts 13:1-3), one immediately finds a missionary move from the holy city to Antioch. It was not easy for the Jews to discover that God was in the move to reach new worshippers in the gentile world. And this happened in the Antioch church while they were worshipping the lord and fasting.

In the Old Testament, a deceiver also became a worshipper of God. What a transformation Jacob experienced in his life! His name was changed to Israel with a daily worshipful reminder as he limped the rest of his life (Gen. 35:10). On his first trip, fleeing from Esau's wrath God encounters him in a dream and he consecrates that place naming it the house of God: "Bethel" (Sarna 200). On his way back to his family of origin, God asked him to revisit "Bethel," and he named it "El-Bethel" (Gen. 35:7) which means the God of the House: a new relationship with the God of a sacred place. In the same way that every Jacob has an Israel, and each Israel has a Jacob, every "Bethel" has an "El-Bethel," and each "El-Bethel" has a "Bethel." A place leads the worshipper to a person, and it is this person that makes every place sacred.

I wonder when churches merge, if the missing piece is the place or the person. If

the person of God has the highest priority in transformed hearts, new places, where the new mergers will start, will prompt new memories recreated with memories from the past.

Perhaps, when a merger occurs, God might be the missing link. No matter where people are, or where they go, their hearts committed to prayer and to worship will help to make sense of lost buildings imbedded with past memories. Those memories will never fade because God will deliver new ones, and He will renew and recreate the memories a congregation lost.

Mosaic's worship is a hybrid of contemporary and traditional, and it is intentional in creating an environment where worship touches and reflects multiculturalism in a multigenerational profile (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138). Worship has not been a divisive issue in the last eight years I have been serving at Mosaic. In fact, as previously stated, participants in the research assessed engaging worship high on the pre and post-test. Within this multiethnic congregation, diverse peoples are truly engaged in magnifying God through worship. But worship does not happen in a vacuum. It requires vertical and horizontal healthy relationships (Taylor 58). In line with this, the members at Mosaic are creating sacred spaces for growing relationships flowing in supernatural way to others. I have personally observed how intentionally Mosaic cultivates a new language of love for God and for others conquering racial, social, economic, and personal preferences (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138). We have also found that

engaging in worship touches the heart of God and it transforms our multiform body of believers.

Third Finding: Mobilized Laity

Mobilized laity was the third healthy characteristic visible in the quantitative research. Mobilized laity can be explained as a unified healthy movement of all church members to discover their gifts and fulfill all responsibilities assigned in the body of Christ to accomplish the mission of the church (Robinson and Wall 43-45). This statement communicates that we need to return the work of God to the people of God. Laypersons create movements with clergy persons. The priesthood of the believers is a must in the New Testament narratives. Several authors affirm that mobilized laity is crucial for the body of Christ to experience health (Wagner *Your Church Can Be Healthy*); (Hemphill and Hemphill); (Schwarz and Logan 22-36); (Macchia 27-197).

The participation of believers will enable laypersons to understand, own, and implement all the necessary changes before, during, and after the merger. They can be the trailblazers at the front of any new church merger. I realize that leaders can be clergy and lay – and there does not need to be a pre-conceived idea of how to do ministry. No one needs to feel threatened by the growth of lay leadership. Empowering ministry can be done in partnership or as a team. It's creative, passionate, and discerning – and can make a difference in the troubled world in which we live.

In lieu of who we are as a connectional system, then, the basics for every congregation needs be directed to cultivate a clear vision, mission, direction, and a process in place where the laity becomes the compelling force (Wilson 47-63). Moreover, local pastors and Elders can join God's movement already happening across the

commonwealth. This approach is more radical if we might be able to renounce to the idea that pastors are the primary ministers. We can embrace heuristic humility of doing ministry *with* them, not *for them*. At the end, we don't know it all.

Conference leaders are invited to discover and apply a clear process for involving lay persons as the driving energy in the process to merge congregations (Malphurs 151). If knowledge is deficient, they can humbly solicit the help of an experienced coach in this area. Likewise, Bishops in consultation with District Superintendents might seriously consider to send a local pastor or elder with a church planter's heart, someone who has been evaluated and trained as church planter (Elliott 41). A church merger is not a revitalization effort but the determination of planting a new church (Elliott 3)

With our United Methodist connectionalism where we hold each other accountable for heart and social holiness, effectiveness, and spiritual disciplines, church mergers can experience revival, which can happen again – spreading like fire. I'm hopeful and praying. If we do this – we'll be the salt and light in the community and the world.

At Mosaic we are learning that the local church is the key to offering hope for the world. That's how Jesus Christ formed it, and how John Wesley thought about it and implemented it. If we focus on meeting the people where they are, the local church will engage the community in new creative ways.

