

ABSTRACT

COLLABORATION IN MINISTRY: A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO KINGDOM MINISTRY IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

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“Connectionalism” in the United Methodist Church is a distinctive adherent to the denomination. Maintaining a bonded existence with all other United Methodist Churches would indeed strengthen the church, foster a stronger Christian community and collectively fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus more readily and effectively. Yet the denomination is in serious, if not critical decline. Something is wrong. The number of United Methodist congregations throughout the domestic United States is staggeringly high. Why then, are we losing membership and vitality? In the Western NC Conference alone it is expected over 400 congregations will close their doors this year. A new focus is needed and a new outlook must be established.

While the outlook may seem dim, there is a strength that lies dormant within the confines of United Methodism’s polity and structure. If individual churches would regain a vision of connectionalism, collaboration could be a vital tool toward revitalization across the board. Utilizing our strengths as a collective body of churches and congregations, collaboration could be an efficient and exciting means to regain denominational vibrance. It’s time to “wake the sleeping giant” of collaboration and join hands and hearts for the sake of Kingdom Ministry.

The purpose for this research is to gain knowledge of how to bring about a new understanding of connectionalism through collaboration in ministry. What factors

contribute to vital collaboration among church and what factors obscure the ability to successfully join arms? Utilizing leaders of churches in the Union County NC area, by a process of surveying beliefs and attitudes towards collaboration, actually participating in a large collaborative ministry event, and discussing beliefs and attitudes following this event, I hope to discover answers. Fourteen pastors and laity will be surveyed and interviewed to gain new insights into how collaboration can work for the benefit of all churches within a community.

What I discovered was enlightening and hopeful for a denomination in crisis. Most every participant had earnest doubts and fears towards working collaboratively; many of them the result of denominational rewards and emphases. Yet following their active participation in a collaborative event, ALL wanted to learn more and participate more readily in these sorts of ministry projects. Participants had a very narrow view of what “collaborative ministry” could mean in scope and breadth for their settings. The event opened their eyes to a more robust understanding of what “Kingdom Ministry” might look like. Most significantly, a large majority of the participants experienced an unusual closeness to God both during and after participating in the collaborative event. Collaboration may be a key toward revitalization in the ebbing reality of United Methodism

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Personal Introduction

“If The United Methodist Church is to be transformed in a way that recovers any semblance of the Wesleyan spirit out of which we were born, we must recognize, acknowledge, and confess we are a denomination in crisis.” (Goodpaster 5) Current statistics regarding the United Methodist Church in America demonstrate that the denomination is indeed, in peril. For example, Methodism once enjoyed the vibrancy of substantial growth, averaging a growth index of 139.7% increase in membership each decade from 1780 through 1840. Now, not only has growth slowed down, but membership has also. (Payne 2) These statistics reveal that something is wrong or broken with the denomination’s current way of being The United Methodist Church.

The name of the denomination suggests that all Methodist Churches are *united*. If this is the case, there is a collective strength that should be outwardly visible. Yet when the implementation of ministry in the individual churches throughout the denomination is explored, rather than collaboration, the individualistic and competitive nature of the church is the most obvious characteristic. This chapter identifies a lack of collaborative ministry efforts of The United Methodist Church as a cause of what diminishes the denomination’s ability to be the once vibrant church it was.

Culture in America has seen dramatic shifts of influences upon it throughout every century and current figures of church attendance would give indication of yet another substantial change. Whereas church was considered the center of community living throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s, it now appears to merely be one of any number

of options on how to spend a Sunday. A culture which regularly and unanimously observed “Blue Laws”, in which stores closed on Sundays to honor community worship, now see extended Sunday work hours as they continue to vie for profit. A culture that has always supported athletic programs for our children and youth throughout the week, now commonly host tournaments on weekends and, most especially, Sundays.

Critics list a host of additional reasons for the dramatic change in church attendance: Clergy burnout, neighborhood transitions, warring in church regarding styles of worship, inward focused missions and even a simple loss of spiritual centeredness upon the average American. Indeed, John Wesley himself once verbalized his fear about the Methodist movement that had swept across England and America in the late 1700’s: “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist in either Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.” (Wesley, 315) In today’s modern culture, it would be difficult to argue Wesley’s fear has *not* become realized in both England and America.

While I think it is always good to know and understand one’s current circumstances along with its causes and conditions, the church must also be aware of what should or could counter these trends. What is next? What might the church do differently as a church that would speak to these new cultural norms that seem to leave church in the background of common, everyday life? Lovett Weems offers guidance and describes the current condition as “leading between memory and vision.”(Weems, 88) The church has a memory of Methodism is its grandeur, but it needs vision to produce what Methodism will look like into the 22nd century.

I have served in varying ministry settings over the past 18 years: serving a smaller member rural church, starting a new church community in a growing, vibrant population area, serving a large-member church of 1500+ in a wealthy community setting and currently serve a medium-sized congregation in a once rural, now booming growth area of North Carolina. During the 7 years I worked developing a new faith community I encountered what I consider a major flaw in our denomination's attitude and viability. The Conference decided to begin a new community in the Lake Norman region of North Carolina. This region had experienced unprecedented growth in population over a 10 year span. The growth was not expected to slow down but to continue to accelerate as people sought refuge from the Urban areas of near-by Charlotte. One of the largest regional companies, Lowes Home Improvement, relocated its headquarters to the Mooresville region, in the heart of the Lake Norman area. New schools, new housing developments and a growing number of condominiums along the shoreline of Lake Norman bolstered the areas growth and vitality. The lure of lakeside living proved inviting to the executives of the large banking industry there. Soon, Lake Norman became a bedroom community to the rapid expanding Charlotte region. Subsequently, it was determined this area would be ideal for forming a new faith-community as statistics revealed a large segment of newcomers to the area were, for lack of a better term, "un-churched." Demographic research findings were presented to the Western NC Conference Cabinet to solicit approval to appoint a clergy person to this area to initiate this project. My name was presented as the viable candidate to undertake the challenge and subsequently, the Bishop assigned me to this task.

What was not disclosed was the intense opposition of several area United Methodist pastors to the idea of starting a new congregation in “their area.” As the District Committee on Congregational Development met with area pastors, not only was there no excitement for the potential of a new United Methodist congregation forming, there was all out dissention. The Clergy, with few exceptions, were extremely hostile to this idea. A host of local church meetings were held to discuss the potential, anger and hostility were expressed at the prospect. Several of the Clergy even went to the Bishop in utter protest. Perhaps to ensure some peace was maintained, the Bishop decided to act. I was made to understand we were not to choose an area to settle within 4 miles of any existing United Methodist Church. Rather than celebrate how another church development in the area might draw new people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, local church clergy and leaders feared losing some of their own membership and subsequently reflecting badly upon their own leadership. Instead of offering to assist my leadership team with resources, we were told not to come near their properties. When we circulated a flier advertising a new church community forming, I received complaints from area United Methodist Churches when their congregants received a flier in the mail. This was untenable to me! How could the Church act so poorly toward one another? What was it that created such a threat to their existence? While the United Methodist Church claimed to be a “connection,” their actions and attitudes were quite to the contrary. They acted as if we existed as individual franchises, trying to gain the majority share of profitability.

There was equally a lack of ecclesial support for the effort. Upon being appointed to this district, I was asked to contact the District Superintendent to introduce myself.

When he came to the phone, he didn't even say "hello" before announcing to me vehemently that "he has never started a new church, has never been a part of a new church, nor does he have any idea how to support the efforts I would be exercising to get a new church started!" His sentiments were consistent in his lack of action. He continually tried to make sure that nothing of any adversity would stir in his district. As the pastors in the area grew more insecure, the support I needed to succeed faded. After about 3 years of setting up our church in a local school gymnasium, I was able to make contact with a local family who owned 25 acres of land directly across the street from the school we were using. This was a local United Methodist family who wanted nothing more than to sell this land to our church, rather than to a developer who was looking to build homes. For about a year and a half, I met and formed relationships with this family, awaiting a day when we could be in position to secure a prime section of real estate and one day build a church sanctuary upon it. As I was asked to do this project from the onset, I was informed the conference had allocated \$200,000.00 for assisting in purchasing the land for our church, and \$100,000.00 to assist in the first phase of the building project. We had grown to a level where we believed it was time to seek out these funds and purchase this land. This is where the competitive nature of the area churches took us into near ruin. As we met with the appropriate committees, the building and location committee and the congregational development people, a devastating thing happened. We were told we would not receive any monetary support for this! A variety of reasons were given: the church was not strong enough to support the indebtedness, the area was growing slower than expected, and they felt the price per acre was too high. (The family was selling it to us for just under \$30,000.00 per acre, where adjoining

property had sold at \$170,000.00 per acre!) We were left stranded. Yet, the very next week, one of the pastors who was against us receiving those funds and had been extremely vocal during our request phase, announced that he was going to receive \$300,000.00 from the conference to start a new satellite campus in an adjoining township. The “competitive nature” of the church left us standing in a sea of bitter betrayal and angst. It was all I could do to try and salvage the angry congregants from leaving in distrust of the denomination I had grown to love. We prayed. We cried. We called out to God and decided to stay the course as we felt God calling us.

To be sure, over then next seven years, this new community grew to average of about 235 people on any given Sunday, but the “franchise stigma” only seemed to grow worse. In my mind and heart I prayed that one day I would have an opportunity to devise a ministry where churches collaborated together to assist in ministry to the surrounding community, where we could be in unity for the prime purpose of relaying the Gospel to a hurting world. I hoped one day, our denomination would cease to compete with each other and form a strengthened collective of a common vision. This is not an original idea. Indeed it’s a biblical one. The earliest recorded accounts of the Christian Church seemed to show this intent.

The biblical foundation of the Christian church appears not to have any regard toward a competitive drive, other than to outdo one another in giving as one had need! To this end, the collective *attitude* reflects generosity with glad hearts. Perhaps in our struggles to establish local churches, denominations and sects we have lost the focus of why the church even exists.

Statement of the Problem

With the reality of declination in United Methodist Churches throughout America, a problem exists when two United Methodist congregations view each other as competition rather than Kingdom sojourners. Indeed, when statistical reports given to our Bishops and District Superintendents outline largely the number of bodies attending each Sunday, a competitive and non-Kingdom oriented value system can easily dominate. When United Methodist Clergy observe a rewards system based highly upon growth statistics, it is no wonder collaboration among adjoining United Methodist Churches is often rare if at all.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to measure the changes in beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative ministry with participating congregants of Stallings, Mineral Springs, Faith, Millgrove, Indian Trail and Weddington United Methodist Churches following their experience with the community mission project, The Union County Back To School Bash. The nature of this mission was to provide necessary school supplies to students about to begin a new school year. Many of these students don't have the financial resource to obtain the necessary supplies to begin the school year. Through sizable contributions of local businesses, the churches obtained large amounts of the supplies needed for the children to receive for free. The children were taken down an assembly line and given the ability to choose their new backpack, notebooks, rulers, pencils, calculators, glue sticks, folders, markers, compasses, protractors, and loose leaf notebooks - all the supplies listed online for their particular grade level. Yet, the best was saved for the last. Each child was taken with their family to a special seating area. Members of the churches then removed the student's shoes and socks. With a basin of

warm water, they washed their feet and told them about how Jesus did this with His Disciples. The church members told them about how God has a great plan for their lives and we pray with them. They then placed new socks on their feet and gave them a brand new pair of athletic shoes to wear. In all, the churches were able to do this for 1500 students in Union County, NC.

This was a ministry of collaboration. No one church was identified as the lead. Volunteers of all ages from different denominations and cultures came together to help one another as anyone who has need. The volunteers who come out to do this ministry are of great interest to me. It requires roughly 300 volunteers to implement this mission each year. Through selected questions given on a survey, the researcher measured changes in beliefs and attitudes before and after having served on this mission. Each worker was asked to participate upon their own volition and given a survey of questions measuring their beliefs and attitudes about this before the event and how their beliefs and attitudes changed following the event.

Research Questions

In order to accomplish the goals of this project, the completion of pre-event and post-event surveys were completed by congregational volunteers to answer the following research questions.

Research Question #1

Prior to taking part in The Union County Back to School Bash event, what were the beliefs and attitudes of the leaders regarding collaborative ministry with persons from differing churches and denominations?

Research Question #2

What dominating issues regarding collaborative ministry events and implementation influence positive collaboration experiences by churches?

Research Question #3

Which aspects of serving in The Union County Back To School Bash event best contributed to the change in behaviors and attitudes of the pre-intervention verses the post-intervention data?

Rationale for the Project

By nature, Christian churches should be able, willing and robustly effective in working together. The Church of Jesus Christ began over 2000 years ago as *community*, sharing resources as any had need. Consider the second chapter of the Book of Acts:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Day by day they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. (Acts 2.44-47a)

In light of this account of the design of the Church, how did the modern church morph into an institution that competes with other churches? The common bond is Jesus Christ, the common mission, His salvation for all. It is hard to ignore the use of the word, “all” in the Acts passage. **All** who believed...distribute the proceeds to **all**...having the

goodwill of all. (Emphases mine) How could the church develop the slightest notion the mission of the church was individualistic and not corporate?

Sadly, based on the researcher's experience with a new church development and in observing many other churches, it seems safe to say the United Methodist Church has largely developed a theology of "Thing-Dom" rather than Kingdom. In other words, for a variety of reasons, the churches tend to operate as lone entities, developing their own properties, buildings and ministries (things), with little regard for the greater good of all churches (Kingdom). Additionally, the emphasis on taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world (Kingdom) has waned dramatically from the days of Wesley and the start of the Methodist movement. While this is not the case with *all* churches in the denomination, it is certainly safe to make the statement in broad sweeping strokes and note it is far and wide the norm. How then, did the denomination get here?

United Methodists exist in a systemic culture of established boundaries and rules. Indeed, the Book of Discipline provides guidelines and ridgelines to help members align as a "connection". This is a good thing, to be sure, lest chaos and ambivalence win the day. Systems align members to a common mission. Yet a deeper look is needed at what this system creates. The itineration of ministers holds some unique attributes to enable collaborative ministry efforts. Truly, when pastors are asked to serve a variety of congregations over an extended conference geography, this can cultivate new ideas, new potentials and leadership emphases that can energize the church. New beginnings are certainly Biblical in concept. When pastors are in the reality of itinerant ministry, they realize they do not own a church, they serve a church. This, is the pathway to collaboration. Yet within this very system are elements of "humanness" that can lead us

toward competitive drives, self-centered motivations and other selfish desires. Such competitiveness raises oneself above others, gains members for one's church as a way of self-aggrandization, and seeks notoriety in hopes of more "lofty" appointments with higher salaries. While this was by no means the intended outcome, this reality should not be ignored. The United Methodist Church needs to identify these realities and call them what they are: sin. Truly, unless the UMC admits that these realities on some level drive the current church mentalities among the clergy, there is little hope of reversing the deathly trend our denomination is now recording.

Rather, if pastors should repent of these self-centered motivations, they might then cast their eyes on a much nobler vision: A vision of Kingdom collaboration, as was the obvious drive of the Acts 2 church, with the sole intent of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28.18-20). Again, there are many pastors and congregations who desire this for all the appropriate and right Spirit-lead reasons. When there are multiple bodies of people whose God-given gifts are shared in such a way that causes a collective good for all, all can achieve a Kingdom "win" that could change the very course of "Church" as we now know it. This could create a purpose and result that far exceeds any intellectually-devised outcome. It is Kingdom motivated, Spirit-lead, and self-less in its entirety.

Definition of Key Terms

Below are project specific definitions of key terms that are used throughout the project:

Kingdom: The Kingdom of God that draws us away from any self-motivated outcomes or rewards and seeks only to honor Jesus Christ.

Systems Theory: The trans-disciplinary study of the abstract organization of phenomena, independent of their substance, type, or spatial or temporal scale of existence. It investigates both the principles common to all complex entities, and the (usually mathematical) models which can be used to describe them.

Collaborative Ministry: A ministry where different churches pool their resources, people, property to assist in bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to light.

Bash: Referring to the missional event, “The Union County Back to School Bash.”

B2SB: The acronym for the above event.

Delimitations

The primary sources for this study involved congregants and Clergy and staff from area churches in which the researcher asked for volunteers that have signed up and registered to help with the Union County Back to School Bash. Volunteers who have never helped with this event in the past were the primary participants in this study. Further, the researcher limited the age level of the participants to 18 and older. Other factors such as sex, ethnicity or any socio-economic considerations were not grounds for limitation in the study per se. However, they will be considered in the evaluative process following.

Review of Relevant Literature

Those publications that have direct inference upon the topic of collaboration in ministry settings, primarily in the local church, were the first line of reference. These included previous dissertations, essays and published articles in ministry journals and magazines. Secondarily, biblical accounts of the early church were specifically useful and

drawn upon. These accounts came from the Book of Acts where the early church was graphically depicted as having the liberal holding of nothing in private, albeit wealth or possessions. Rather, everything was held for the benefit of all as any had need. The model for the earliest Christian church, then, is collaborative at the very core.

