

## **ABSTRACT**

### **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CLASS MEETING:**

## **WESLEYAN DISCIPLESHIP WITH SOFTWARE FACILITATED BLENDED LEARNING**

by

Michael Kojo Larbi

The class meeting, a Wesleyan discipleship construct, played a pivotal role in the sustained growth of the Methodist movement in Britain and America. John Wesley and his associates designed Methodism to be a “connexion,” a network of interlocking groups in which Christians were nurtured. These groups included the society (which became the Methodist local church), class meeting, and band. The class meeting brought together, typically, up to twelve believers each week to watch over each other in love as they shared their lived Christian experiences with each other.

To the extent it helped adults learn in word and deed, class meetings were a system of andragogy. Class meetings might be deemed a Social Network Analysis (SNA) sentiment network and modelled with theoretical frameworks such as Granovetter’s strength of weak ties, structural balance theory, and Scott Feld’s focus theory. In time, Methodist membership moved from the class meeting to the local church, with attendant waning of focus on and participation in class meetings. SNA might yield new insights that should aid the revitalization of the Methodist movement. Applying blended learning, the enhanced learning method that combines online learning and in-person instruction, to the class meeting was the focus of this research study.

The research assessed some adaptations required and the impact on participants' spiritual lives when Class meetings (termed Life Together Groups) were implemented, aided by blended learning using social technology (specifically, Zoom), in the Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina. Of particular interest was the impact in the technology savvy young adult demographic. Using seminars, participant experience surveys, and interviews, both qualitative and statistical analyses were carried out. Lessons learned include the contemporary relevance for the Class Meeting for spiritual formation and growth when adapted to the local context, and the helpfulness of the blended learning format for small group discipleship. Further research is needed in a wider context to generalize the results and an additional study may apply SNA modelling to the class meeting to tease out patterns and insights to aid revitalization of intentional discipleship in Methodist churches.

21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CLASS MEETING:  
WESLEYAN DISCIPLESHIP WITH SOFTWARE FACILITATED BLENDED  
LEARNING

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by  
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## CHAPTER 1 NATURE OF THE PROJECT

### Overview of the Chapter

Many components of the research project are covered in this chapter. First is an introduction to the study, followed by an articulation of the research questions and the rationale for the project, definitions of key terms, the research methods employed, and a review of the subject matter literature.

### Personal Introduction

The world of learning has changed tremendously in the last twenty-five years with the advent of the public internet in the mid-1990s, which has transformed how learning occurs through the collaborative and social nature of many new technologies (Tyree 27). Rapidly evolving web technologies have created a paradigm shift in how knowledge is created and transmitted by teachers and received by students (Tyree 27). The medium for communication is rapidly changing and this change seems unstoppable. The set of technologies collectively termed social media have taken human interaction into a whole new paradigm. Communication is virtually instantaneous, and the means varied and very convenient. Technologies available in prevailing social media platforms provide convenient personalization of content and interactivity of users which in turn enhance user engagement and perceived cohesion and enjoyment, all of which are relevant to the learning experience (Yaros 54). Specialized learning management systems also leverage many of these technologies to enhance the learning experience.

Social technology permeates and saturates the modern lifestyle as evidenced in the global public health crisis that is the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the lockdown of many countries around the world from the first quarter of 2020. Social

media technologies provided the platform that has made much of social interaction and communications feasible in this crisis. High speed video conferencing through providers like Zoom became the order of the day. All phases of education, from primary through tertiary, had to switch to online learning using these technologies. The pandemic also brought an existential threat to many churches which necessarily had to shut their doors to in-person gatherings. Zoom and similar technologies helped churches to transition to online worship services. As of this writing, it remains unclear whether many churches can return to their pre-pandemic normative mode in its entirety post-pandemic and to what extent churches would adopt a hybrid in-person plus online mode of worship.

The early Methodists in the eighteenth century, and particularly their leader in the Methodist Revival, John Wesley, essentially built a nationwide network made up of small groups labelled class meeting and bands, for the express and sole purpose of Christian discipleship (Henderson, 11-14). Using the simple constructs of a weekly hour-long meeting of eight to twelve people (the class meeting), and a consistently simple but unchanging set of questions, participants deepened their accountable relationships as they sought to work out their individual salvation with the help of their fellow Christian disciples. The class meeting was an educational construct that influenced and shaped the behavior and lives of its members (Henderson, 93). Wesley's class meeting network seemed to have the characteristics of what is called a sentiment network in Social Network Analysis (SNA). While this research reviews some of the literature on SNA, the focus of the study is on the implementation of the class meeting with the aid of modern social technology. The SNA modelling and evaluation of a class meeting network is recommended for future research.