It is thought provoking to see how the long-standing church members graded the church higher in the mobilization of laity than did the new church members. Perhaps this finding reflects a perception gap. That is, the new members may not see how the mobilization of laity is being done whereas the older members are able to discern the

many ways in which this occurs. If this is true, then more needs to be done to help new members bridge this perception gap. Mosaic may need to give greater attention to the empowerment of new lay members to engage in ministry. Moreover, it may be necessary to implement a process to help new lay members understand their roles and responsibilities and provide opportunities for service. Most of the time we hear that we need to invest in our leaders, but if we do not invest in the laity, we will not get new leaders. Mobilizing laity is essential. The positive thrust is reinforced to turn them into ministers (Malphurs 151).

As a church, Mosaic desires to take lay spiritual leadership seriously as a way of pointing people to the redemptive work of God, to hope in Him, and accomplish kingdom community transformation. We also need to carefully and humbly find ways to learn from the younger generation, involve them in lay leadership, and realize that they can connect with a younger population.

Fourth Finding: Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership was the fourth characteristic for a healthier church merger discovered in the quantitative research. However, empowering leadership was scored considerably lower than all other characteristics. Indeed, this characteristic was the weakest area at Mosaic. Empowering leadership involves leading as servants like Jesus Christ toward articulating and implementing a vision while trusting one another in the process and multiplying in others His model for the life of the church.

Three reasons help to understand why this characteristic tested the lowest. The first one is related to ethnocentric attitudes and beliefs that did not take into consideration the importance of approaching this merger from a multiethnic context (DeYmaz

"Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138). This initial approach created an initial lack of full integration of all cultures when the merger was announced and the invitation was to follow a set of guidelines void of multiethnic voices leading the merger, and of those approving it. Perhaps, other cultures never fully owned the conversations prior, during, and after the merger. In short, it is possible that the team process failed from the start (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138); (Tomberlin and Bird 44); (Barna "The Power of Team Leadership: Finding Strength in Shared Responsibility" 11).

The second is associated with the deep emotional wounds the merge caused among leaders stopping them from moving forward and being healthier in the process (Scazzero 22). The merger process needed a balanced emotional sacred time to grieve, to desecrate a place in order to consecrate a new one, and to provide a proper burial for a final closure. Perhaps, these sustained wounds from the start until now reflect might reflect some resistance to leadership empowerment (Scazzero and Bird "The Emotionally Healthy Church" 20).

A third reason could be that Mosaic has reached a plateau, lost momentum, and a conundrum of unceasing conflicts generated over the years which have exhausted energies and resources to lead Mosaic to a preferred future (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 75).

In the face of this account, I have witnessed how they faced each problem with spiritual and emotional strength and with an immeasurable trust in God's promises. I am proud to serve with them. I am a better person, husband, and minister because they have

taught me how to stand firm in the middle of the storms and appreciate multiform expressions of God's love. As the researcher and pastor of Mosaic I take ownership of this situation. I am ultimately responsible but not solely accountable.

In consideration of what Mosaic's leadership has faced, I propose the following approaches. A prerequisite for persons chosen as prospect leaders before the merger is to equip and train the new leaders before, during, and after the merger. This effort requires reaching new people for Christ and multiplying this DNA in the formation of new leaders with a heart for evangelism and discipleship (Griffith and Easum 51). For a merger to be successful from the start and sustainable in the long run leaders will have to spearhead new ministries redesigned for the new mission field (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138).

Furthermore, empowering new multiethnic leaders in a new setting (church merger) is a major shift to how they used to be and do church. An innovative system is essential to be in place. Otherwise, the default mode and uncertainties of a preferred future will push back to reign in the new direction of the recent merged church (Cordeiro 147). The changes of the unknown and how the past lurks on the horizon will push back to safe places familiar for many years (Friedman *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* 116).

Belligerent leadership must be substituted with new leaders willing to move toward uncharted territories where they might not be able to see the shore anymore but will hold onto the boundless oceans forthcoming (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* 75).

As the course is set, the different environment might reveal vulnerabilities and struggles. To lead limping for the rest of our lives can be acceptable, like Jacob did when God transformed his life. We can lead out of brokenness (Scazzero and Bird *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* 114).

Of course, permission can be granted to foster in our lives a doxological transformation in a healthy way and receive ample reassurance to break with the power of the past. This could be the heaviest of the anchors to lift up.

Many of these issues are not unlike those encountered in the New Testament. The initial leaders of the newly formed church in the New Testament faced conflict early on. They were faithfully expanding Jesus's mission from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The church in Jerusalem grew exponentially. Suddenly, this growth created a leadership struggle when the Greek-speaking widows, whose needs the Hebrew-speaking believers did not meet, brought this matter to the apostles' attention (Acts 6:1-7). The apostles resolved it by choosing new leaders full of the Spirit and wisdom.