Research Methodology

To discover why collaboration is not widely practiced across the United Methodist church is one of the goals of this project. In addition, the researcher hoped to discover the multi-faceted positive outcomes that can occur with collaboration and Kingdom-thinking congregations. To reach these goals, the researcher hoped to investigate a group of constituents, both laity and clergy, who agreed to participate in a large collaborative outreach to the surrounding community. The Union County Back to School Bash is an event started in 2013 involving roughly 12 different churches of numerous denominational affiliations. The researcher asked volunteer participants to fill out a survey that might articulate their beliefs and attitudes toward the collaboration of the event. Subsequently, these participants were asked to fill out a second survey immediately following the event. By analyzing the data from the two surveys, the researcher would be able to measure the changes in attitudes and beliefs toward collaborative ministry prior to the event verses post-event summations. In each survey, the researcher structured questions that relayed their tendencies of doubts and fears that collaboration can occur without somehow casting a favorable light on one church over another. This may be one of several key issues as to why collaboration is not more actively utilized among congregations. Also, key questions helped the researcher understand the additional hesitations for engaging in collaborative ministries such as

theological differences, traditions that vary, or simply personality differences. Could church size be a factor? Perhaps there are differing mindsets among the congregations that house 1000+ parishioners verses those congregations that have fewer than 200. Questioning their pre-existing understandings of what this event might be like with respect to working with diversities in people such as educational levels, blue-collar workers verses business executives, economic disparities might create greater understandings.

One area probed substantially was the clergy of each of the participating churches. It stood to reason the churches would follow the lead of their pastor with regard to mission and outreach and collaborative ministry. The researcher, therefore, formed a focus group with exclusively clergy to engage in open conversation as to their attitudes and beliefs surrounding a cooperative engagement like the Back to School Bash. The intention to uncover deeper truths toward what hinders such “Kingdom-thinking” endeavors and drives churches to be more individualistic. Discussion topics included: Did clergy-persons fear losing members to other congregations through the collaborative process? Did they have varying understandings of what constitutes a “healthy” outreach or mission? For example, perhaps they harbored a resentment toward providing free products rather than engaging them in a project that promoted sustainable habits for providing for their families more economically. This provided a discussion of how the pastors viewed the Body of Christ at work for the poor and underprivileged. In addition, the researcher asked questions that specifically target United Methodism. Clergy who are under the auspices of a Bishop and a Cabinet of District Superintendents are asked twice annually to provide statistical data that outlines the status of our church. I wondered if

collaboration wasn't a priority because the Conference is looking at individual churches successes with respect to new membership, financial gains and losses, and overall measurements of church health and vitality – all of which reflects upon the leader. Taking time to help other congregations is not currently one of the areas measured among United Methodist Churches. Is a competitive spirit at work among the clergy to produces the fastest growing congregations? Is this an important aspect of setting sights on ecclesial promotion by the Cabinet and Bishop? This might explain a great deal why more work is not accomplished collectively rather than individualistically. The focus group discussion gave clarity as to why leaders, in general terms, may not actively engage in collaborative efforts and with more frequency.

Type of Research

The research conducted was a combination of pre-intervention and Post-intervention analysis. The researcher utilized a survey to measure attitudes and beliefs toward collaborative ministry prior to participation in a large collaboration event. Following the completion of the survey, a follow-up 30-minute interview was conducted to gain qualitative analysis of each participant.

Participants

The participants of this study were leaders of local churches, both Clergy and laity, primarily, but not exclusively, United Methodist congregations in the Union County area of North Carolina. The undeniable influence of leadership toward collaboration between churches caused the researcher to evaluate the beliefs and attitudes of the leaders foremost.

Instrumentation

The research involved electronically producing and delivering the surveys followed by a camera-recorded personal interview.

Data Collection

SoGo Survey was utilized to construct a 25-question survey utilizing Likert Scale 5-point response possibilities along with individual questions where participants can elaborate for clarification. This was generated, delivered and collected electronically. The agreed upon participants were issued this survey in early December and asked to complete it within the first 2 weeks of the month. They were subsequently invited to take part in a personal interview for approximately 30-40 minutes that was recorded on video camera for transcribing and reporting. The interviews took place throughout the month of January.

Data Analysis

This project contained both quantitative and qualitative information for analysis. The quantitative data sought to discover and record information such as age, years serving a local parish, and number of collaborative events participated in prior to the interview and survey. Qualitative data sought to discover prior experiential outcomes and how that affected their attitudes and beliefs toward collaboration in ministry settings. This data assisted the researcher in understanding other factors that affected the likelihood of collaboration occurring, such as denominational influences, congregational attitudes and barriers toward partnerships.

Generalizability

This project was assessed to offer a new approach toward offering ministry throughout any community. The sheer number of United Methodist Churches throughout

any region offers a tremendous viable opportunity to “link arms” for the sake of bolstering ministry throughout any given community. This project offered a significant framework to be applied and adjusted to virtually any demographic area, domestically and internationally. The significance of collaboration between churches pointed toward a new and robust understanding of how the church can impact a community for Jesus Christ.

Project Overview

This study outlined the existing problems toward a lack of partnership collaboration in the United Methodist Church. Chapter one outlined the existing problem inherent within churches that are significantly reducing the UMC to thrive as a Christian community. Chapter two outlined research and literature regarding biblical and theological underpinnings for collaboration, barriers to successful collaborative events, systems theory and leadership importance and hindrances toward collaboration. Chapter three discussed the process taken to gather information and processes for doing so. Chapter four analyzed the recorded findings and measured the outcomes. A summary of findings in Chapter five outlined major findings and discoveries from this project.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The United Methodist Church is declining rapidly in attendance, missions and evangelism. Bishop Robert Schnase cites, “In many of our U.S. conferences, up to 85 percent of our congregations are declining in membership, attendance, ministry activity, and financial strength, and this trend has lasted for more than forty years.” (Ough, Jones, 2010, p.44) This project was undertaken to uncover a “sleeping giant” within the confines of the United Methodist Church structure: The connectional nature of the denomination and how clergy has largely ignored the potential it holds in correcting the downward trends so prevalent in the annual reports. If the UMC is to reverse these statistics, it will take the efforts of the collective and not the individual church striving to gain for itself. Collaborative intentions and idealism will not be enough. Collaborative action is a mandate the church must achieve. The assertion being tested was that achieving collaboration among churches would create a spiritual energy and vision for Kingdom-thinking resulting in the collective gain in *all* churches. As someone once said, “when the tide comes in, it raises all the boats in the harbor.” The challenges and obstacles to achieving such gains are not naively presupposed. Rather, they are real and they are surmounting each year the church ignores these present circumstances.

Some believe the idea of collaboration is the predictable future of the Church in many defining areas. Charles Van Engen writes,

Partnerships in mission in the twenty-first century will involve combinations of the following:

- Church with church,
- Mission with mission,
- Sending mission with receiving church,
- Sending church with receiving mission,
- Formerly receiving church, now a mission sender, partnering to serve a new receiving church or mission,
- Multi-cultural teams that draw support from, and are accountable to, persons, churches, or mission agencies all over the globe,
- Local congregations who send their own missionaries, cooperating with older or newer receiving churches or mission agencies,
- Global, multi-lateral cooperative mission endeavors
- local congregations to partner with denominational structures,
- mission sodalities to partner with congregations within a tradition,
- mission sodalities or missionary orders to partner with denominational structures or church hierarchy, and
- mission agencies or denominational mission groups to partner with non-governmental agencies (NGOs) or other agencies made up of members of churches even within the same tradition. (P. 13)

This is a complex and exhaustive list of ways to combine, to coordinate efforts, to collaborate for greater outcomes than any one church could ever accomplish. This is a MUST for United Methodism in the 21st century if it is to remain a vital Church.

The purpose of this project was to measure the changes in beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative ministry with participating clergy and leaders of Stallings, Mineral Springs, Faith, Millgrove, and Indian Trail United Methodist Churches along with Sardis Baptist Church following their experience of active participation in the collaborative ministry event of “The Union County Back to School Bash”. Each leader took a survey and participated in a personal interview.

Biblical Foundations

A theological framework for the rationale of collaborative ministry can be founded in a theology of baptism. Paul declares, “There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4.5, emphasis mine.) Ephesians Chapter 4 is a distinct chapter in this letter. For the first several chapters of this letter, Paul elaborates his doctrinal instruction on the new identity formed in a life in Christ. Yet in chapter 4, Paul seems to shift emphasis to a sense of “moral” calling, or as Fowl writes, “It is quite common to treat chapters 1-3 as doctrinal and chapters 4-6 as moral instruction (paraenesis). This distinction is sometimes characterized as the difference between indicative (chs. 1-3) and imperative (chs. 4-6). (125).

The moral imperative is hereby stated plainly, “unity.” The rationale for Paul to write instructively upon this would certainly recognize the human condition for division. It also appears to be a preamble to Paul’s intended discourse of identification of unique gifts and graces given by God to the body (vv7, 11-12). Herein lies a very important distinction: there is unity in the body, but each individual is distinct in their offering to

this unity. Yet, unity is the ultimate and gifting is the penultimate characteristic of the body of Christ.

Much of Pauline theology carries the emphasis of unity in Christ over individualism. Since, then, Christians are all baptized into the one body of Christ, the recognition of their corporate nature, one with each other, should not be understated. This is augmented in Romans 12:4, “For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, **are one body in Christ**, and individually we are members of one another.” (NRSV, emphasis mine) The ramifications of this are telling as cited by Dunn and Kaseman, “Accordingly, no ecclesiastical hierarchy can be said to be constitutive of the body of Christ, although ranking is not excluded (e.g. 1 Cor. 14.5) where practical needs dictate such an ordering. This in turn suggests that the pluriformity of the church is essential for its function.” (339)

Baptized into the one body, Paul lays claim to the central notion that believers are called to a larger sphere of ministry than the human condition often beckons. Christians are called to that of a unification, a common “togetherness” that is articulated through the common evangelistic energies of the collective.

Francis, Jones and Robbins aptly cite the World Council of Churches (1982, p.20) faith and order paper, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, “The Holy Spirit unites in a single body those who follow Jesus Christ and sends them as witnesses into the world...The Spirit calls people to faith, sanctifies them through many gifts, gives them strength to witness to the Gospel, and empowers them to serve in hope and love.” (34)

A “single body” is who the church should be, under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The UMC may have been under the lordship of self-preservation in the United Methodist

Church at large, which may be just a symptom if not a direct cause of our decline. Tiller comments,

“Having made this point we shall continue nevertheless to speak of shared ministry because membership of the people of God involves a call to serve one another in the Body of Christ, and together engage in mission to the world: ‘As God has called you, live up to the calling... There is one body and one Spirit, as there is also on hope in God’s call to you; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all... But each of us has been given his gift.’” (66)

The absence of a shared ministry and mission in realistic, modern United Methodist praxis has led to a far-more individualistic and competitive non-cohesive church. What, then, should the church do as a further motivation to shed antithetical practices? Looking deeper into scripture and the event of Pentecost may give additional qualifications for collaboration in ministry.

Pentecost and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2 contains a miracle event. Unlike the miracles Jesus performed by and large to individuals, (with the exception of the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000) this was a miracle that came upon a multitude initiated and carried out by God, to people who were from far-reaching and diverse geographies: “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs...”(Acts 2.9-11a). This event showed God’s intentions for all persons, regardless of ethnic origin, age, sex, or any other differentiation to be *united*

in a Baptism of the Holy Spirit –a baptism that does not distinguish amid the diverse languages and cultures present.

Wilhite and Jensen, however, provide another significant understanding of what Pentecost delivered in terms of an earlier event. Genesis 11 recounts how the whole earth was speaking the same language and how they conspired to build a tower, high into the sky, in order to “make a name for themselves.”(Gen. 11.4) This collaborative effort was void of Godly intention. Wilhite and Jensen write, “The Lord’s confusion of the people at Babel stayed their God-denying project of self-exultation. Like the exile from Eden, the multiplying of languages and scattering of the people protected those at Babel from going bad to worse.” (102) They continue,

“At Pentecost, Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled and Babel is undone. Jerusalem was packed with Jews who gathered for the feast (notice the re-gathering of those scattered at Babel), and a group of Jewish followers of Jesus ‘were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability’ (Acts 2.4) A piercing noise draws the attention of those Jews gathered for the festival ‘from every nation under heaven’ (Acts 2.5), and they stand amazed and perplexed to hear the Galilean followers of Jesus speaking in the language of every nation represented...What Pentecost represents – and in this it marks the beginning of the mission of the church – is the **unity of the Gospel** (*‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ – Eph. 4.5*). (103, Emphasis mine).

Being one is clearly the intention of God, yet not without the most important of qualifiers, that of being God honoring, following the purposes of God and not the sinful nature of self-serving egotism. Charette also points out, “The very phenomenon that

testifies to God's universal and inclusive intentions at the same time points to the exclusion of the inflexible who hold firmly to a narrowly defined nationalistic understanding of God's redemptive purpose.”(174).

Notably, this is not to claim that effective collaboration requires all people “speak the same language.” Rather, being one means being one in the Lord where efforts and agendas are Spirit-directed, Spirit-directed and filled with as many as wish to unite. “The Pentecostal gift is nothing less than the empowerment for mission in which the Spirit catholicizes the people of God.” (Wilhite and Jensen,104)

Given the current cultural temperature of individualism, racism and power politics, this is especially relevant. Yet consider how this all began. First century church goers were unlikely to succeed together, given the nature of their diverse cultural backgrounds. The followers of Jesus crossed all kinds of boundaries bordering Jerusalem and Palestine. Considering this early movement had extreme divisions between Jews and the Gentile and Greek and Roman world, it is nothing short of remarkable the Church even got off the ground. One of the most pressing divisive issues was happening in the church at Antioch, with the collision of Elder Jewish statesmen with new followers of “the way” over the issue of circumcision, Peter and Paul were left to cast the aligning arguments to sort out this division by declaring the unifying reality of the message of Jesus was for all people, not just the Jews. This very issue ignited the way for the intended purpose of the church to spread the word throughout the diverse world. The unity factor was and still is, Jesus Christ. From that moment onward, churches were established throughout the diverse cultures and held together by unity of the faith. A pivotal moment happened when, unexpectedly, Emperor Constantine made the decision

to become a Christian. Perhaps, for the first time, the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus became available to the politically powerful and fueled the spread of the Good News.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Within this letter to the church in Ephesus are some theological underpinnings that call for a unified spirit where once division was prevalent. Heil writes, a major concern of Paul in Ephesians is to assure the implied audience, characterized as “you” who came to believe (1.13) after “we,” Paul and all those who first hoped in the Christ (1.12), came to believe, that they are nevertheless *united* to and incorporated within those who first believed as part of the *cosmic unity* that is a major theme of the Letter.”(8)

Contextually, Paul is making a case for reaching beyond the bounds of the Israelites to offer the Gospel to all, including the Gentiles. Paul writes, “There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.” (Eph. 4.4-6 NRSV). The unifying word, “one” is repeated seven times in this passage alone, signifying the ultimate call for collective belonging rather than solo endeavoring. Paul’s understanding of Kingdom is being brought into a clear focus throughout his writings. For example, he declares believers are no longer to see themselves as Greek or Jew, male or female, slave or free, circumcised or uncircumcised – but one in Christ. (Gal. 3.27-28). Christians’ ability to trust their lives and their endeavors to the Lordship of Christ establishes the unifying, connective “tissue” to the Kingdom mission. Under the Lordship of Christ, believers no longer differentiate themselves in terms of isolation. Rather, they proclaim a unity to each other, for each other, by each other. Reuben Job cites one of Wesley’s sermons where he states,

“Whosoever thou art, whose heart is herein as my heart, give me thine hand!
Come and let us magnify the Lord together, and labour to promote his kingdom
upon the earth! Let us join hearts and hands in this blessed work, in striving to
bring glory to God in the highest, by establishing peace and good will among
[people], to the uttermost of our power!” (qtd. In Job 25, inclusive language
mine)

Paul called for unity in the diverse cultural environment of Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the most dominating and advanced cities, second to Rome, and had become one of the most prominent seaports in the region. The diversity of its populace should not go unnoticed. Paul is positioning himself at a highly strategic place in Ephesus, undoubtedly hoping the influence of the Gospel would be carried far and wide from its impressive seaport. Converting travelers from all over the world would by mere inevitability, cause the spread of the Good News to foreign soil. He is certainly not without challenge. He faces the increasing tension between Jew and Gentile; Jews, who, following the Mosaic Law, called for the formal circumcision of all who wish to come into fellowship. (See Eph. 2.11-13). Acts records his confrontation with Demetrius and the rioting worshippers of Artemis. (Acts 19.23-41). Diverse in culture and religion in Ephesus, Paul is faced with seemingly impossible odds.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4, “There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of it all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4.4-6). This repetitive “one” would draw us easily into understanding and calling that we are to be the “same”, drawn together by the singular focus of one calling, faith, baptism and Lord. Yet what,

exactly, is “oneness”? This concept has a great connotation from the outside, but it can also be very ambiguous from within. Paul’s letter here points to the values of “oneness” but a oneness that has definition and specificity. Ward goes on to state that:

Oneness here, whether of the body, the spirit or God, does not mean homogeneity. In fact, the very repetition of “one” elides different understandings of oneness. The oneness of hope names the consensus of Christian conviction in the Christ event, as does the oneness of faith. It is the single, agreed and experienced orientation of those who have been called. The oneness of baptism names that inaugural liturgical event whereby each person is initiated into being a member of the church; the repetition of the same sacramental act. (78)

The Gospel According to John 17:20-23

John’s Gospel confronts the reader as this particular chapter recounts Jesus’ prayer to God for the gift of oneness; one with God, one people infused with the like-mindedness of Christ. In fact, the chapter reiterates this in verse 21, then again in 22-23. Jesus prays, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” And again, “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may **be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one.**” (NRSV Emphasis mine) Indeed, the prayer reflects the desire of Jesus to connect believers. Scot McKnight states, “These texts show the integral connection between the mission of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the disciples’ mission to the world.” (“Gentiles” 264). Several things are most apparent from this concept. First, the connectedness believers are to have is not simply to each other. It is the connection between Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father that is the

defining element in enabling a connection to one another. The Christian walk of faith, though, is even more difficult when one considers the connection Christians have with each other and the world around them. The “set apart” nature of the faith is no easy existence in the wake of the temptations of the world. A.W. Tozer writes, “In sharp contrast to this is our life in the Spirit. There we enjoy another kind of life – we are children of God; we possess heavenly status and enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ.” (110).

Secondly, while believers are all individually gifted and graced, individualism is not lifted here. Rather, Jesus is praying that all believers would be one. The conjoining of all Christians would create what is necessary for a missional success. This is a daunting and difficult concept to embrace. Believers’ individuality comprising varying backgrounds, education, upbringing, and social norms all create a pool of differences that diversify us but can bring strength to the collective. As Cousar states,

On the one hand, for Paul the body symbolizes the unity of the community (“we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12.13). But on the other hand, the body illustrates the community’s diversity (“the body does not consist of one member but of many” [12.13]). In case readers have not yet grasped the point, Paul concludes with a pointed application: ‘Now you are the Body of Christ and individual members of it’(12.27). (143)

Believers should embrace their differences and equally, retain the intimate understanding that they are indeed a unique creation made for a purpose that no one else can imitate. Lastly, the connectivity Jesus prays for is not for the purpose of connectivity

itself. Rather it is for a higher purpose, that the world may know that God has sent Jesus Christ and have loved them and Jesus Christ equally. The authority of Christ is hereby proclaimed; yet, the love of God is lifted to include both the Son and the world. With Jesus as the head and the world in harmonious union, the purpose of the spread of the Gospel is both natural and intentional.

Obstacles to Collaboration in Ministry

The Church is united under the celebratory sacrament of Holy Baptism. One would think this would be the sufficient grace by which believers would automatically and with great joy supply one another with encouragement, leadership and fellowship. Yet, as if believers were to consider themselves as an orchestra, the current state of performance would cause any listener to cover their ears. The sound is anything but harmonious. The comparison here may be harsh, but assuredly it doesn't fall far from reality. The UMC is a largely dis-jointed, competitive, insecure church who, while striving for Christian perfection, has developed divisive habits set on self rather than Kingdom. Paul Glen describes effective collaboration as he states,

Clearly, we all want every collaborative effort to be one of those ideal experiences, but we get the disasters much more often. This isn't too surprising, really. Everything has to go right to make a collaboration work well, but only one or two things need to go wrong to undermine that cooperative ecstasy.

Collaboration is a fragile thing, difficult to create, and easy to break. (24)

Since the Church is made of individuals, it is essential to understand people create the obstacles. Sofield and Juliano write, "Movement toward a more shared style of leadership necessitates change on the part of the people involved. While the purpose of ministry

remains the same – the mission of Christ – the method for accomplishing this task today calls forth attitudes, behaviors, and skills different from those needed in the past”(25).

With people’s involvement come the multifaceted reality of sinful lives, full of issues surrounding the aspects of everyday life: work, family, relationships, ego, finances, ability, failure, confidences and lack thereof, climbing into the future, cultural “norms”, discipline, health and fitness, pleasure and entertainment, education and self-improvement, and belief systems. A quick consideration of just those aspects show how complex believers lives are already. Each Christian brings all these elements to the table of collaboration with the greatest of hopes attached. How can the church possibly navigate through the mire of sociological influences to land upon the rock of the mission of Jesus Christ? Rather than a stumbling block, this great diversity is exactly how God designed humans to be and it is exactly his intentional design. Manning writes,

Despite the smear of sin across the face of everything we know, work is still the creative collaboration with God it was designed to be. The work of our hands is a holy business, whether we produce a new World Trade Center, the Sunday liturgy, or spaghetti for supper. When we produce something we can honestly call good, we return to the drawing board of Genesis. (45).

God created humans, and all people, *collectively*, form a tangled tapestry. Dependence is not upon simply one’s individual skill sets, but acknowledging that God’s design, God’s purposes, strength and guidance, are all available – actually *essential*, to achieve all that is possible collaboratively.

There are issues that require addressing and strategically overcoming. One primal and essential force to this dilemma falls squarely on how a group is lead. The leader must

possess strong and faithful qualities, understanding the many differences people have and recognizing how these differences might be unified for the common good of the mission. The common issues that cloud pastors' abilities to collaborate are vast. This paper will focus on four common attitudes and four resulting behaviors: attitudes of *competitiveness, parochialism, arrogance and burnout*. Behaviors include: *hostility, inability or unwillingness to deal with conflict and/or loss, a sense of learned helplessness, and a failure to share faith* (Sofield & Juliano 26).

Competitiveness

Today's world is very competitive. From the earliest of a person's maturation, he or she learns to gain advantage and victory. We strive for self. To be sure, this is not entirely bad. Competition can foster new growth within individuals and unleash an exploration of each person's creativity. Yet, like any good gift given by God, we can easily twist what was meant for good and make it into a destructive means. As Sofield and Juliano write, "However, some people develop a destructive competitiveness that blinds them to the gifts of others or interferes with their freedom to unite their gifts with others in ministry"(26). It is of great concern that often this quality is developed in early adolescence while beginning the arduous and often painful journey of "fitting in" and "belonging." This can be a destructive age where anyone who is different from the collective is pounced upon with ridicule, most likely from the need to elevate the self. Sofield and Juliano continue to point out, "It is within the family system that most of the attitudes regarding cooperation, collaboration and competition are developed." (26-27) If one has ever observed families where multiple children reside, it would be hard to not to see how these skill sets are either healthily developed or abused. Interpersonal

relationships within the family structure are key: the mother-daughter dynamic, the father-son relationship. These are either nurtured appropriately or as in many modern-day family dynamics, neglected due to excessive financial demands and dual-income households often produce. Children want to be noticed, loved and often thought of as the “favorite” among their siblings. Each family will inevitably face these challenging attitudes. All of these dynamics can foster the competitive nature which then appears in adulthood as either an attribute or a hindrance.

Dr. Murray Bowen has been considered a pioneer in developing a family systems theory that offers incredible insights toward our effectiveness in collaborative effort. Developed in the 1950's and 60's, this offers two important reasons for the theory. Kerr and Bowen writes, “The first is that family theory defined the and important new set of variables that influence the physical diseases, emotional illnesses, and social acting-out problems. The second is that the theory demonstrated that the interrelationship of these newly defined variables could be understood with *systems* thinking”(8).

With the formative behaviors developed in early childhood and adolescence, people often develop a sense of unhealthy competitiveness when trying to develop their self-esteem. In a world that taunts, there is pressure to be first, to have “the look,” to achieve high standards, to be recognized and a myriad of other social “norms.” These competitive attitudes can become extremely detrimental to Christian community. The danger of self-esteem is that it sometimes can be tied to success itself, rather than the effort to succeed. If and when this occurs, the impediment is obvious and it is dangerous. When one is set on the objective of personal success over all else, they will often attempt to succeed by pulling others down. Sofield and Juliano recalled a story they heard of an

egalitarian society where certain people were identified as knockers. Any person who began to excel and stand out was immediately “knocked” down. They go on to say,

“Ministers whose self-esteem is based upon the norm of perfection may become knockers, unconsciously rationalizing their behavior by thinking, ‘If I can’t be perfect, at least I am better than so-and-so’”(27-28).

Bishop Reuben Job writes, “The ministry of all Christians as a concept is more acceptable today and yet its achievement is often elusive. Clergy and laity often see this concept as an issue of power. When they do, the struggle for supremacy or power renders ministry ineffective and is usually destructive to all involved”(178-179).

Individual competitiveness can be destructive toward any collaborative efforts and many times competitiveness can be destructive in a corporate fashion when congregations as a whole compete. When the individual members’ self-esteem issues compound, it can be unknowingly projected upon the organization’s abilities and attributes, advancing an attitude of competitiveness, comparison, and adversarial attitudes towards other congregations. Each congregation carries uniqueness, no doubt. Suddenly, these traits can spark a rivalry toward the uniqueness of another congregation. When a congregation begins to compare itself with others, a sense of drive for superiority can arise. Almost unwittingly, one congregation can begin to see itself as the “better-than” congregation, leading to attitudes of condescension and arrogance (Sofield and Juliano 28). Factor in the varying ministry offerings of any particular church, such as children’s ministry or homeless ministry, and one can easily slip into a mode of reckless comparison and create a myriad of tensions among differing congregations. All of these factors can contribute to an untenable reality toward attempting collaboration.

Parochialism

Sofield and Juliano define parochialism as “characterized by narrowness of thinking”(28). In other words, when clergy takes concern only for their own congregation, apathy towards other groups and congregations can become dominant. Language surrounding this might include excessive talk about “my church,” inevitably creating an inward-focused emphasis verses the emphasis of reaching out to others for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a narrow vision at best and a direct affront to effective evangelism at worse. This flies in the face of the ultimate goal of all of Christianity: Spreading the Good News! God has tasked His Church with building up others. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, “All things are lawful, but not all thing build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other” (1 Cor. 10.23-24). Yet, this narrowing of God’s vision can create incredible dissonance among that which God obviously intended for harmony.

Perhaps one of the most destructive results of parochialism is the attitude causing a congregation to focus inward and strive to maintain the “status quo.” This seems to be a significant issue among United Methodists for a variety of reasons. Congregations that were once formed in locations where new neighborhoods were being developed, eventually deal with those neighborhoods ethnically changing. For example, a church established by a prevailing neighborhood of middle class, white American households, may find themselves 50 years later with a neighborhood of immigrant Hispanic/Latino occupants. Should the mission of the church remain focused on middle class white Americans, (status quo) the congregation could find itself on the doorstep of extinction. Many may be facing this reality right now. A congregation that is unwilling or unable to

recognize the opportunity to reach a diverse culture of individuals in favor of trying to “maintain” is most likely a church on Hospice Care; awaiting a slow death. Where the Church is ideally life-giving, this inward focused, parochial vision can be toxic for its members.

Arrogance

Not having the humble heart in ministry is one of the deadliest hindrances to effective collaboration. The self-focused individual will undoubtedly look at ministry as that which will serve only his/her “bottom line.” Questions as to whether or not to involve other congregations center around such narcissistic reflections as, “how will this make me look good, how will this benefit my church so to afford me a better reputation?” Rick Warren’s iconic book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, opens with some of the best words the church could hear, “It’s not about you.”(17) Indeed, it is all about God, God’s Kingdom, and God’s call for the church to fulfill the Great Commission. There is no room for the arrogant heart in the Kingdom. Yet some leaders in the church can be the worst at surrendering this mindset and allowing humility to win the day. Abusive power can be the Devil’s greatest tool. Graves and Addington identify the source of this writing, “The path to abusive power is traceable. It begins simply in our need for appreciation. From there the path winds upward to self esteem, which – when it takes itself too seriously – moves toward arrogance. Arrogance of disparages others and leads to abusive power” (18). Keller goes on to identify these issues of power as idolatry. He states, “More than any other idols, personal success and achievement lead to a sense that we ourselves are god, that our security and value rest in our own wisdom, strength and

performance. To be the very best at what you do, and to be at the top of the heap, means no one is like you. You are supreme” (75).

The task is complex beyond measure. Markham utilizes a term, “spiritlinking” as a means to understand the vast differences and complexities surrounding such an ideological task. He writes: “Spiritlinking is directed toward networking, community forming and coalition building across chasms of ideological differences. It is a daring, disruptive, counter-cultural and revolutionary activity that flies in the face of popular trends toward individualism, separatism and organizational self-sufficiency and autonomy – all subtle resistances to the process of transformation” (4).

In the United Methodist Church, the system of itinerancy may very well be a culprit to fostering a lack of humility. A pastor is appointed by the Bishop, along with the assistance of the Bishop’s cabinet. A pastor who is eligible for appointment is thereby subject to go where they are sent. As the 2016 Book of Discipline states, “The itinerant system is the accepted method of The United Methodist Church by which ordained elders, provisional elders, and associate members are appointed by the bishop to fields of labor. All ordained elders, provisional elders, and associate members shall accept and abide by these appointments” (Par. 338, p. 272). For many persons under such authority, the question almost instantly becomes, “What criteria promotes my being asked to serve in a certain location?” In other words, there are some appointments within the Annual Conference that just are more preferred. Either the salary arrangement is distinctively higher, or the parsonage is larger. In some cases, there are very special “perks” for certain congregations. For example, there happened to be a prominent car dealer from the area who was a long standing member of a church. They could offer a new car at much lower

costs. Another friend of mine was appointed to a congregation where the senior pastor was given a free membership to a private local country club. It doesn't take much understanding to see, as in secular corporate venues, the reward system roosts. In corporate settings, the young office worker that works hard, is conscientious, a team player, and through research and development integrates a money saving system of some kind that allows the company to raise profit margins will be thought of with high regards, and often promoted to higher positions with higher salaries. Nothing surprising here. Yet often in the Church there is similar accountability. The pastor whose church gains more members, pays its apportionments dollars, and excels in missions and outreach projects is likely to be given a larger congregation with staff and any number of individualized "perks." In other words, the very system utilized to fill our pulpits could easily be seen to foster individualism, self-aggrandizement, and other behaviors reflective of the human tendency for arrogance.

Burnout

Clergy burnout is a reality brought on by the sheer scope of what we are most often faced with in any given day. Compiled grieving of congregants, stresses on staff and volunteers, Budget declines, cost increases, program design and implementation, counseling, Bible Study preparation and teaching, weekly sermon preparation and execution, visitation of the shut-ins, hospital visits and performing funerals, weddings and baptisms, etc.—these are not even exhausting the job description of what a pastor typically handles. It should not bring about any surprise that many clergy are either quickly approaching or already experiencing a sense of burnout. Turton claims that clergy burnout is most often due to implications of the role of clergy and obvious stresses

that accompany this role. Often the role of clergy is ambiguous which leads to differing levels of conflict. Expectations become clouded. He states, "Role ambiguity is defined as the degree to which clear information is lacking regarding method is for fulfilling known roles as well as consequences of role performance"(37). When congregants see the role of the clergyperson in differing ways than the clergyperson themselves, obviously stress is the outcome.

The role of the clergy is no doubt vitally important. There is a sense of divine appointment and calling. Through ordination and a sense of credentialing, this accompanies an aspect of real authority. Turton states,

The implications...suggest that because of their ordination clergy are special, set aside, holy, other-worldly people...that clergy should look to God and the Holy Spirit for care and support and that they are expected to give help, rather than receive it. They are not expected to suffer the same types of problems as those in their congregation, neither are they expected to experience breakdown or burnout" (35).

Burnout undoubtedly can be a great hindrance toward any sort of proactive collaboration in the ministry setting. As burnout takes hold, the clergy person is more likely to have absolute ambivalence toward trying to aid or assist another parish or another outreach ministry. The hearts of those who are "burned out" are tired, weary and worn and are in search of healing and rest. Collaboration is most likely the furthest idea from their minds. While there are any number of ways and practices that can assist clergy from falling victim to burnout, the scope of this study is not engaged here. It is nevertheless a formidable deterrent toward the collaboration objective. In whatever forms these

obstacles arise, they are indeed great hindrances to fulfilling the Kingdom calling that collaboration requires.

Systems Theory

The prospect of engaging more readily in a collaboration for ministry by its very nature requires a look at more than just the individual. There are many parts at work in the church, all of which can inform the work of collaboration. Like most of life, in the church multiple aspects are at work during any given moment. Reality is sometimes conjoined with our perception of that reality, often creating competing understandings. People, places, circumstance and occurrences of any number of factors can hinder the pure understanding of our current reality. Therefore, collaboration will be subject to an endless variety of variables influencing our ability to accomplish Kingdom goals. Regina Hendrickson defines systems theory as “a way of seeing the whole, how the parts mutually influence one another, how the circle of influence becomes patterned, and how the pattern is maintained by the arrangement of functioning parts” (27). More specifically, Steinke writes, “System Theory is a way of conceptualizing reality. It organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point. System thinking considers the interrelatedness of the parts. Instead of seeing isolated, unrelated parts, we look at the whole” (3).