The chosen leaders had gentile forenames that opened the doors to ethnic groups to enjoy the benefits of God's Kingdom (Constable 108). God's plan included the gentile world. How the apostles faced the struggle, mobilized laity, and the options presented to them paved a way and the church kept expanding with new disciples. Gentiles in the new community was a major change and challenge (Scazzero 22, 66).

Ministry calls for ministers open to love and reach all cultures surrounding our communities (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's*

Church 76). And a minister does not exist unless there is someone who assigns her or him a duty beyond any human cultural preconceptions. Therefore a minister's task is to deeply know who the master is and to manifest Him to the world as a new possibility to see, to touch, to hear, and to feel. This is the master's desire to all whom He has called. Only then, ministers will be received by all humanity as their own (McKee 60).

Fifth Finding: Intentional Evangelism

Intentional Evangelism was the fifth finding for a health-given church merger. It can be defined as the purposeful priority of all leaders, clergy and laypersons, to love God and love others so they can embrace the cross and enjoy the transformational power of Jesus Christ's resurrection and enjoy all the benefits of His Kingdom here and now (Christopherson and Lake 6, 22), (McNeal *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church 76*).

Most authors agree that evangelism is a must when a new church plant (church merger) is considered (Anderson 48); (Tomberlin and Bird 11); (Christopherson and Lake 2); (Kinder 60). Each church merger needs to start with a fiery evangelistic zeal, alongside a kingdom mission passion as the main purpose of the church to succeed. A primary pastor's role is that of a church planter. Both foundations are a must (Tomberlin and Bird Ch. 1); (Elliott Ch. 10). Overlooking these two dynamics will place the new merger back on the declining route where the average attendance will go back to their original numbers before the merger (Tomberlin and Bird 16-17). Therefore, in every church merger, pastors should be trained as church planters, and all leaders must be committed to move forward with the new merger as a new church plant.

The process for merging congregations cries for an undivided passion for evangelism. To fulfill God's mission in the new church merger with an external focus, the harvest is the main task at hand (Christopherson and Lake 2). Evangelism can take various nuances such as need-based, seeker friendly, fresh expressions, and establishing loving relationships for the transformation of our communities. This course will help to avoid any enticements and outlive predominant default crisis modes and failures screaming not to move with this new church plant in a multiethnic context (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 139).

At this point, evangelism is reclaiming the very life of Jesus Christ with a trinitarian mindset. The *missio Dei* is to reach all nations. Intentional evangelism is the language of love and life highlighted from creation to culmination. It is crucial to bring the gospel *from* evangelism not *for* evangelism empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the great commission vision (Christopherson and Lake 2). Thus, numbers is not the main driver, multiethnic life transformation is (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 139).

Jesus left His mission in the hands of twelve men who changed the world. And they did it! The call and the content of the mission have not changed at all. Now, the same mission has been left to us to fulfill. Our work can be done so people can experience redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, and love. Thus, merged congregations have the potential to become communities for individual and social transformation.

Mosaic is engaged in this multiethnic dimension of intentional evangelism. We are celebrating evangelistic events to grow the kingdom of God by creating opportunities for people of all cultures to see and touch the life of Christ. We have an evangelistic team in place. They coordinate and implement different evangelistic ideas. Some of the new members are proactively starting ways to reach new people for Christ. These are efforts directed to become a healthy merged, evangelistic-driven congregation.

As a church we will take the power of the gospel to offer love, life, and hope to spiritually dilapidated communities around us. These are signs that make me hopeful for the new direction of the congregation.

Sixth Finding: Authentic Community

Authentic community was the sixth theme indispensable for a healthier church merger. The importance of this theme originated in the focus groups consultations and the qualitative data. Authentic community can be described as the sustainable effort for recreating and cultivating healthy relationships with God and with others to find a place of refuge and redemption to restore the *imago Dei* where love is the bridge and foundation of all (Taylor 28).

In Genesis, the creation motif announces how God created community. His voice echoed, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Community began in the mind of God. Welcoming the other to celebrate companionship is a theme flooding the pages of the Old Testament. Through generations, God is the host of mankind (Stanley and Willits 27). He offers a daily *Shulham* – a table of invitation to Israel in the wilderness. The nation of Israel is called to offer authentic community to the stranger among them (Leviticus 19:34; 24:22) (PohlCh. 1).

The New Testament breaks a long period of silence with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection opened the doors for the creation of His new body on earth, the church. As such, they are called to be the people called out of the world to form an authentic community to revolutionize it (Pohl Ch. 11).

It is in this alternative community where internal difficulties arose between the Jews and gentiles, poor and rich. But finally, they learned to love one another and offered loving hospitality to others by God's grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Reports from Roman citizens expressed their admiration for how this new community loved one another. Nevertheless, oneness in Christ does not disguise the painful realities of a merged congregation (Vanier 28).