A longtime axiom of those who are proponents of systems thinking is, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” This is the conceptual centerpiece to systems theory. It is most relevant toward discovering the issues and hindrances surrounding collaborative ministry efforts. For the sake of clarity, this paper restricts to look at the following issues as they might correlate to collaboration:

1. Anxiety
2. Boundaries
3. Change
4. Emotional Factors

Anxiety

Bowman and Kerr define anxiety as, “the response of an organism to a threat, real or imagined. It is assumed to be a process that, in some form, is present in all living things” (112). This complex emotional state is unfortunately not rare in America. Zhang, Ross and Davidson claim, “Anxiety disorders are the most common and debilitating mental health disorders in the United States and social anxiety disorder (SAD) has the highest lifetime prevalence rate of 13.3% in the National Comorbidity Survey” (101).

The outlook is not necessarily promising. A recent 2015 study in the National Institutes of Health reveals, “Adult mental disorder rates are substantial, with 18% experiencing anxiety disorder and 9.8% major depressive, dysthymic, and bipolar disorder in the past year” (NIH/NIMH 2015). This spans far and wide across our culture from those under the age of 30 to a large number of aging Americans (70+ years old). Sadly, that percentile is only growing. Anxiety is one of many responses when dealing with systems. This response is very human-like. Looking at the saga that unfolded in the Garden of Eden, we see a clear “system” of origin. God created Adam and Eve and they lived in the garden, rife with vegetation, food, water and many forms of flora and fauna. The system that God created gave them dominion over the animals and the entire garden...except for one tree. So, Adam and Eve had everything they needed to live in unity with God: They had love and companionship—both with God and each other,

warmth, safety & security, food and water. Then they meet the serpent. He created some anxiety as he spoke with Eve, “Did God say, ‘you shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen.3.1a-5)

This opens a question, “how is it they (Adam and Eve) broke covenant (the “system”) so easily? They had everything they needed and yet, it was not enough!” Eve became anxious over the prospect there was MORE and she was being deprived of it. The temptation was too great. Anxiety multiplied following the fateful bite of the forbidden fruit when it records, “then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”(Gen. 3.7a; 8b)

Anxiety can be the ruin of any number of relationships within a known system. It can and often does create alarms that sound off in people’s minds. They can be real or imagined and simply create upset. At times, a person’s anxieties can serve him or her well when the danger of harm may seem hidden or below the surface of a relationship and are actually quite real and relevant. An example might be when a person becomes anxious over attitudes toward someone in leadership and discovers there had been an “underground” defiance developing among staff against a decision or some other aspect of the ministry setting. Anxiety might save a person from going through a trial of sabotage or a coup. And, likewise, anxiety might prove false and contribute to a sense of

paranoia. An anxious presence has effects, as Steinke writes: Anxiety provokes change. It prods and pushes us toward innovation or transformation. If, however, it reaches a certain intensity, it prevents the very change it provokes. What is stimulus becomes restraint. We “lose our head” or “cool,” as we say, essentially our awareness and composure; we are too reactive to be responsive (16).

The corporate effect on this type of anxiety should not be discounted. “Change, trauma, or a failure in function in a family (or a congregation) affects every member of the family - and cannot be caused by one family member alone” (Bagby, 515). One of the most widely-used resources in understanding church dynamics is from Bowen’s Family Systems Theory. Bowen was a research psychiatrist (1913-1990) whose studies developed the concept of the “differentiation of self,” describing different levels of maturation in relationships. Bowen first began to be interested in this concept after serving in the US Army during World War II and began treating soldiers experiencing varying levels of trauma in battle. He began with his training in Freudian psychoanalysis but soon departed from this when he understood that an individual’s difficulties often went beyond what lies beneath the human psyche. Rather, he discovered, individual anxieties were more readily embedded in each individual’s family of origin. (Brown 3) In the late 1950’s, Bowen began researching entire families at the US National Institute of Mental Health and discovered noticeable patterns of anxieties within family units. These patterns were identifiable in other species as well, especially when herds or packs were facing threatening environments. In his dissertation on Bowen’s Family Systems Theory, Gottwald writes,

Bowen Theory is grounded in the study of nature and biology. More specifically it has its origins in the observation of the social systems of ants and rats. Its aim is that of all the empirical sciences, namely rational thought. It seeks objective knowledge of the human emotional system, and it seeks the freedom or autonomy that such knowledge affords a person (81).

Bowen's theory is not used for identifying mental illnesses as much as distinguishing the challenges of being human within the common bonds of relationships we all encounter. This essentially points us to the bigger picture of a systemic function rather than isolating the behavior pattern of a single individual. It conjures the very real understanding that we must learn how to view the world through the lens of each family member rather than by our narrow, subjective experience (Brown 5).

The Church is more than a building, it is a complex system of emotional human beings. Understanding how this "family" system functions is key toward understanding the active dynamics of collaboration in ministry. Bowen & Kerr ground-breaking book published in 1988, outlines the cause and effect issues of individuals within the core unit family.

"In Bowen family systems theory, the nuclear family, rather than the individual, is the emotional unit. This concept changes the way one thinks about everything relational, and perhaps the way one thinks about everything!"(Gilbert 5)

Gilbert writes, "Whatever affects one affects each one in the system. That is, anxiety moves easily from person to person in the group"(6). Steinke writes, "In periods of intense anxiety, what is most needed is what is most unavailable—the capacity to be imaginative. Again, this is as true in the church family as in all relationship systems"

(21). This is precisely what can happen when attempting a collaboration with other groups or churches. The anxiety-quotient is relevant and real; serving not to promote the greater vision of a collective effort through collaboration, but to deter the effort at its very center. As Steinke goes on to describe, “Anxiety tests the supreme values of faith and love. It questions our very existence and purpose. Consequently we may fail to notice how profoundly anxiety is affecting us, either ignoring its corrupting influence or sweeping it aside too easily” (28).

Boundaries

Everyone has a dual need to be both independent and interdependent. That is to say, people are both individuals with a need to express originality, creativeness and uniqueness, but we also need the sense of closeness with others. Acceptance and belonging are just as needed to the human experience as individuality. As Steinke writes, “To be separate and to be close are basic needs. One is personal, the other relational. A major task of our life is to be able to shift from one to the other with some degree of balance between the two”(31).

Oddly, these two innate needs, separateness and closeness, are antithetical. They are polar opposites yet together serve the psyche in varying ways. If a person is trying desperately to be unique and separate, he or she tends to disengage from group dynamics. The individual may become anxious and develop a thinking pattern that says, “I can only count on me.” Worse yet, people can often think, “I am absolutely right and everyone is wrong” or “Nobody understands”. This mindset serves as a formidable enemy of any hope for collaboration. But developing a need for closeness to others has its pitfalls as well. People develop a thinking pattern that might emulate, “I can’t exist without you” or

“I’ll give you whatever you want for my own peace of mind” (Steinke, 35). Suddenly, people cannot tolerate differing ideas, ideals, values or understandings. People believe acting and being the same is what will bring them to a closer relationship. However, neither of these extremes will survive on its own. It fails because it tries to exclude the other only to find the need for closeness and separateness makes the whole. Somehow, our minds will not tolerate the exclusion of either.

Research shows that including those with differing ideas is the foundation for discovery and new insights. For example one study found amazing results when collaborating with international teams:

While the homogeneous teams generally had more harmonious discussions, they generated fewer discoveries. The heterogeneous teams, by contrast, were far more contentious. Team members thought they spent an excessive amount of time explaining obvious points to other team members. In the process, however, they discovered that these points were not so obvious after all. Team members gained a greater awareness of their underlying assumptions and the need to clarify their conceptualizations, ultimately leading to better research products and greater theoretical clarity. (*International Collaborations in Behavioral and Social Sciences Research: Report of a Workshop, 4-5*)

Expanding our boundaries of comfort toward accepting other viewpoints is a formula for incredible discovery. Systems become more efficient. Ideas are generated. Outcomes change and often for the better.

Change

Not many people enjoy change. This tends to be somewhat a social norm. Undoubtedly,

it can be argued that the lack of change in our systems leads people to at best stagnation and at worst, decline and systemic unsustainability. Yet it remains a constant in my psyche. While change as it effects individuals is daunting enough, systemic change can be a huge challenge. Some would classify it as “complex, grand or even wicked” (Tulder and Keen 315). This type of change however does not just happen: it requires change on every level, especially in the leadership. To believe that change is a simple alteration in organizational function is shallow at best. Changing is difficult and it is also very costly. The leader first has to accept the loss of the “old ways” and familiarity then somehow relay to the rest of the team the logic and upside of how the change will benefit the mission. Dan Heath tells it well:

For some reason, when we go to work, we pretend **change** is just a matter of teaching people something new. It's as if organizational leaders really think, "Once I tell my staff **why** we should go in a new direction, they'll **change**." That's very naïve. The same force that is going to make a diet **hard** is going to make organizational **change hard**. When you share a new direction with your team, the people in the room may appreciate your logic for **change**. They may agree with you intellectually. And yet there is a more emotional side of them that has grown comfortable with the old way of doing things. They've been practicing routine A for years. They are very good at routine A. Now, you're trying to get them going to be easy the next day (“Changing When Change is Hard, emphasis mine).

This is ominous and difficult work. Change creates a host of issues on every level. Yet, as one person said, “change is inevitable.” But when applied to mission and ministry, change can be an exciting and fruitful endeavor. Instead of ministry being

consigned to the individual parish, collaborative ministry will require a great change in thinking.

Emotional Factors

Being that the system is made up of the individual, it would be hard to avoid the discussion of human emotion. The emotional aspects of any individual are incredibly vast and numerous and are highly pertinent when considering systems theory. Bowman and Kerr relegate the emotional system into two additional systemic parts, the feeling system and the intellectual system (30). In this, they also make a strong point that one must not overlook, that of confusing the terminology of “emotion” and “feeling”. While it is quite common to interchangeably apply these terms as synonymous, it is important to make this distinction lest the ability is lost to distinguish humanity from other lower life forms. One example is to watch a colony of ants. They swarm together when an intruder to the colony invades. Yet they are not doing so from a feeling of loyalty, they just act. This is not to say all lower life forms don’t have feelings, but one must draw the distinction and identify the term “emotional” to correlate with a higher life form. The feeling system has enormous influence upon our social interaction and in many cases, reigns supreme even over more cognitive influences. How people “feel” about something can create impetus to do or not do, go or not go, produce or not produce. This is somewhat different with emotions. Emotions, according to Bowman and Kerr, are not felt. Instead, they write that “the influence of emotions must be inferred by observing what people and other organisms do and do not do in a given situation (31). They further identify that feelings are often the intellectual interpretation of the emotional system. Then, humanity teeters between the feeling of the matter coupled with some sort of intellectual evaluation. This

is not so with all forms of life and makes humans quite unique in the scope of life. This is especially important to recognize as persons ponders its relevance upon the effective nature of collaboration. The complexity of the individual to observe a circumstance and intellectually evaluate its virtue with most likely be met with a combination of the emotional system, feeling and cognitive. As people collaborate, having a sense of this can create environments where productivity can thrive or be squelched. Systems theory teaches the importance of understanding the individual as they react to the larger scope of the intended goal.

Research Design Literature

This project was designed with two active components utilizing elements of quantitative research in the form of a survey, followed by qualitative research in the form of personal interviews. The survey was designed by the researcher and utilized Likert Scale five-point question formats. There were questions that enabled the survey participant to write additional comments for their answers in order to gain as much clarity as possible. Each person was given the survey via electronic format enabling them to participate at their leisure. The survey was designed so each participant could answer questions and leave the questionnaire and come back later to complete it as their schedules necessitated. I did place a time limit, however, on the length of time to complete the survey and return it to me.

The personal interviews were set up in accordance with Tim Sensing's book, "Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses." The personal interview questions were designed by the researcher for the purposes of personal observation and open-ended questioning. (Sensing, Chapter 4) The

interviews were set at the convenient time for the interviewee and were conducted on camera to ensure all behavioral nuances could be observed and documented. Each interview was recorded onto a SIM Card in the camera. Following each session, it was handed to a designated research team member to confidentially transcribe and document each interview for later analysis. The participant was instructed to feel free to elaborate on any of the issues or questions raised, enabling further clarity, observing body language and other behavioral nuances.

Summary of Literature

The Book of Acts records the extraordinary account of the first Christian Church. Throughout its contents, repeatedly the concept of shared resources was mentioned. The people learned that having things in common enabled ministry of sharing the Gospel account with others. This was the vision of The Kingdom. Nowhere does there appear to be any regard for competitiveness, or selfish prosperity. The New Testament church was not, from its origin, compiled to draw attention to itself. It was designed to work in collaboration with people of many different tribes, nations and races for the purpose of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Modernity has created denominations, sectarian divisions, worship style wars and churches that emphasize a varying number of theological ideals over and against others. We are rife with favorite ways to worship, ways we relate the Gospel to culture for today and how we understand Baptism and even marriage. The overarching results can't be denied. There has been a huge rise in numbers of people who are "done" with the institutional church. (See UM Insight April 2016) There are additional families who have

found other activities to occupy their Sunday mornings. Attendance in the local churches are dropping; some even dramatically. (Pew Research)

This points to strong evidence for need of a resurgence of first century church ideals. Collaboration is key toward creating community that understands and re-focuses upon sharing the love of Jesus Christ collectively. Utilizing all our strengths and skill along with our combined energies, enthusiasm and vitality, the Church can reclaim its purpose when individuals bridge what used to be the defining forces of preference and individualism and collaborate for the purpose the Church holds: offering the Good News and love of Jesus Christ to everyone.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

With the known fact of the United Methodist's Church's decline in membership and vitality, the essential nature of collaboration among our existing churches becomes pressing. The nature of this project was to evaluate the beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative ministry among church leaders within the geographic boundaries of Union County, NC. These churches, both United Methodist and other denominational affiliations, were chosen for evaluation following their involvement in the community collaborative outreach, the Union County Back To School Bash. This chapter will review the process by which to disseminate this goal.

The purpose of this project was to measure beliefs and attitudes of church leaders from Indian Trail, Stallings, Faith, Antioch, Mineral Springs, Wesley Chapel, Heath Memorial and Mill Grove United Methodist Churches, as well as Sardis Baptist Church, Rock Harbor Church and Common Heart Ministries following their participation in the collaborative ministry event, The Union County Back To School Bash.

Research Questions

The three research questions utilized in the project were designed to evaluate the changes in beliefs and attitudes toward collaboration among churches before and after a large community outreach event. The first question was designed to establish a base-line thinking of attitudes and beliefs prior to engaging in a collaborative event. Most of these leaders were either immune to the experience or to some level open to the experience. The initial question establishes this information. The second question was designed

primarily to understand how they felt after actively participating in the extensive planning and eventual participation in the collaborative event. The third question was designed to obtain input of the rationale of the noted changes in beliefs and attitudes following the Bash event.

Research Question #1

Prior to taking part in The Union County Back To School Bash event, what were the beliefs and attitudes of the leaders regarding collaborative ministry with persons from differing churches and denominations? To answer this question, the survey questions 3-5 establish an effective understanding of the background of the participants. The questions also go beyond the individual leaders and reach further into their perception of how their congregation or ministry setting participants might feel about collaboration in ministry. Additional questions (6-9) try to establish a degree of causality as to why collaboration may or may not have been taking place in their personal ministry. Questions surrounding leadership style and denominational influences (9, 13-20) were posed to establish outside factors as to why collaboration has or has not been occurring to this point.

Research Question #2

What dominating issues regarding collaborative ministry events and implementation influence positive collaboration experiences by churches?

To answer this question, participants were asked in the survey in questions 22-25 to show how they might follow through on either pursuing other ways to collaborate or to avoid further collaboration, based upon their experience serving with the Bash event. Having seen and experienced the Bash event, participants have formed perhaps different understandings, ideas, or ways to overcome fears and anxieties regarding the prospect of

collaborative efforts. These need to be evaluated and noted.

Research Question #3

What issues regarding collaborative ministry events and implementation create hindrances?

To answer this question, questions 22-25 were asked to give both theological (22-23) and practical evaluation (24) towards collaboration among varying churches. These questions allowed a better understanding of the variety of circumstantial and institutional practicalities surrounding individual churches and their ability to instigate and implement collaborative practices.

Ministry Context(s)

Stallings United Methodist Church was established in the year 1911, somewhere between May of that year and March of the following year. History records the church was established in the village of Stallingsville, NC. This was a very small community in that day. Over the last 106+ years, the village of Stallingsville became a township, Stallings, NC. The surrounding communities of Indian Trail, Wesley Chapel, and Hemby Bridge, NC have since been established. Stallings United Methodist Church began with a community of people who were largely agricultural. Farms in the area were plentiful. The people of this community knew how to collaborate. They were prone to helping one another bring in crops, borrowing various farming equipment, and a host of other ways they assisted one another to thrive. Stories are remembered of the many ways people gathered to share food and celebrate community events. This was most common to the agricultural community and an undeniable asset to forming Stallings United Methodist Church. The original sanctuary was built largely from the abilities of the members to

draw together and erect the house of worship. This is undoubtedly a factor to be considered institutionally foundational in the DNA of this congregation.

Like many townships, though, a growth spurt began as the larger city of Charlotte, NC to its north began to expand. Lower tax rates and less population were attractions for new people to settle into the area. This brought many new residents to the region. No longer was the community consisting of only farmers, but now also educated professionals. Charlotte, NC began to be a home to financial institutionalism, housing today some of the leading banking and financial institutions of the United States. This led to the expansion of the church as well. As any growth within the confines of a church will dictate, change had to happen. New buildings were erected. Somewhere in the new establishment, the idealism of collaboration was laid aside. Within the United Methodist denominational values, growth and financial viability became far more the focus. Yet, among its core leaders, there still remains a long-term memory of community and collaboration at its center. This is perhaps a significant reason Stallings UMC and many other churches in the area are so receptive to the idea of reaching out to the community in collaboration to assist a felt need, mainly poverty.

The current population of the Stallings, NC area and surrounding region consists of a new and quite significant change to the populace. The immigration of Hispanic, Asian, Burmese and Russian peoples has been abundant. This has not only changed the regions demographics, but also changed the work force. Within Stallings United Methodist Church, for example, several different congregations are housed. The Sunday morning service line-up consists of a Modern Worship service at 9:00am, a more traditional expression of worship at 11:00am, a Hispanic worship service at 11:00am in

the fellowship hall, a Burmese Christian Church service at 12:30pm in the sanctuary and a Slavic Worship service in the fellowship hall at 6:00pm. Many of these immigrants come to the area as skilled and unskilled laborers. Families are working, but the minimum wage is creating difficult financial strains upon these families. When a new school year begins and school supplies are needed, many families simply cannot afford to outfit their children with the necessary supplies Union County Schools ask parents to provide. This is the foundational purpose to hold a collaborative ministry event in our area. This is what propagated the idea for the Union County Back To School Bash, where close to 5,000 people come to receive supplies, free haircuts, new backpacks and a new pair of shoes.

Participants

This research on collaboration among churches undeniably points to the effectuality of the leadership along with their initiation and encouragement of congregants to participate. Each church involved with the Back to School Bash was lead by their ministers. These ministers are the participants of the study. Throughout the year, approximately 12-15 meetings, 1 hour to 1 ½ hours in length took place. These were for the purpose of establishing roles for each church and each area needed for the event. For this event, leadership was needed in the following areas:

- Finances & contributions from corporate sponsors
- Supply purchasing and donation collection.
- Church involvement and recruitment of volunteers.
- Coordinating with Samaritan's Feet for shoe sizes/supply of shoes.
- Website design.
- Registration of students, age, grade levels.
- Coordination with the Union County Schools to advertise to all students.
- Event set-up and cleanup.
- Food supplies, donations, purchasing and cooking.
- Training of all volunteers.

- Procurement of a suitable venue. Site set-up and design.
- Worship team for the volunteer Sunday morning worship.
- Recruitment of beauticians and hairstylists.
- Equipment needed for hair stylists.

Each of these areas were assigned to participating churches. Meetings were designed for all to help coordinate how these ministry areas could be successful.

Description of Participants

For the purposes of this project, the participants consisted of the following (Given with permission):

Table 3.1 List of Participants

Name	Gender	Title	approx. age
<u>Dan Moore</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Heath Memorial UMC</u>	<u>64</u>
<u>Paige Ann Miller</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Pastor, Faith UMC</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>Earl Bradshaw</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Mill Grove UMC</u>	<u>53</u>
<u>Greg Hamilton</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Indian Trail UMC</u>	<u>57</u>
<u>Greg Collins</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Antioch, Wesley Chapel UMC</u>	<u>58</u>
<u>Tim Carpenter</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Assoc. Pastor, Sardis Baptist Church</u>	<u>62</u>
<u>Ken Hucks</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Sardis Baptist Church</u>	<u>62</u>
<u>Keith Adams</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>President, Common Heart Ministries</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>Jim Parsons</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Indian Trail UMC</u>	<u>48</u>
<u>Tom Mabry</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Mineral Springs UMC</u>	<u>57</u>
<u>Gregg Forwerck</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Missions Chair, Stallings UMC</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>Robin Baron</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Lay Person, (Co-Chair)</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>Libby Cook</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Finance Chair, Stallings UMC</u>	<u>65</u>
<u>Thaddeus Fennig</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Pastor, Rock Harbor Church</u>	<u>43</u>

Each participant was ensured there would be complete confidentiality in their participation and their individual responses. A signed consent form was issued and signed before the survey was issued.

Ethical Considerations

Each individual received a survey from a password-protected computer via email to his or her personal email account. Responses were retrieved likewise and thereby remained confidential. Each participant was asked to meet at a set upon time and place for a personal, one on one interview, which was recorded and stored for confidentiality as well.

Instrumentation

Each participant was to take part in a two-part evaluation process. The first was a 25-question survey, sent and received electronically by private email. The second portion of the evaluation was a personal interview that was recorded by camera and by voice recording, for back-up purposes, which was also gathered and stored in a secure desk following each interview.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The reliability of the project data and the validity of the project findings were achieved by the highest possible degree within the confines and scope of this project. In order to achieve an acceptable degree of reliability, several factors were considered in forming the survey and interview questions. First, the survey was formulated, edited and reviewed by Dr. Tom Mabry and Dr. Thomas Tumblin to ensure the scope of information

trying to be received was adequate. Equally, a panel of peers was asked to review the questions to determine if they felt it could measure what its intentions held.

The researcher designed the survey and had expert reviews by the aforementioned sources. The survey was 25 questions in length to ensure focus and accuracy would not be lessened by length and bedlam. The survey utilized both qualitative and quantitative data questions related to beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative ministry both before and after experiencing the Bash collaborative event. The initial questions also allowed for some necessary demographic information to be collected. This survey was created and delivered by SoGoSurvey.com. These were sent electronically and returned electronically.

The researcher designed the interview questions to bring about a far more detailed response to the simple questions laid out within the confines of the survey tool. This enabled each participant to expound on answers and give a more well-rounded explanation and understanding of their responses. It also allowed for a freedom to disclose a variety of information the survey would not be able to supply. Issues surrounding beliefs and attitudes towards collaborative ministry were vital to the project. However, the interview questions were designed to enable the leaders to describe in vivid detail the qualitative data needed. Issues around individual leadership styles, perceived attitudes and beliefs of congregants towards collaboration and how individuals felt about how collaboration could possibly be advantageous to their own setting, were designed for the interviewer to record and receive greater detail.

Data Collection

Participants for this research were selected based upon several key factors. First, they were either a leader in the collaborative event, “Union County Back To School Bash” or a leader in their church which participated in the Bash event. These were primarily clergy serving a local parish. However, several participants were asked to be interviewed that were not clergy to get a broader scope of ideas and input.

Phase One

First, the researcher selected those who fit the above criteria. Primarily, these were the clergy who were serving local churches who participated in the Bash collaborative event. Some were also selected who had served as leaders in the event who were laity. These were contacted by phone to explain the scope of this research and invite them to participate. They were given every respect to deny participation as well. Phone calls were made and information was gathered. Since the individuals would receive a survey via email, the researcher asked them for the appropriate address they wished to correspond.

The survey was designed and stored with SoGo Survey, an online company. Once the survey was configured, I was prompted by SoGo to create an opening letter inviting the participant to fill out the survey. (See Appendix A) The survey was set up to be completed in one sitting, but the option was provided to create a way for each participant to return to the survey to complete it at a later date, should the need arise. Each survey, when completed, was stored on the site for later recall.

Phase Two

Once a participant had received the completed survey from a participant, a second call was made to set-up a time and location for the interview to take place. The researcher reminded them they would be recorded on camera, but the video was only for the researcher's usage and would not be reproduced for any other purpose than for this project.

A personal digital camera, a Canon 6D and a camera tripod was used to record each interview. Portable clip-on microphones, one for the camera and one to be placed on each person's lapel, were also utilized. This ensured the conversation would be appropriately heard. The location for each interviewed varied upon convenience and availability. Many of them were held in a private study, but several were held in the participant's own church and office area.

As the interview began, each participant was ensured the data collected and recorded was for the researcher's collection of information and that everything they said would be kept anonymous and confidential. The questions asked were merely a prompt to engage in deeper conversation. (See Appendix B)

Each interview was designed to last a maximum of 30 minutes. The participants were free to share any information they wished, even beyond the prompted question directed. As needed, this allowed the researcher ability to ask them to clarify a specific position, idea or statement they had made and ensure accuracy and clarity was achieved.

At the conclusion of the interview, additional time was offered with them over a meal, to engage them further on the issues they had discussed.

The SoGo Survey Website enabled the researcher to see how many invitations had gone out and how many responses had been completed. Each survey was printed out

and kept in a special folder. Since the researcher had recorded each interview, the camera's sim card was retrieved. The researcher had previously secured an assistant to help transcribe each recording in order to analyze them at a later date. She was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement form. She was given a special card reader that enabled her to watch the interviews and transcribe each answer as the participant disclosed. These were typed and collected for the purposes of this project.

Data Analysis

The project survey and interviews contained both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher utilized Likert-scale and open-ended questions, with suitable avenues for participants to embellish their responses. The data was collected for personal perusal and study according to type and the format needed to answer the research questions.

Using the information from the quantitative data of survey questions 1-3 provided a demographic of the population of participants. (See table 4.0.0) Question #4 was added to evaluate any pre-intervention data that might have influenced the individual's experience with collaboration. Questions 6-9, and 21 were posed to record any known obstacles directly correlated to the individual's congregation as it applies to attitudes and beliefs surrounding collaborative efforts. The denominational factors were of importance and questions 16-18 identified those factors which caused influence in participation of any collaborative events. Leadership qualities were measured in questions 13-15, 19 recording self-evaluative data as it correlates to likelihoods of participation. Lastly questions 22-25 inquired about participant's understandings and descriptive input on how their faith interfaced with efforts surrounding collaboration in ministry.

The qualitative data involved a videotaped interview with seven questions to help direct conversation and to supplement the survey questionnaire. These answers were more personal and revealed a deeper understanding of the issues. Question 1 asked the participant to expound on their experiences participating in collaborative ministry events. Questions 2, 4 and 5 evaluated possible obstacles to collaboration among churches. Questions 3, 6, and 7 allowed for the participant to expound on how collaboration might achieve greater goals for community engagement. Question 7 also asked the participant to evaluate how participating in the Union County Back to School Bash event effected (if any effect) their spiritual lives. Twelve interviews were given and their responses were translated to computer and placed in a word-document format. Each interviewee was catalogued by the letters INT#.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The United Methodist denomination holds within its polity the understanding of “connectionalism” whereas individual congregations do not exist on their own, but remain unified with a larger Church. However, individualism with United Methodist congregations may be a contributing factor to the denomination’s decline in membership and overall vitality. The purpose of this project was to measure the changes in beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative ministry with participating congregants of Stallings, Mineral Springs, Faith, Millgrove, and Indian Trail United Methodist Churches and Sardis Baptist church following their experience with the community mission project, “The Back To School Bash 2018.”

This chapter identifies the participants, with written permission, who agreed to contribute to the study along with their demographic makeup. This chapter provides quantitative data extracted from the Collaboration Survey and the coded data from the qualitative information resulting from the personal interviews conducted.

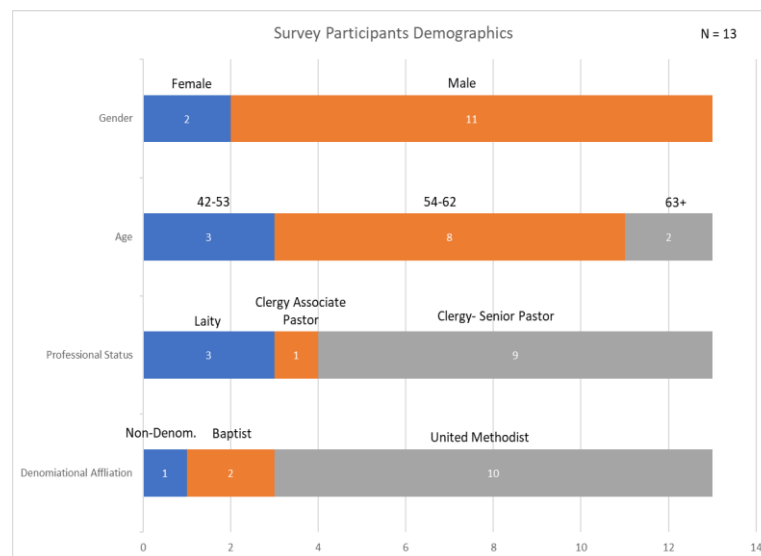
Participants

The survey invitation was sent out to 37 pastors in the Union County, NC area specifically to pastors and other leaders who had participated in the Union County Back To School Bash event. These were leaders of primarily United Methodist congregations, however there were several who were from varying denominational affiliations.

From that initial invitation, thirteen responded and agreed to take part in this project. Of these participants, nine were Clergy and four were laity. When asked how

long they have served in a local church, both Clergy and Laity, six responded 4-10 years, five responded 10 or more years, and two responded 1-2 years. The denominational background information showed ten were United Methodist and two listed themselves as Southern Baptist. One listed themselves as Non-Denominational. The participants agreed to take part in both aspects of the project, the Collaboration Survey and the personal interviews. Twelve participants were able to follow through with the interview process. These figures can be seen in Figure 4.0 below.

Figure 4.0



Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What were the beliefs and attitudes of the leaders concerning collaborative ministry prior to participating in the Union County Back to School Bash?

In the Collaboration in Ministry Survey, questions 3-6 were designed to gauge the participants background in participating in events that collaborated with other churches or organizations. The interview questions 1 -3 allowed participants to open up about their

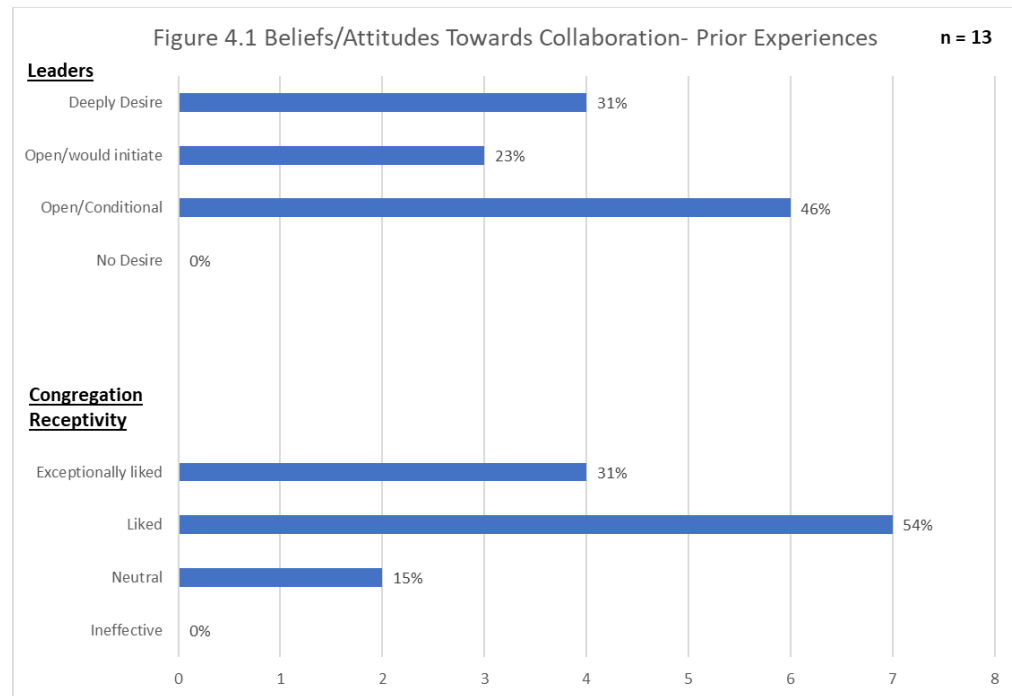
deep-seated beliefs and attitudes toward collaborative ministry prior to serving in the Union County Back to School Bash.