Mosaic's axiom is "You Are Welcome Here." They entwine their hearts with wreaths of acceptance and love for people of all races. In this path to forming authentic community persons can breathe and touch a small piece of heaven on earth. I am proud to serve a congregation positioned in the top five percent of churches in America where people's groups are the normal. Nevertheless, Mosaic has a room to keep growing in this area.

Seventh Finding: Distresses Arising from the Merged Congregation

The last finding dealt with concerns arising from the experiences Mosaic has lived as a result of its merger. This finding came out of the focus groups conversations where participants expressed their views about failing to start a merger on a healthier pathway. A milieu filled with anxieties, emotions, losses, confusions, and internal and external forces was at work hindering the health of a merged congregation to break away from just surviving to thriving and fulfilling its mission. The fact that one of the five churches

happened to be African American particularly contributed to the milieu (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 138).

The exertion of uniting five congregations with contrasting levels of health was, is, and will be a large-scale undertaking. Adjoining one African American congregation to four Caucasian churches without appropriate consultations of the distinctive expressions of racism in Kentucky heightened the anxiety and anger of this merger (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" introduction).

For instance, I recently heard from a Kentucky Conference leader say that “most African Americans in the Kentucky Conference do not have a future.” It was a sad day. I felt angry and marginalized. Yet, no one else attending the meeting said anything, a tacit agreement. One wonders, if this person’s assertion is a mirror of a wider institutional, social, and moral issues of a polarized society where members of ethnic groups are left out of Kingdom biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical narratives; the very language of heaven (DeYmaz "Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation" 4); (McManners 423).

Perhaps, such remarks might echo a deeper deterioration of pre-existing ethnocentric issues and reflect a microcosm of a macrocosm polarizing the USA where xenophobia, hate, anger, and broad stigmatization of valuable ethnic people groups in America and the world are stigmatized as threats to our society (Howell and Paris 33).

In the misguided priorities mentioned on table 4.7.1 the response I heard was that the original place for the merger was to take place one mile away from R. E. Jones. The

demographic data informed the proposal to start the new church in that location. In fact, the neighborhood was filled with possibilities, although it was mostly African American. Was this perhaps one of the reasons Mosaic's merger was moved to a different neighborhood? The answer is beyond the scope of this research. But the removed physical location of the church generated other unnecessary pressures. I struggle seeing how the power and privilege of one culture assumes ethnocentric attitudes over ethnic groups.

The other substantive matter under misguided priorities was the process for voting. In any merged congregation some authors explicitly agree that the majority ruling, voice, or vote has to be removed from the merger to accomplish its objectives. (Elliott 12).

Mosaic's participants in the focus groups discussions were not ashamed, disturbed, or did not avoid mentioning their emotional wounds. This is in spite of the fact that in our American culture we have difficulty seeing suffering as legitimate (Scazzero and Bird *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* 160). Their response patterns were open and clearly corroborated how they have been healing over the years. They have accepted, without denial, the redeeming painful memories filled with sadness, anger, and depression but accepted elements that reflect a healthier environment. Although, it appears from those conversations that they were not allowed to grieve in a healthy way, their responses demonstrated facing the facts. However, vestiges of blaming and feeling victimized remain. Follow-up sacred communication with quality time might help heal the wounds still open in the back of their minds (Vanier 28).

Insufficient communication was another matter brought out into the open. This was seen as a major problem in prior to, during and following the merger. Also, the church has been declining in attendance. Moreover, Mosaic is facing financial struggles, and still the presence of click groups is evident and they are experiencing a limited leadership pool.

Therefore, for health to take deep roots in the life of Mosaic, one has to start with the *missio Dei*. As a church, Mosaic has to be fully committed to embody intentional evangelism, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, authentic community, imbedded with passionate spirituality, and engaging worship. These biblical, and theological foundations will assist Mosaic to experience health to fulfill God's mission in its community.

I was internally overwhelmed as participants opened their hearts to speak and contribute in each focus group. A plethora of different reactions and emotions filled most of our conversations. Pain, tears, frustration, struggles, unbelief, and doubts filled the room at different times (Tomberlin and Bird ch. 4). I listened attentively, quieting an inner voice to speak and intervene.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

Implications for Mosaic

Mosaic exists in a milieu expressed in a larger system that attempts to serve, maintain, and survive rather than choosing to thrive and transform communities for the kingdom. The goal is for Mosaic to be reenergized to live in an environment of more than enough. Mosaic has faced persistent losses, conflicts, and crisis of all sorts creating an emotionally drained ecology.

If we are trying to increase church health in a merged congregation, we must deal with the various distresses included in the seventh finding. These distresses signal that there are problems with the merger, at least at a perceptual level. Thus, consistent healing efforts need to permeate that part of the congregation that still feels injured. Such congregations need to embody forgiveness by embracing the losses experienced while letting go of the right to get even. Other problems can also impede a successful merger. For example, if procedures were suspect when the actual merger took place, or if a high level of suspicion or distrust existed at the time of the merger, it will prolong the healing process and will not be conducive to church health over a long period of time. Second, if the communication process breaks down from the start of the merger, and if people were not heard before the merger, it becomes necessary to go back to the drawing table to have more conversations to raise people's awareness of what church health is and the components that contribute to it, as was evident in the sermon series. This effort involves continued and sustained listening to people's stories. Data from this study suggests that in trying to identify and evaluate church health, in a merged congregation, listening to stories is essential. If this process of listening to their stories is successful, such persons develop an understanding of the process and can stop debates and endless talking and move to pursue the merger. Furthermore, if trust is not built and the voting process is not handled properly, the implication will be a lack of ownership from the start, deepening the pain as conference leaders abandon the merger process.

Other implications are worth mentioning since these can influence how successful a merger is. For example, if the period of time for the merger was rushed and the persons leading the merger lacked experience, these factors can hinder the merger. Additionally, a

lack of wide and honest prior conversations with all five churches prior to the merger means that the merger process should be stopped to allow for such conversations to occur before proceeding. There is nothing wrong with stopping the merger until one has developed new possibilities and demonstrated openness to forthright dialog. In short, one has to stay with these necessary processes until all people invested in the new future can see it clearly.

Implications for the Kentucky Conference

The Kentucky Conference might consider using these health characteristics: passionate spirituality, engaging worship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, intentional evangelism, authentic community, and distresses Arising from the merged congregation for future church mergers and make the adjustments necessary to change how they help churches in need of resources or which are declining in numbers. This formula is not magical. It is a suggestive path to health and a merged church. These statements have not covered unknown variables in the process.

Limitations of the Study

After using the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire in this study I discovered some limitations in using a pre-established test; such an instrument might not fully provide insight into the deeper issues running under the surface. However, such issues can come to the fore through focus group conversations. Using both, the quantitative and qualitative data added strength to this study.

This study was also limited in that there was an absence of historical data to compare district statistics of church mergers that have failed in the Kentucky Annual

Conference. This data might have helped to analyze the variables or reasons why these merged churches closed their doors again.

The sermon series was not adequate on itself. If someone were to repeat my research, he or she would need to increase the number of focus groups and spend more time listening and create spaces where pastor and lay leaders could spend more time telling their stories after the research is done. Unilateral communication is somewhat deficient.

Additionally, another constraint of this research was the fact that it was done fourteen years after the merger, and it was done only at Mosaic.

In addition, a limitation of this research is that it did not include and engage in the focus conversations with the six former pastors who served at one time at Mosaic and the respective Bishop, District Superintendent, New Church Development Director, and members of the Spiritual Leadership Incorporated team involved in the merger.

Moreover, another limitation is that Christian who take a written test tend to rate everything high. Possibly a way to find different results based on this tendency of the "Ceiling Effect" is to increase the scale numbers from 1 to 7 or 1 to 9. This cannot be done in an established test like The Beeson Church Health Questionnaire that I used as a template to birth this research.

Finally, a limitation can be attached to the intervention itself. That is, the sermon series utilized in this research involves a unilateral way of communication since there is no response from the listeners.

Unexpected Observations

There were several surprises in the study. First, a unique surprise was how all participants trusted the process and opened their hearts to the researcher, who happened to be their pastor, and disclosed their viewpoints regarding the merger. Second, the low score on empowering leadership surprised me. Perhaps, I thought that we had been investing quality time to keep our leaders motivated and moving in the right direction but the score showed the opposite. It is humbling, and yet, it offers a good opportunity to evaluate strengths and weaknesses under this finding.

Third, I was surprised to see that by using not just the five but also the eight characteristics of the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire I was able to learn how Mosaic rated high in Passionate Spirituality and Engaging Worship. Without using the full scale, it would not have been possible to discover these two healthy capacities in the life of the church.

I also did not expect to see how high the results of the pre-test and post-test were. Janet Dean names these high numbers as the “Ceiling Effect.” She explains in the following way:

One of the things we often find when we test Christians, is that they tend to score pretty high in anything we give them. If it sounds like that should be true, like the leaders scored higher than what they might feel. We sometimes call it a “Ceiling Effect.” Is like Christian know what the right answer is, so that is what they will say, but they might not live it or believe it.” (Dr. Janet Dean in discussion with the author December 19, 2016).

Another surprise was to find out how the use of the qualitative method identified more issues of church unhealth and church health than the pre-established categories of the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire. Listening to people's stories was a major contribution to this research.

Another surprise was that the series of sermons alone did not have the full influence on church health.

Future Directions for the Study

The study of multiethnic church mergers opens a door for further research to analyze how cultures might embrace a multiethnic vision.