In the survey, twelve participants had participated previously in more than 3 collaboration events. The other participant had worked 1-2 events. Twelve of the participants had familiarity with the concept of collaborative efforts among churches more than three times. When asked question 4 in the survey to describe their experiences with those events I received a mixed review. Using the 5-point Likert Scale, six participants found collaborating exceptionally satisfying, while seven participants found the events enjoyable. None of the participants found themselves neutral, or had any negative response. The interviews were able to extract additional data. When asked to explain their experience with collaboration in ministry, six participants actually described doing a ministry event in their church or their corporate setting that would simply be considered an outreach event. One example was someone described doing a “hunger walk” with their corporate office workers as being a collaboration event. Others described having a bake sale to raise money for the local food-bank with the women of their church. When the researcher provided a definition for what I meant by collaboration as being working together with another organization/church for a common goal, planning and implementing tasks and teams, they quickly reduced their number of events to one or two. 54% had participated in 1-2 collaborative events prior to participating in the Union County Back to School Bash. The evidence of this discrepancy identified a need to clarify the difference between internal collaboration and external collaboration.

Several questions on the Collaboration Survey also uncovered factors surrounding their beliefs and attitudes towards collaboration prior to their participation in the Union

County Back to School Bash event. Survey question 5 asked if they had any concerns about doing a collaborative event. 39% said yes and 61% said no. Issues included perceived congregational attitudes toward collaboration (question 5), concerns of member migration to other churches (question 7), and event site neutrality (question 8).

Figure 4.1



When the survey asked participants about how they perceived their congregation felt about participating in collaborative events, several different answers were recorded. 23% said they thought their congregations were open to it, depending on the event and how it was structured. 46% they were open to it and might even initiate an event. 31% felt their congregations deeply desire collaborative events and wanted to be part of “Kingdom-type Thinking.” Three (23%) felt that their congregants would participate depending on what was being asked of them. The personal interview identified more clearly what these conditions were. These included primary concerns surrounding organization and leadership.

The personal interviews allowed for further explanation surrounding preliminary expectations, beliefs and attitudes. Interview question 2 identified several key issues participants identified. Interviewee 1(Int#1) identified a deep sense of anxiety surrounding the prospect of doing the collaborative event centering on the issue of competition with other churches. He said, “I am not concerned about helping other churches thrive, but I know several of my colleagues are. It’s the age-old competition issue.” There was an identified concern that members of their church might be exposed to other churches and find favor with them, resulting in people migrating to another church setting. This sentiment was not the prevalent concern of the collective group, yet this issue was a mild concern to three of the persons interviewed, or 25%. The identity of the concern varied in explanation. Int#2, for example, identified the concern from the standpoint of having only recently been appointed to his church. This was a newly appointed pastor who identified his concern as dealing with an insecurity of people migrating away due to the common difficulty surrounding grieving the loss of their former pastor. Exposing them to other churches might create atmospheres to more easily “entice them away. Int#4 also identified this issue as “having a competitive spirit and one that needed to be ‘brushed aside’ for the greater good of the community and the outcome of the mission.”

The largest concern regarding the pre-intervention beliefs and attitudes surrounded several issues derived from former collaboration experiences. Seven of the twelve participants (58%) voiced they were anxious and doubtful of the effectiveness of the event due to a lack of trusting other churches and their participants to follow through with their commitment. Int#7, for example, felt a great deal of skepticism toward other

groups committing and actually engaging their congregations to a level of excellence in the event. Int.#8 expressed fear surrounding this as they had been “burned” before. They had launched a collaborative event several years prior and the other churches failed to come through with their area of responsibility, leaving him “holding the bag” to ensure the event actually succeeded.

These concerns, while verbalized differently, were also linked to the concern of organization and leadership surrounding the event. Four of the twelve interviewed (33%) identified the cause of their anxiety was whether the leader had the ability to actually “pull it off” (Int.#4) Further explanation surrounded the quality of leadership being offered and the ability of the leader to effectively delegate responsibility. Three of the participants shared they had been “assigned” duties for an event that ill-matched their skill set. The ability of the leader to assess skills of team member and allow for them to be placed where they can make a positive impact was vehemently expressed as being highly important.

A correlation between how they perceived former collaborative events along with the concerns carried forward can be found in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Collaboration Prior to Bash Event						
Question	Yes %	No %				
6. I have some fears about collaboration with other churches.	39%	61%				
Question	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree %	Moderately Disagree %	Moderately Agree %	Strongly Agree %
7. I am concerned my congregants might leave my church after seeing other churches as we work together.	2.60	3.44	62%	8%	31%	0%
Question	Mean	SD	Disagree %	Agree %	Does not matter %	
8. It is very important the collaborative event is held at a "neutral" site - other than another church setting.	4.33	2.08	15%	46%	38%	

This appears to indicate the beliefs and attitudes about collaborative ministry are largely contingent upon leadership quality, organizational efficiency, and site neutrality.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What dominating issues regarding collaborative ministry events and implementation influence positive collaboration experiences by churches?

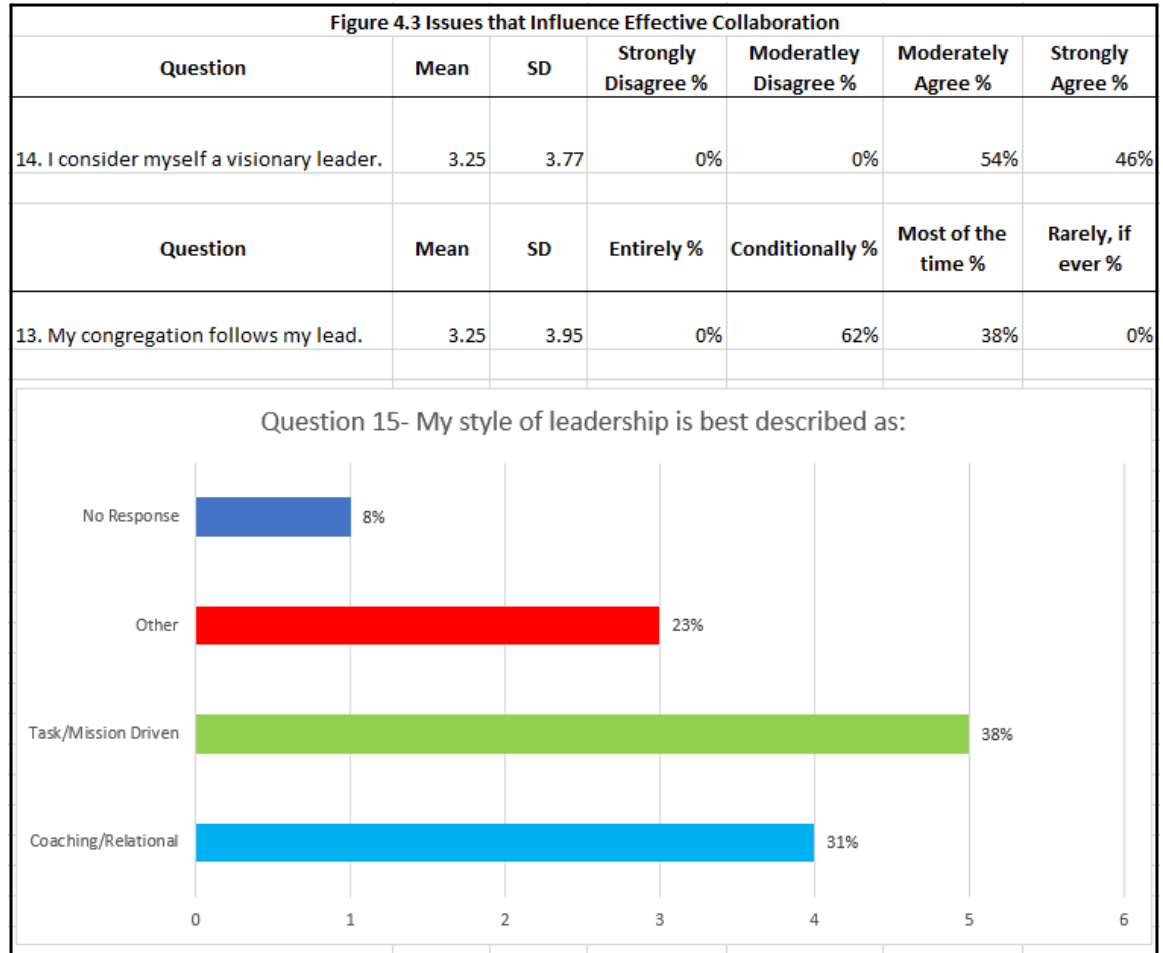
The Collaborative Survey revealed several key identifying factors. The first factor involved leadership abilities and types of leadership best suited for collaboration.

Question 14 asked for each participant to identify themselves to the degree of visionary leadership qualities. This was parenthetically articulated to mean, "I like to paint a picture in the minds of the congregation of a desired future." The Likert Scale responses fell into only two of the five categories, "Strongly Agree" and "Moderately agree." 46.15% felt they "strongly agreed" with their leadership style as being visionary. 53.84% "moderately agreed." The follow-up question asked them to describe what this meant; asking an open-ended question to articulate how their leadership would be best described. The responses were quite varied. Yet, key phrases helped me to understand and link them into

categorical understandings. 30.76% identified themselves in a sense of coaching, collaborative, and relational. 38.46% identified themselves in a more personally responsible, task-oriented, mission-driven ideal. Additional responses were highly individualized categories. For example, one participant identified that since he was an associate pastor, his leadership style was “follow the leader”. Another identified that their leadership adapted depending on the situation. These comments pointed to evidence of a “we” vs. “me” dichotomy. There were those leaders (30.76%) who seemed to identify more with a collaborative style, a “we either do this together or not at all” mentality. A larger group, (38.46%) identified with a more self-driven style of leadership, a style of “we’re going to get this done even if I have to do it alone” kind of mentality. Both of these groups identified themselves as visionary leaders. Yet, the data seemed to show a great difference in how these leaders would approach achieving a goal.

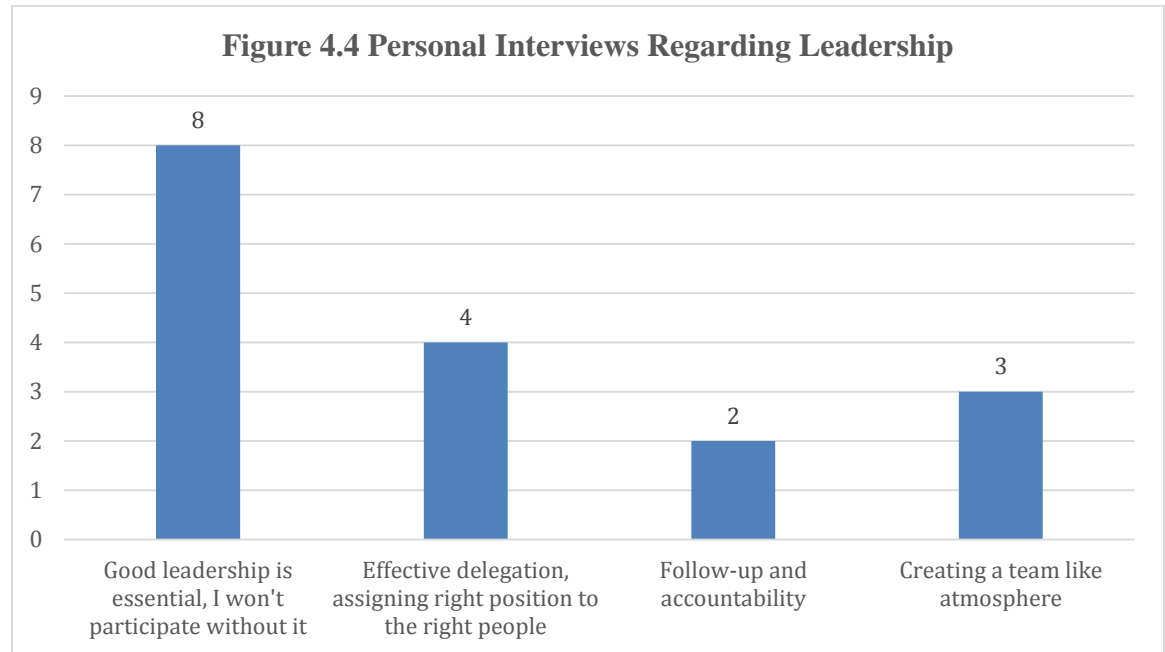
Question 13 asked participants to specifically identify whether their congregants actually follow their leadership and given multiple-choice responses. 38.4% of participants responded, “strongly agree”. An additional 38.4% responded, “Most of the time.” 61.53% however, articulated they felt their congregation would respond to their leadership “depending on what was being asked.” Two responses were not chosen: Those that felt their congregation followed their leadership “entirely” and those that felt they followed “rarely if ever.”

Figure 4.3

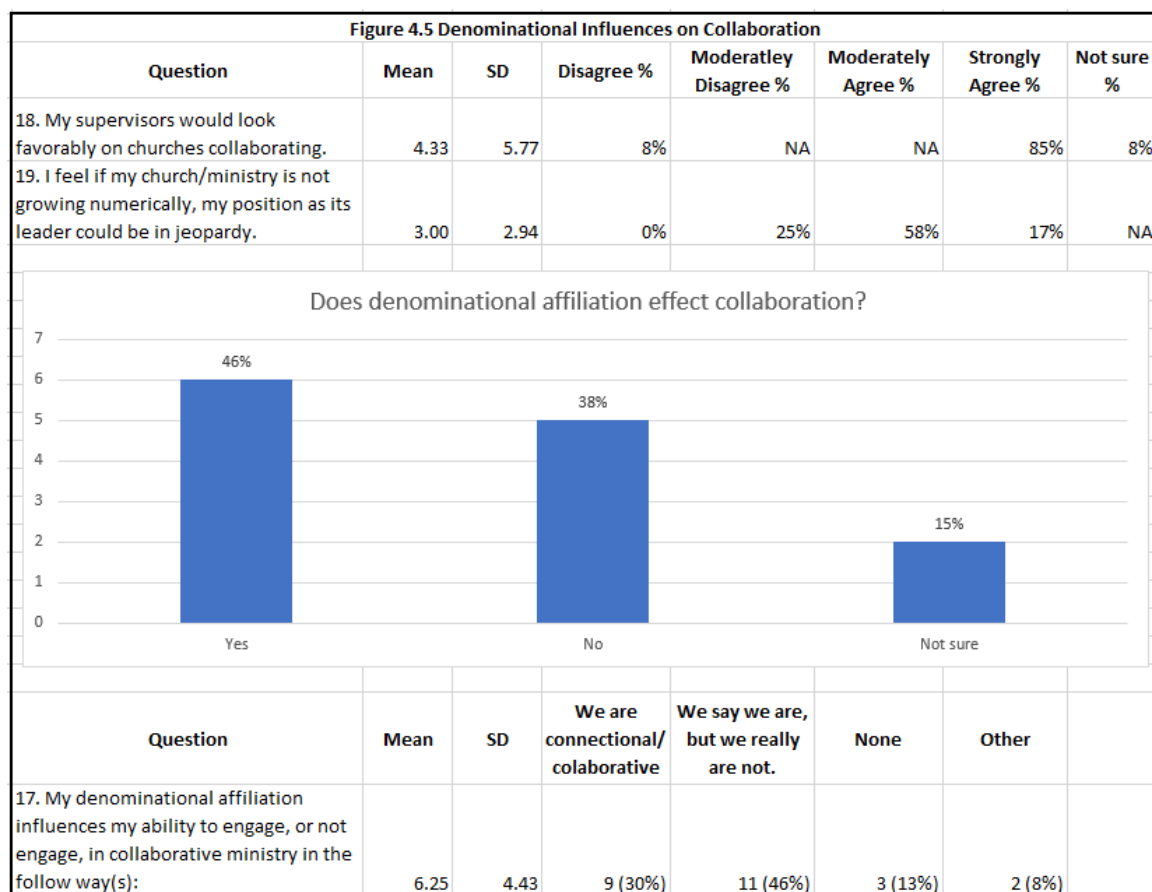


The interview portion allowed for additional information surrounding the topic of leadership to surface. Int#6 expounded on this topic a good deal. She expressed how leadership and direction are two essential ingredients to a collaborative event’s success. She felt a good leader needed to evaluate the team and put “the right skill sets together”. For example, she described the issue by identifying people with right-brained dominance verses left-brain tendencies. Each is therefore qualified to do very different functional things. She said, “Good leaders identify a person’s dominant thought avenues and will align them to do functions accordingly.” Further, “Trying to ask people who are left-brained to be creative is like asking a triangle to be a circle.” Int#5 identified leadership

as the key reason he would or would not participate in a collaborative event. They identified their time was so limited they had no time to waste on a project if it is not well-organized and well lead.