After using the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire in this study, it might be beneficial to use the pre-test, expose the congregation to healthy mergers to discover principles and process in place of successful mergers, have more focus groups, then give them the post-test to examine how perceptions and behaviors show different results. I think that an in-depth church health assessment of each particular congregation would demonstrate a wider scope assessing the present church health of Mosaic.

A future opportunity for a research would be to examine how bringing different races affects merging congregations in the Kentucky Conference. Ethnographic studies might provide room for a healthier merger to happen.

A possible future research project could be a comparative analysis of two or three successful church mergers outside of the Kentucky with two or three mergers in the Kentucky Conference. Such a study would allow us to draw lessons we can learn, and apply transferable principles in our context.

The landscape for the need of merging congregations might allow a different research where the focus could be laying healthy foundations with unhealthy congregations willing to merge and follow the process over a period of three to five up to ten years.

Another area for research could be the use of other methods of intervention such as a discipleship series where sacred spaces can be created between the pastor and the parishioners.

Postscript

As a result of the interaction in this study with the literature review, results of tests, focus groups conversations and discoveries of these seven major findings, I have presented the relationship of church health and a merged congregation and its distinctive prospects and challenges.

I humbly submit that the tests, the immense amount of literature, and the focus conversations, and proven scientific measures do not produce health separated from fervent prayer, passion for the lost world, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit guiding every step, and an unapologetic desire to realize every local church as the body of Christ that He longs for.

It is my prayer that when considering merging a church, these spiritual disciplines combined with a body of knowledge might assist persons who are planning a church merger, or will lead one in the near future.

Had I read a research like this one, prior to entering a merged congregation, I would have implemented specific changes. For instance, I would have been more intentional leading the church as a church planter. I would have had a conversation with

conference leaders to understand the dynamics of this church merger and seek their approval to regenerate Mosaic as a church plant. I would have asked for fervent prayer and engaged in evangelism and discipleship from the very first day of my arrival with all church members. I would have created sacred spaces for healing conversations with church members. I would have asked for full agreement at all levels to cease all programs and activities of a “normalized” church to focus on these eight church health characteristics in four phases over a period of two to four years: intentional evangelism – transforming discipleship to form authentic community; mobilized laity – empowering leadership to mature new functional structures all under the canopy of passionate spirituality and engaging worship. This formula is not magical. It is a suggestive path to health and a merged church. These statements have not covered unknown variables in the process.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A. Survey of the Beeson Church Health Questionnaire

BEESON CHURCH HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS: Listed below are 54 statements that describe characteristics of our church and your relationship to it followed by 13 personal questions. Please rate your perceptions of the strength of each characteristic by using the scale provided and writing the appropriate number in the box to the right of the statement. Your responses will be treated confidentially, and your participation will help our church leaders be better informed as we seek to discern future strategic initiatives for our church.

5	4	3	2	1
STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

1. I enjoy getting together with other people from my church outside of church events.
2. The leaders of our church seem rather defensive.*
3. I find the sermons convicting, challenging, and encouraging to my walk with God.
4. Our church has a very clear purpose and well-defined values.....
5. My local church actively reaches out to its neighborhood through spiritual and community service.
6. My church affirms me in my ministry tasks.
7. I regularly practice the spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation).
8. I have a close enough relationship with several people in my church that I can discuss my deepest concerns with them.
9. Our church is led by individual(s) who articulate vision and achieve results.
10. I find the worship services spiritually inspiring.....

- 11. Our church clearly communicates our mission statement.
- 12. Prayer is a highlight of the worship service.....
- 13. Tithing is a priority in my life.....
- 14. New ministry ideas are normally appreciated and encouraged.
- 15. The music in the church services helps me worship God.....

5	4	3	2	1
STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

- 16. I do not know my church’s plans and direction for the years ahead.*.....
- 17. I am actively involved in a ministry of this church.
- 18. Our church relies upon the power and presence of God to accomplish ministry.
- 19. My prayer life reflects a deep dependence on God concerning the practical aspects of
life.
- 20. I have experienced a lot of joy and laughter in our church.....

- 21. There are few training opportunities in our church.*
- 22. The worship at this church is so inspiring that I would like to invite my friends.....
- 23. This church teaches that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.....
- 24. I do not know my spiritual gift(s).*
- 25. There is a sense of expectation surrounding our church.....
- 26. Our church has a clear process that develops people’s spiritual gift(s).....
- 27. I experience deep, honest relationships with a few other people in my church.....
- 28. The lay people of our church receive frequent training.....
- 29. Excellence is an important value in how we accomplish ministry.
- 30. This church shows the love of Christ in practical ways.....
- 31. I enjoy the tasks I do in the church.
- 32. There is an atmosphere of generosity within our church.....
- 33. I would describe my personal spiritual life as growing.

34. The love and acceptance I have experienced inspires me to invite others to my church.....
35. I look forward to attending worship services at this church.

5	4	3	2	1
STRONGLY AGREE	MODERATELY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	MODERATELY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

36. I have confidence in the management and spending of our church’s financial resources.
37. In our church the importance of sharing Christ is often discussed.
38. I feel that my role in the church is very important.....
39. Our church emphasizes the person and presence of the Holy Spirit.....
40. My church needs to place more emphasis on the power of prayer.*
41. The leaders and members of our church enjoy and trust one another.
42. When I leave a worship service, I feel like I have “connected” with other worshippers.
43. My church is open to changes that would increase our ability to reach and disciple people.....
44. Our church has very few programs that appeal to non-Christians.*
45. I share my faith with non-believing family and friends.....
46. This church operates through the power and presence of God.
47. I rarely consult God’s word to find answers to life’s issues.*
48. The leaders of our church seem to be available when needed.....
49. We have an effective and efficient decision-making process in my church.....
50. When I leave a worship service, I feel I have had a meaningful experience with God.....
51. People rarely come to know Jesus Christ as their savior in our church.*.....
52. The teaching ministry of this church encourages me to be involved in ministry.
53. I currently enjoy a greater intimacy with God than at any other time in my life.....
54. I believe that interpersonal conflict or misconduct is dealt with appropriately and in a biblical manner.....

Personal Information

55. Your age

56. Gender

1. Female

2. Male

57. Marital status

1. Single

2. Married.....

3. Widowed.....

4. Other:

58. Number of children

59. The following are a regular part of my spiritual life. **Check all that apply.**

1. Bible Study.....

2. Devotional times

3. Family devotional time

4. Ministry.....

5. Prayer

6. Sharing my faith with others.....

7. Other spiritual disciplines (fasting, etc.)

60. Which best describes your current involvement with the local church you attend

most? **Check only one.**

1. Attendee only

2. Leadership board member.....

2. Ministry leader/teacher

3. Pastoral Staff.....

61. Are you a member of this church?

1. Yes

- 2. No.....
- 62. Approximately how many years have you been involved with this particular church?
- 63. Which of the following best describes how often you attend weekend worship services? **Check one.**
 - 1. Visitor
 - 2. 1-2 times a month.....
 - 3. 3 or more times a month
- 64. In the past year, what percentage of your total income from all sources did you give to your local church (approximately)?
- 65. Our current church staff is _____for the ministries of our church. **Check one.**
 - 1. Understaffed.....
 - 2. Adequate
 - 3. Overstaffed.....
- 66. I actively participate in a small group or ministry team.
 - 1. Yes
 - 2. No.....
- 66. How would you describe the community within which your church is located? **Check one.**
 - 1. Growing and thriving.....
 - 2. Plateaued
 - 3. Declining.....
- 67. The size of our church facility is adequate for our current ministries.
 - 1. Yes
 - 2. No.....
- 68. I would describe my personal spiritual life as...
 - 1. Growing
 - 2. Plateaued
 - 3. Declining.....

Appendix B. Beeson Church Health Characteristics Scales

AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

1. I enjoy getting together with other people from my church outside of church events
8. I have a close enough relationship with several people in my church that I can discuss my deepest concerns with them.
54. I believe that interpersonal conflict or misconduct is dealt with appropriately and in a biblical manner.
20. I have experienced a lot of joy and laughter in our church.
27. I experience deep, honest relationships with a few other people in my church.
34. The love and acceptance I have experienced inspires me to invite others to my church.

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

41. The leaders and members of our church enjoy and trust one another.
48. The leaders of our church seem to be available when needed.
2. The leaders of our church seem rather defensive.
9. Our church is led by individual(s) who articulate vision and achieve results.
14. New ministry ideas are normally appreciated and encouraged.
21. There are few training opportunities in our church.
28. The lay people of our church receive frequent training.

ENGAGING WORSHIP

35. I look forward to attending worship services at this church.
42. When I leave a worship service, I feel like I have “connected” with other worshippers.

- 50. When I leave a worship service, I feel I have had a meaningful experience with God.
- 3. I find the sermons convicting, challenging, and encouraging to my walk with God.
- 10. I find the worship services spiritually inspiring.
- 15. The music in the church services helps me worship God.
- 22. The worship at this church is so inspiring that I would like to invite my friends.

FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURES

- 29. Excellence is an important value in how we accomplish ministry.
- 36. I have confidence in the management and spending of our church's financial resources.
- 43. My church is open to changes that would increase our ability to reach and disciple people.
- 49. We have an effective and efficient decision-making process in my church.
- 4. Our church has a very clear purpose and well-defined values.
- 11. Our church clearly communicates our mission statement.
- 16. I do not know my church's plans and direction for the years ahead.

INTENTIONAL EVANGELISM

- 23. This church teaches that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.
- 30. This church shows the love of Christ in practical ways.
- 37. In our church the importance of sharing Christ is often discussed.
- 44. Our church has very few programs that appeal to non-Christians.
- 51. People rarely come to know Jesus Christ as their savior in our church.
- 5. My local church actively reaches out to its neighborhood through spiritual and community service.