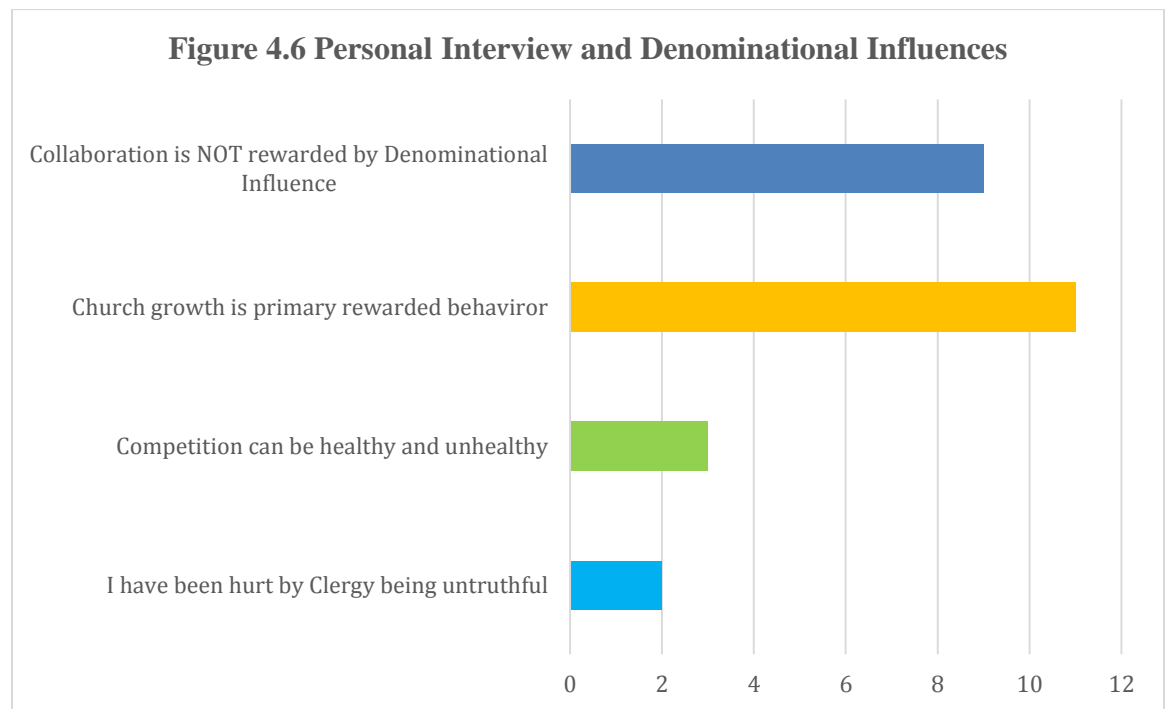
A significant portion of the survey surrounded forces that created environments to either support collaboration or perhaps hinder it. Question 16, for example, asks them about their denominational influences surrounding their abilities to engage in collaborative events. When asked if their denomination has much to do with why they either do or don't engage in collaborative ministry, 69.23% disagreed and 30.76% agreed. Equally, the follow up question asked if their denominational officials, boards or otherwise would look favorably upon them engaging in collaboration with other churches, 84.6% agreed that they would like to see them engage with other churches. 7% disagreed and another 7% was not sure (see Figure 4.5).



The interviews regarding the question added insight toward this issue. The candid responses were hard to gather under one category. Int#6, 7, 9, and 10 identified a major hindrance within their own denomination towards collaboration with other churches. They expressed their deep concern over what the denomination measured and praised. Their statistical data was collected each year that identified things like new members, baptisms and confessions of faith, mission trips and budget figures. But there were no statistics asked of any church as to what kind of collaboration took place throughout the year. Because of this, they expressed concern that many of their colleagues engage in competitive postures rather than collaborative postures. Int#3 and 8 had similar responses, yet added more to the concern. They felt clergy in the denomination were only rewarded for growth in their churches, primarily surrounding new members, attendance

figures and budgets. This created a belief that collaboration efforts with other churches went unrecognized by the denominational leadership. Indeed, question 19 of the Collaboration Survey asked if they felt that if their church was not growing numerically, their position as a leader would be in jeopardy. 34.5% agreed, and 41% disagreed. 25% strongly disagreed. When asked to clarify in the interviews, the participants all appeared to reverse their answers from the survey. 61% verbalized their understanding that what was rewarded by the denomination was not collaboration efforts but simply growth in attendance and budgets. They expressed their understanding that if their churches did not grow, their next appointment would be “gauged” upon those statistics as to salary and church-size. Equally, they admitted this hinders their attitude toward having collaboration among the churches.

Figure 4.6

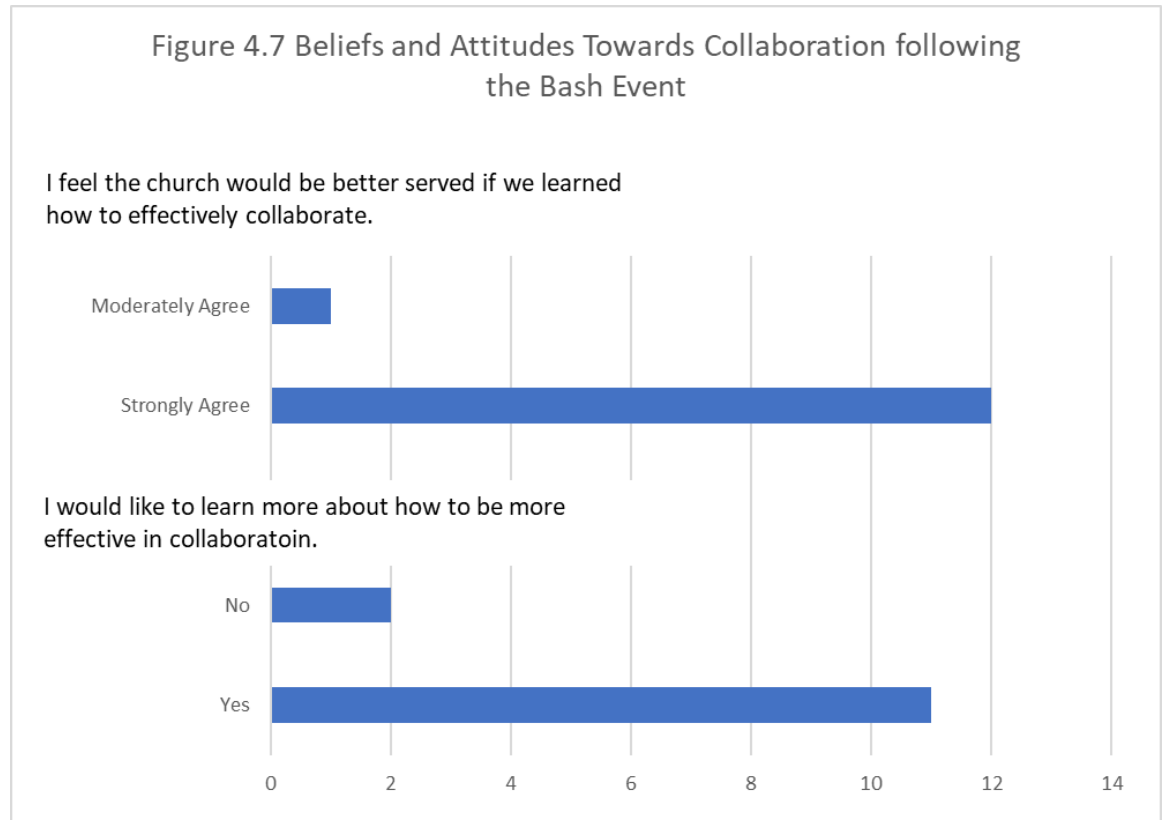


Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What were the beliefs and attitudes of the leaders towards collaboration following their participation in the Union County Back to School Bash?

The Collaboration in Ministry Survey asked questions surrounding the post-intervention data. Questions 10, 22, 23, 24 and 25 helped to identify their feelings about collaboration now that they had had the opportunity to experience the Back to School Bash. Question 10 asked if they believed the Church would be better served if believers and clergy would learn how to effectively collaborate. The Likert Scale responses were overwhelmingly agreeable. 92% of the participants responded “Strongly Agree,” and only 8% responded differently with “Moderately agree.” The survey then asked them a theological question as to whether they believe God calls all of us to collaborate with other churches/ministries. 100% of the participants answered “true.” The follow-up question gave further insight into why they answered this way. Question 23 provided the participants to elaborate their theological viewpoint on collaboration. There were varied responses. 31% of participants quoted scripture from Ephesians 4.5-6, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...” 15% responded in a way that lifted the idea of being more about the “Kingdom” over and against individuality. Another 15% lifted non-theological responses and identified that collaboration could help foster new ideas for their individualized ministries. 7% responded by announcing that we are all part of the Body of Christ as their reasoning for collaborating. The remaining responses were individualized and varied.

Question 24 asked if they would be interested in learning how collaboration with other churches might be beneficial for everyone, now that they had participated in a large collaboration event. 85% of participants responded positively and 15% responded “no.”



The interviews identified information regarding post-intervention qualitative data. Following their participation in the collaborative event, they were asked to identify what they thought might happen if we were to offer more collaboration. Int#12 verbalized their understanding that the Holy Spirit provides what is needed in this and felt that a receptive presence to the work of the Holy Spirit would result in a complete renewal of the church through collaboration. Int#10 and 11 felt similarly and responded their view that the Kingdom would be advanced. Asked to expound on that, they each indicated that people would be more drawn to the church and that nominal people would grow closer to God. Int#9 quoted an unidentified source that “when the tide comes in, it raises every boat in

the harbor.” They extrapolated the idea that collaboration would cause benefits for every church in the area.

Additional Responses:

I cannot think of one way collaboration would hurt but the benefits are endless
Most of my collaboration is in faith community, however, with my work I bring folks together.

We are more effective together than apart.

Whenever fellow believers come together to make a difference serving others, Jesus message grows.

I look forward to exploring this further.

My experience has been positive!

The final interview question asked them to identify the results of their experience with the Back to School Bash and how it affected them for future ministry. 42% of participants quickly responded that they felt closeness to God like they had not experienced. When asked each of them to elaborate, they had varying responses. Yet the over-arching theme was made clear. They felt that through working side-by-side with other churches besides their own on a common mission to help those less fortunate, they sensed the Presence of God during that time. Int#3 interjected how the project was larger than any individual church and therefore it wasn't self-seeking. Int#2 articulated a deep sense of inspiration witnessing the variety of churches and people all working together for a common mission. 69.23% articulated they would be interested in taking part in future Back to School Bash events. 22% identified they would like to help organize additional collaborative events in the future. 2% were undecided.

Figure 4.8

Figure 4.8 Personal Interviews Regarding Post-Bash Beliefs and Attitudes		
Response	Response number	% Total
Effective collaboration would draw people TOWARD the church	4	33%
I have experienced an unusual closeness to God during the event	9	75%
Effective collaboration would benefit EVERYONE	5	42%
I want to be involved in additional collaborative events	12	100%

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings became evident from the quantitative data analysis from the survey and the qualitative data analysis from the interviews.

1. The term, “Collaborative Ministry” had differing connotations to each individual. It appeared the idea of actually working with another church or organization side-by-side to produce an agreed upon mission outcome was not generally understood as collaborative ministry.
2. There was great anxiety surrounding effective leadership and the collaborative event. How the event is organized and how teamwork is deciphered and assigned was a source of great concern and served as a major influence in their participation.

3. Theological understanding of the idea of collaboration was agreed upon unanimously. Biblical underpinnings for collaboration in ministry were unquestioned.
4. When effective collaboration with other churches occurred, the majority of the leaders experienced an unusual closeness to God.
5. A majority of the United Methodist Clergy expressed great concern over what gets rewarded in their settings and expressed the competitive posture resulting hinders their attitudes toward creating effective collaboration with other churches.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

With rapidly declining numbers in United Methodist churches, collaboration would seem to be an ideal practice for effective ministry. This project sought to uncover some of the issues that both contribute to effective collaboration and the issues that hinder them.

This chapter identifies five findings from this research project and discusses personal observations, the literature review, and the biblical framework of the project. Following this, limitations of this study, additional unexpected observations and recommendations.

Major Findings

First Finding: The concept of collaboration had differing meanings to different leaders.

While my survey questions surrounding collaboration identified the intended meaning, the concept was shown to have a differing meaning. During my research, I observed there to be an understanding of collaboration that could be identified as “internal” collaboration. Some participants, for example, described a collaborative event as gathering a group of individuals from within a church or office and offering a mission-outreach type event for the community. Collaboration took place, no doubt, toward achieving a set upon goal. I observed that those participants who were laity (3) each understood collaboration more from this viewpoint. It was during the follow-up personal interviews where this surfaced more clearly. One individual who was a layperson runs a

charitable organization to offer food and various support to the homeless and poor. He described collaboration as having people take food that is stored in their warehouse to individual families. This identified more of a concept of mission-coordination than actual collaboration. Some clergy also seemed to understand collaboration more from an internal perspective. Several clergy participants identified previous experiences with collaboration as forming a team from within their congregation to attend and raise money in a “hunger walk.” Still another clergy participant identified their previous collaborative experience as combining United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men from within the congregation to have a craft and bake sale to raise money for a youth retreat. These are, of course, wonderful missions.

Fewer leaders identified the concept of collaboration as I defined it in the survey: “Collaboration as meaning two or more organizations coming together for the purpose of a common understood goal.” In the survey, twelve of the thirteen participants identified themselves as having participated in three or more collaborative events. Yet, during the personal interviews, it became quite clear their understanding of collaboration fit more of an internal collaboration. This type of collaboration is no less rife with issues that affect the quality output of the collaborative effort.

In the review of literature, Sofield and Juliano identified many of the internal issues that create the ability for any organization to collaborate. Much of what was identified as collaboration was more about the family system of a church coordinating efforts within their own “home” to bring about a desired result. The study of systems theory also taught much about how to try and identify collaboration. Peter Steinke’s work on family systems was especially helpful. Studying the internal dynamics of the

individual parts enables a better understanding how the whole can function. Yet it emphasizes how the “whole is the goal” and, therefore, keeps all eyes on the desired goal more than the individual.

In the theological and biblical framework, Paul reminds Christians that they are all one body and within this body is one hope (desired outcome) of each person’s calling (giftedness) with the single most important undergirding being a focus on “One Lord, One God and Father of us all.” Truly, biblical accounts are clear that we are all different and yet we are all collaborating to maintain the “unity of the spirit”(Eph.4.3). Regardless of the circumstance surrounding collaborative efforts, internal verses external, we maintain unity when we are certain what draws us together. The “whole” becomes the essential in striving for the “goal.” Equally compelling was the understanding of Pentecost where people were gathered from far reaching corners of the world, “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs...”(Acts 2:9) Each individual, with their cultural understanding attached to their heritage, might have translated differently what they were seeing and experiencing. Yet, the unifying Spirit enabled them to come together under the understanding of the love of God that enabled them to “collaborate” from that day on to bring the understanding of Jesus Christ to the world.

Second Finding: Leadership and Organization were of great importance to the success of the collaborative event.

The issue of leadership and how the event was organized became a primary concern for the participants. Prior to the actual Bash event, leaders expressed that any previous experience with collaboration around these two aspects weighed heavily in their minds as to whether the event was successful. Organizational aspects are also a major component to factoring the level of success in the event. Clearly, participants voiced how many of the occasions where they were involved in collaboration were highly dysfunctional because planning and organization were not given ample attention.

The Bash Event begins planning with a team roughly 6 months prior to the event where the leaders hold each other accountable for the tasks they need to accomplish before the event day. This gave a great opportunity for individuals to step-up and offer their skills and knowledge to assist others in completing, with a high degree of quality and efficiency, these various tasks. During the event, I recall no fewer than 8 or 9 people commented on well-organized the event was and how the area leadership was well-trained and versed in providing the outputs they were hoping for. This was the result of placing good leaders into the right task-orientations and making plans well in advance of the actual date of the event.

The literature review gave insight into the importance of leadership upon the function and outcome of a collaborative event. Bowman and Kerr emphasized the many faceted needs for the leader to be efficient. Indeed, the leader possesses great potential for the success of an event, but he or she must also be aware of many aspects of self-differentiation that needs to happen for them to be effective in leading people. A team

contains individuals who are dealing with a vast array of often difficult, emotional circumstances. Deciphering insecurities, boundaries, anxiety, integrity and how people deal with change and are flexible in different environments all contribute to being a leader of multiple groups. Further, Turton's materials on understanding the demands of the Clergy was insightful and progressive. Since the Bash event is geared on quality leadership, many of these leaders are already leading a congregation of their own. Understanding the demands clergy are often under allowed me to further understand the difficulty with committing to another task. Prior to the Bash event, I observed 2 specific clergy members of the team who were struggling to fulfill required tasks. Understanding the demands we often face, I was able to offer additional leaders to walk alongside them in their given role to ensure they were able to get the tasks accomplished.