45. I share my faith with non-believing family and friends.

MOBILIZED LAITY

17. I am actively involved in a ministry of this church.

24. I do not know my spiritual gift(s).

31. I enjoy the tasks I do in the church.

38. I feel that my role in the church is very important.

6. My church affirms me in my ministry tasks.

56. The teaching ministry of this church encourages me to be involved in ministry.

PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY

12. Prayer is a highlight of the worship service.

18. Our church relies upon the power and presence of God to accomplish ministry.

25. There is a sense of expectation surrounding our church.

32. There is an atmosphere of generosity within our church.

39. Our church emphasizes the person and presence of the Holy Spirit.

46. This church operates through the power and presence of God.

53. I currently enjoy a greater intimacy with God than at any other time in my life.

TRANSFORMING DISCIPLESHIP

7. I regularly practice the spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation).

13. Tithing is a priority in my life.

19. My prayer life reflects a deep dependence on God concerning the practical aspects of life.

26. Our church has a clear process that develops people's spiritual gift(s).

33. I would describe my personal spiritual life as growing.

40. My church needs to place more emphasis on the power of prayer.

47..... I rarely consult God's word to find answers to life's issues.

Appendix C. Questions presented during focus groups conversations.

What do you think was the health of the church prior to the sermon series?

Intentional Evangelism – Sunday June 26

Transforming discipleship -- Sunday July 10

Mobilized Laity -- Sunday July 17

Empowering Leadership – Sunday July 24

Creating Authentic Community – Sunday July 31

What do you think is the church's health now?

What do you think made a difference after listening to the sermon series?

How do you think the sermon series helped the health of the church in the last three months?

What do you think Mosaic could in the future to advance the church's health even further?

How did you experience the sermon series?

How would you say that the health of the church has increased?

What do you think has made a big difference?

What do you think has shifted in each of you?

Do we renew Mosaic's vision, mission, strategies, and short and long-term Kingdom goals?

How can Mosaic reverse history and become a healthy, vital merged, vision-mission driven congregation?

What will it take for Mosaic to reverse history?

How do you think a new start might help Mosaic?

Where do we go from where we are?

What are Mosaic's options to become a thriving congregation rather than just surviving?

Appendix D. Ethical Considerations Worksheet

Consent Forms Template

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

MOSAIC UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH HEALTH AND A MERGED
CONGREGATION IN THE KENTUCKY CONFERENCE**

Dear _____,

You are invited to collaborate in a research study being done by Rev. Eliseo A. Mejia, a student at the Beeson Doctor of Ministry at Asbury Theological Seminary. As an active member and/or leader of Mosaic You have been invited to participate in a research process related with Mosaic's merger. I am grateful for your response and desire to engage in this conversation. Your time will make a difference in the future of our congregation.

Your participation in this study will help us clarify the factors, influences, and variables that allow a merged congregation move forward. We will look at five focus areas in the following order: evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community. The findings will help us to create a new energy and synergy at Mosaic as we depend on God to lead us in this effort.

If you agree to offer your insights and ideas, you will be asked to answer a comprehensive questionnaire twice within a two-month period, attend a two-hour interview in a focus group and listen to the full five sermon series on evangelism, discipleship, mobilized laity, empowering leadership, and authentic community. The conversations during the focus group sessions will be recorded (audio only) for accuracy but will be kept confidential in the office and will be deleted by October 3rd of 2016. This

research will cover a four-month period. You will receive further instructions as you answer the questionnaire and participate in the focus groups research process. These guidelines will delineate the dates, times, and location to complete questionnaire and the focus group meetings. Although I will encourage confidentiality during the focus groups; I cannot guarantee that it will be maintained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. Your contribution in this study will be as a volunteer and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I need to reassure you that your participation in this study will be strictly confidential, and your responses cannot be connected to you. Only the researcher, his mentors Dr. Anthony Headley, Dr. Janet Dean, will have access to the collated data. I have taken a thorough training course “Protecting Human Research Participants” in order to maintain a high level of integrity to protect all the information participants will offer. Your responses and ideas expressed in the duration of the study will be handled in the most confidential manner. Any further interaction with the information will have to be handled with your proper consent.

This is an invitation and you are offered a choice to interact or not. Your participation is vital and voluntary as we move toward a new future in the life of Mosaic UMC. Please if you have any question, reservation, or comments feel free to contact me at 859-421-7832, or by email at eliseo.mejia@asburyseminary.edu.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

Signing this paper means that you have read this, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change

your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to Participate in the Study Date Signed

Another ethical consideration is that the author of this study will use code numbers created by the person's birthday and last four digits of their cell phone numbers without knowing their names

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