The theological framework that I best associated with the issue of leadership was Romans 12:9-18 where Paul is urging everyone who is a believer in Christ to recognize the marks of being a true Christian. The marks include: letting love be genuine, outdoing one another in good deeds and selfless acts, being especially patient in suffering and strong in persevering through the many obstacles. The leader sets the tone and pace for all of the others and therefore this is not just good thinking, it's mandated. When Paul describes blessing those who persecute, the very issue of personal sacrifice towards obstacles and attitudes to respond in love is essential. During the Bash event, I observed people waiting in long lines to receive supplies breaking in front of others. Angry parents complaining of the situation confronted me and they were not kind in their choice of words. One of the laity who was working as the head of registration was amazing in how she carefully listened and apologized for the occurrence. She took the family by the hand

and led them through the supply tables, the haircut area and onto the shoe area. They were so appreciative, yet it was the heart of this leader to respond with such grace and love that won the day.

Romans also outlines how believers need to function in order to achieve the desired goal and mission. Paul describes in 12.4-7 this very thing. The organization is made up of many members, while together they retain the same function. He elaborates on how believers also have been given different gifts and they should recognize them. The survey and the personal interviews revealed that what they loved about the Bash was how they were able to use their God-given gifts to exact tasks and accomplish the ministry accordingly. One could easily be asked to perform tasks that they have very little ability or know-how, leaving them feeling anxious, stressed, and likely to have to face the disappointment of not getting the job done to a high quality level. However, the Bash event was continually assessing the skills of individuals to do the best we could to avoid that unfortunate outcome.

Third Finding: The biblical underpinnings for Collaboration in Ministry were agreed upon unanimously.

While there may have been different understandings of what collaboration meant, I observed among the leaders there was no one who did not see the biblical implications of what needed to happen. Indeed, as the survey and the interviews indicated, everyone agreed whole-heartedly that God calls for His church to work together and not isolate themselves from each other.

Prior to the Bash, a difficult situation unfolded. A leader emerged who seemed to carry an attitude asking “what can this event do to boost my bottom line at my church?”

It was quite obvious to everyone involved. Without hesitation, the leaders tried to redirect this individual towards an understanding of the desired outcome. It was emphasized it was not about boosting our own congregations, but rather sharing the love of Jesus Christ with those in need. That individual never came to another meeting and disassociated himself and his church from participating. This saddened the group. Yet, in a way, it proved beneficial this happened. This quickly and acutely called into question the focus of the leaders collaboratively! There was no hesitation the calling of God to contribute for the good of all was exemplified without question.

The review of pertinent literature points to this agreeably. Dunn and Kasseman discuss in detail the concept that we are called into a “plurality” in order for the church to function appropriately. As such, clergy simply cannot maintain that they are called to enable their individualized parishes to take the posture of individuality alone. While clergy are certainly unique in our strengths and abilities as individualized parishes, they are called forth to enable the greater good of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to flourish. Francis, Jones and Robbins recite from the World Council of Churches and it echoes this sentiment to the core. The Holy Spirit is the One who unifies people through faith in Jesus Christ and *sends* them out to proclaim this to the world. Tiller adds that believers are also called to serve one another in the Body of Christ but for yet a greater purpose, that of working together for the mission of the world. When Christians first allow the love they have for Jesus Christ to cultivate the love they naturally thereafter have for one another, the unity of the Body of Christ is both strong and on task.

The theological and biblical principles for this are many. The theological understanding of collaboration begins with the theology of baptism and is aptly

articulated in Ephesians 4.5 where Paul calls believers into one baptism. While we are different people, our Baptism in Christ creates a unifying factor that simply cannot be separated. They are not all initiated into different sects or unrelated groups. In fact, Paul articulates how believers are no longer considered or named by our individual heritages. There is no longer Greek nor Jew, slave or free, all are now one in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3.28). This unifying factor alone speaks depth into why believers are all called to collaborate, combine talents and gifts and operate from the cause and effect of their baptism in Jesus Christ.

Romans has much to say about this concept of being called forth to do works together. Throughout chapter 12, Paul exhorts how believers are all now changed and given new lives. Where they once considered themselves this or that, they are now qualified through our faith in Jesus Christ to do the incredible mission of sharing Jesus Christ with anyone who does not know. Yet, Paul takes it even further in chapter 14 as he calls Christians to carefully treat each other as well. He calls for us to welcome those who are prone to sin, weak in the faith, perhaps even estranged from God altogether – welcome those and do not judge them. Indeed, Acts 13.38 teaches how sins are forgiven of all people through Jesus Christ.

The second chapter of Acts perhaps best exemplifies this understanding of collaboration among believers. Following the miraculous day of Pentecost, the many joined arms together and learned to do life together. They sold their possessions to provide for the whole (Acts 2:34) No one went without anything because everyone shared in what they had collectively. With the exception being Ananias and Sapphira, they shared all they had for the greater good of Kingdom ministry.

Fourth Finding: The result of collaboration left people feeling an unusual closeness to God.

This was perhaps the most exciting thing to witness. While people gathered with their strengths and unique gifts to do a purposeful ministry, they reported a spiritual experience occurring. I watched the many who were “changed” by the atmosphere and wonder the Bash event created. One parishioner was there and was asked if she would like to be part of the foot-washing/shoe team. Her task would be to remove the socks and shoes of the student and wash their feet. Along side of this, she would need to explain the rationale for washing their feet-that Jesus calls us into servant-hood and that we hope you will know that you are loved beyond words by God. When this was all explained, she wrinkled her nose and said, “I’m not washing anyone’s feet!” No one forced the issue and simply assigned her to work with our food area, providing people with free hotdogs, chips and drinks. But about an hour into the event, something happened to her. She was watching people wash feet and talk to kids about the love of Jesus Christ, and she suddenly changed her mind. She went over to the shoe area and asked if she could wash feet and give out new shoes! The picture on the front of next years’ brochure about the Bash will feature this woman washing feet. She expressed to me a strange desire and a change of heart. Very suddenly she desired to share who she was in this way and the event caused her to feel a closeness to God (her words) she hadn’t known before. It is very encouraging to me that when we push aside our inhibitions for the greater good of serving the poor and needy, God is honored and is close to us in a new and realized way.

Steinke’s work in the literature review assists in understanding this concept. Receiving a benefit from selflessness is rudimentary. It is a way that gives people a hope

or a liking or a favorable “warm-feeling” when they least expect it nor are actively searching for it. Steinke’s work showed the benefits inherent with including those who, although they may have differing feelings or understandings than the others in the group, can actually learn more and be “peppered” with new discovery and insights. The reality is most people tend to draw close to those who simply think like us, act like us, have similar educational backgrounds like us and even are of a similar socio-economic background. The result of the interactions of these kinds of relationships is evident and not surprising. People experience a sense of ease, a sense of comfort in these settings. Yet, the end result leaves them exactly where they were when they started, emotionally and intellectually.

True collaboration will inevitably draw people into circumstances we are both unfamiliar with and more likely nervous and uncomfortable with. Today’s culture appears to be far too bent on the individualized idea that each individual deserves comfort, at all costs. Few people stop to understand how limiting that understanding is. I observed, for instance, that at the end of the day of the Bash event, when the last student was served and left the building, spontaneous cheers erupted, people began embracing each other and an excitement seemed to explode from all the volunteers. Many were in tears as they came up to me, thanking me for leading the event. When I asked why they were crying, several could not explain, but several did. They all said roughly the same thing – they **were not expecting** the outcome they got. They were not expecting they could so joyfully get along with people of other churches: they did not expect their reaction to the kids who were so overjoyed when they received new shoes and new backpacks. They were not expecting the tears the parents cried as their children were prayed for by each volunteer. The resounding result spoke volumes.

The biblical and theological framework for this is best represented from the resulting euphoria found in the people who experienced the Holy Spirit during the day of Pentecost. The crowd that was assembled, representing so many differing cultures and people, experienced something they could not easily understand. They heard a rush of wind. They saw divided tongues that looked like flames of fire. They were instantly filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages. Jews gathered at the sounds and realized the men were Galileans yet speaking openly in their native languages. The only plausible explanation was they were drunk. (Acts 2.13) They came not knowing what to expect and yet the resulting evidence is compelling: they were cut to the heart at Peter's speech and were baptized. The results were obvious and all were filled with awe.

When we are able to set aside our usual lives to do something for so many that will not give any self-serving result but for the love we have for Jesus Christ, the results are awe-inspiring. This is what I witnessed following the Bash event.

Fifth Finding: A considerable amount of United Methodist Clergy expressed concern over what gets rewarded and the resulting competitive spirit hinders their desire to collaborate with other churches.

United Methodist Clergy, being organized and under supervisory oversight, are asked to report statistics regarding their individual congregations. These reports are generated annually and cover a variety of topics from (most prominently) attendance records, baptisms, deaths, new members to how many people attend Sunday School classes, small groups, Youth group, Children's Sunday School, United Methodist Women, or United Methodist Men's group. These numbers represent a great deal and arguably are extremely important in evaluating the life of the church. Yet it is not so much what is

reported that seems to create issue but what is not reported. For example, there is nothing in these lengthy reports that asks us to identify any collaborative efforts to assist other churches in the area.

The commonly held perception perception is that what gets “rewarded” by Bishops or District Superintendents is merely the numbers that represent the growth of the church. It is widely understood among United Methodist Clergy that should your numbers show that your congregation is growing, that would indicate exceptional leadership on the part of the pastor. This is often very true and admirable. Subsequently, that pastor is often rewarded with a new appointment to a higher salaried church, with more expensive and elaborate parsonages and the like. This easily leads to a problem I personally have experienced throughout my 23 years in ministry: falsification of records. I have been appointed to serve 4 different congregations. Without exception, when I was given the outlay of each appointment, including the number schemata, I soon discovered the “books had been cooked” to try and show the congregation was in better shape than it actually was. Debt was higher. Attendance figures were considerably lower, and membership numbers were far from what was originally reported.

Collaboration in ministry is simply not rewarded by our Conference Officials and therefore the “competitive nature” we all have comes out in unhealthy and detrimental ways.

The literature review offered a couple of works that identify this behavior pattern of competitiveness and helped me to understand an underlying problem in our denominational reporting. Sofield & Juliano, for example list four attitudes that are

highly destructive in fostering a spirit of collaboration resulting in seven toxic behaviors. Of the four attitudes, competitive spirit is listed as number one.

To be sure, competitive spirit can generate some good outcomes. When churches come together to compete, for example, in out-doing the other in raising money for the community food bank, this can be a very good thing. When two churches compete to see who can contribute the most flood buckets to assist with a natural disaster that happened, this can be a healthy and fun way to achieve goals. But undoubtedly, competition between churches can often lead to very unhealthy and unbiblical behaviors. Typically these attitudes can foster hostility, inability or unwillingness to deal with conflict in a healthy way, and unwillingness to share faith.

The United Methodist Church, statistically speaking, is losing more and more members and is, as Bishop Goodpaster claims, “A denomination in crisis.” The more we are fostering the possibility of hostility and conflict, the church will continue to die. I believe collaboration is not just a very good idea, or just a biblical concept, but it should be considered as one of the highest priorities. The United Methodist Church claims have “connectionalism” as one of its most fervent strengths. The reality speaks for itself. But until or unless Bishops and District Superintendents begin rewarding the Kingdom-thinking principals the bible clearly lifts up by rewarding creative collaboration between churches, this trend will only get worse.

Biblically, the Gospels of John and Luke offer a theological framework for this. The disciples had heard Jesus talk about what was about to happen to Him, yet their “zest to be the best” overtook the moment as they argued about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven (Luke 22.24). Here is an apt example of how the human

condition works. While the Son of God walked with them, healing, preaching about the love of the Father, and even raising the dead to life, the disciples are caught in their humanness and argue about which one of them would be the greatest in heaven! Jesus had just asked them to celebrate the Passover meal with Him one last time. John records how Jesus humbled Himself even more as He girded Himself with a towel and washed the dirt off the disciples' feet (John 13). It might seem that the disciples were hopeless in their thoughts and actions, but they must remember how they became the ones who spread Christianity across the world.

Perhaps if our denominational officials would simply start to reflect deeply on how pastors are called to be selfless servants of God, collaboration among churches would take on a higher meaning.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

1. I believe my findings lean toward understanding ministry in a much deeper sense than what Methodist clergy have categorized for many years. For too long, we have described ministry as “successful” when there are more people attending weekly services, newer buildings are built, more staff added to accommodate the growth. I believe its time to look deeper into what makes ministry successful. The self-less collaboration of churches who are unified by the goal of seeking more people who need relief from suffering, an honest, loving witness to the love of Jesus Christ, and true community to support each other is a recipe for becoming irresistible to a culture consumed with greed and hurt.

2. The undeniable reality of following the biblical call to collaborate for others strengthens the relationship Christians, and especially clergy have with God. While our

worship services are a key component to reaching people for Jesus Christ, the actual ministry to the poor, the underprivileged, the hunger, the young and old fosters a deep-seated *encounter* with the living Christ. Churches in my area have spent literally millions of dollars to erect stages with lightshows and smoke machines, video special effects that would shame Disney World, and sound systems that engulf the eardrum. These are outward manifestations. Until churches begin to provide opportunities for people to come into a true and meaningful encounter with God, faith will falter. When churches can represent Jesus Christ better in our communities through acts of selfless collaboration with other churches, I believe a sense of Christian revivalism could rise in America and be a factor among many to change the statistical data of dying churches.

3. This study has revealed an underlying flaw in our United Methodist polity and organization. The reporting of statistical data of growth as rewarded by the appointment process is generating a competitive spirit among clergy that is not only unhealthy but unbiblical. The United Methodist Church would benefit greatly by the appropriate encouragement and reward for those leaders who seek a stronger Biblical worldview of Kingdom vs. individualized separativeness.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations to this research was that there was some selection bias as to the participants I asked to study. Each of them had some connection with the Union County Back to School Bash, having either taken part in an event or was certainly subjected to the reputation of others.

Another limitation is the event of the Back To School Bash occurs on one day of the year. The timing of the event along with the coordination of getting my materials

ready did not align. I would have hoped to done a more pure pre-intervention/post-intervention format, but I had a very limited window of opportunity and did not take advantage of that scenario well.

Unexpected Observations

I was quite surprised with the number of collaborative events that people associated with this study had taken. Equally, as I was studying this topic, I was pleasantly surprised at how many churches throughout the country seem to realize how important the function of collaboration is. This created some “unsurprising” data with the survey and even the interviews. There were very little polarities of thought and understanding that accumulated in this study.

Recommendations

Several possibilities come to mind regarding usage of this project. First, having District Superintendents aware of this data may spark a much-needed directive from our hierarchy where recognition of churches who selflessly collaborate is heralded. I believe until the day our Bishops start providing a segment in our statistical data that asks what collaboration with other area churches have taken place, little will change to combat an unhealthy, vitriolic competitiveness. Secondly, with the undeniable decline in church attendance throughout the denomination, effective and sensible collaboration is much more than a nice idea. For example, three United Methodist Churches in my District have declining numbers of youth who want to participate in youth group activities. We are collaborating to establish a position of a *shared* youth minister. There are countless other ways we could bring our congregations together and still remain true to the inherent DNA of each. Thirdly, the model of the Bash Event can serve others to replicate ways to unite

communities, churches and businesses to make a difference in people's lives. It is my hope this will not remain secretive, but will provide impetus for other areas of our Conference to utilize.

Postscript

This has been an amazing journey of many discoveries. It has also been timely, during an era in the United Methodist history where our dividedness has never been more vivid. The ideas reflected in this study give me a sense of hope for a united future.

Asbury Theological Seminary will always be my spiritual home, and for that, I am eternally grateful to all the wonderful professors and staff who have allowed me this great privilege to journey through the Beeson Doctoral Program.

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Letter

Collaborative Ministry Project

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Rev. Scott E. Ireland from Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you hold a leadership role in your church or organization and have participated in the collaborative ministry outreach, “**The Union County Back To School Bash**”.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in two ways:

To fill out a 25-question survey, which will be sent to you electronically and retrieved electronically through a secured email account.

1. To take part in an interview with Rev. Ireland that will be recorded, at a time and place that is both private and convenient for you.

Please know that if anyone is given any information on you, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name. The recording of the interview will be secured and no one else will have access to its contents.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in this study, please tell Rev. Ireland who can be reached at (704) 451-7772 or by email, sireland@wccumc.net. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdrawal from the process at any time.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in this study, do not sign this paper. Being in this 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 this study

Date

APPENDIX B

Collaborative Ministry Interview Questions

Rev. Scott E. Ireland

- I. Talk for just a moment and tell me what experience you have had with collaboration in ministry?**
- II. Does collaborating with other churches cause you any anxiety? Why or why not? What are the specific things you might feel uneasy about?**
- III. Are there ways you feel your current church setting could benefit from other churches? In what ways?**
- IV. Does your denominational affiliation, its polity and/or evaluative processes support or hinder any possible motivations for collaborating with others? Explain.**
- V. What specific things do you think need to change in order to have more successful collaboration events?**
- VI. What do you think might happen if area churches were less competitive and more cooperative in their approaches to ministry? Explain why you think that might be.**
- VII. After discussing these issues surrounding collaborative ministry, how likely are you to participate in events or ideas that share resources for other churches? Explain why this is so.**

Interview time: 35-45 minutes.

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