John Wesley once asked, during a Methodist conference, "Can nothing be done to make the meetings of the classes more lively and profitable?" (Goodell 5). Wesley was keen to find new ways of making the class meeting more interesting, relevant, and helpful to its members and Methodist ministry. Wesley did not have the modern software powered social network, which aims to create and leverage technology to facilitate the needed communication and maintenance of real-life social networks. Had it existed in the eighteenth century, he might have leveraged it to improve and grow the network of class meetings. However, Wesley understood that a simple reproducible social construct like the weekly class meeting draws people together and builds long lasting bonds and a supporting community, in addition to the primary objective of helping individuals grow in Christ. Bringing people together in virtual technological spaces is the dimension modern social media adds to the social network. Personalization of content, convenience, enhanced engagement of actors, and the perception of greater cohesion and enjoyment have served to provide a global reach for platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. At the turn of the twenty-first century Facebook did not exist. Yet, today, it is a platform on which two billion people across the planet actively interact and share their lives in, sometimes, great minutiae. These technologies and platforms enable the sharing of our lives and stories with each other and over wide distances, though some have argued that they actually reduce social interaction and intimacy (Turkle 1). However, the prospect of successfully combining the class meeting construct with modern social media tools is an exciting one for the reach of the gospel and the formation of Christian disciples. Second, the social technology facilitated reintroduction of the class meeting in the contemporary United Methodist Church. It holds the hope of renewal, reversal of decline, and growth, a



subject matter covered in the rest of this chapter and some detail in Chapter 2, the Literature Review.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Protestant Church in western countries such as the United States and Great Britain has experienced numerical decline relative to population growth in recent decades (Barna Churchless 2014; Barna, State of the Church & Family Report 2016; Pew Research Center 2019). The situation is grave in the young adult demographic, where research published in 2019 indicates that nearly two-thirds of previously churchgoing in America have dropped out at some point (Kinnaman et al. 15). In the case of the United Methodist Church (UMC), research shows that total membership grew in the eight years to 2018 but stagnated in particular locations. In general, membership growth lags population growth in its jurisdictions by six percentage points (Scott). In examining some of the causes of decline, particularly in Methodism, one discipleship small group construct, the class meeting, is no longer in use in many Methodist churches, especially in western societies. Class meetings powered and sustained the growth of Methodism, starting in the eighteenth century during the Methodist Revival in Britain and later throughout North America (Henderson 12-15). American Methodism was started by migrant British Methodists who started class meetings of their own volition (Richey, *Methodism in the American Forest* 16). Significantly, during Methodism's infancy and rapid growth in both Britain and America, membership in a Methodist Society which became the local church was held in the class meeting (Richey, *Methodism in the American Forest* 47, 96-97). Membership is today held in the local church, considerably diminishing the previously emphasized importance of the class meeting in Methodist

ministry and no longer making them mandatory local Methodist church structures. The focus of this research project is the reintroduction of the class meeting in the local church.

Given that the class meeting is an old but proven model of small group discipleship, its reintroduction in the contemporary local church requires adaptation to the modern context. Specifically, modern social media software tools provide new means of gathering and collaboration that the church is increasingly dependent on, as evidenced by the forced migration of worship services to online format during the Covid-19 pandemic, which became a global public health problem from the first quarter of 2020. The conventional class meeting model involves the in-person meeting of participants. In introducing technology facilitation, particular attention has been paid to the concepts of blended learning, the combination of online and in-person instruction for enhanced learning (Simonova, Blended Learning Conference 2018, 69). The effectiveness of such technological intervention in a blended learning adaptation of the class meeting in a local church implementation was, thus, the focus of this research.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the research was to assess the adaptations required and impact of the Wesleyan construct designed to aid growth in grace and faith of the Christian disciple in community in small groups, the class meeting, in the contemporary context when implemented in a blended learning fashion, using in-person and remote interactions facilitated by readily available social media software, in particular Zoom, in the Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina.

## Research Questions

The Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina, a non-denominational church, is actively designing and implementing a new discipleship ministry with the small group discipleship model at its core. The main investigator of this research has led this effort from its inception in August 2019, in his capacity as the Pastoral Assistant for Discipleship for the Congregation. Of the various group discipleship models considered, the Wesleyan small group construct, the class meeting, is one that has had significant historical impact and longevity on a broader societal basis (Henderson 12). The class meeting encapsulated important tenets of biblical Christian discipleship, to wit, personal growth in faith and grace within the context of an intimate small group, accountability for spiritual stewardship, the sharing and bearing of each other's burdens, and "speaking the truth in love" (Henderson, 14). Using the class meeting model, John Wesley organized large population blocs into small groups, trained them in tenets of Christian discipleship, and mobilized them as social change agents (Henderson 15). For these proven impact reasons, the class meeting is the primary model that has been studied in detail as a basis for shaping this new small group ministry, complemented by a review of other small group models used by other denominations for the same purpose.

Of particular help has been the document produced by the New Faith Communities of the North Carolina (NC) Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) to educate pastors and laity alike on the biblical, theological, and Methodist historical underpinnings of the class meeting, which has rechristened the "Common Table" (Moore, *Good Friends, A Wesleyan Way of Discipleship*). This document also

contains guidance on how to start a class meeting, invite others to join, lead and facilitate a class meeting, as well as what happens within a class meeting, such as communal prayer. The Congregation has christened its small groups Life Together Groups (LTGs).

### **Research Question #1**

What changes are required to adapt and implement the Wesleyan small group discipleship construct, the class meeting, for relevant use in a blended learning model leveraging modern social technology such as Zoom?

### **Research Question #2**

What was the impact of small group discipleship facilitated by blended learning using social technology (Zoom) on the spiritual lives of participants?

### **Research Question #3**

What lessons can be drawn from the use of a blended learning approach facilitated by software for class meetings that might help with its adoption among the social media savvy young adult as well as the older demographic?

## **Rationale for the Project**

The protestant church faces an existential threat (Willimon, *Pastor* 216). This seems to be particularly the case in the Western church, as is evident, for instance, in the decline in church membership and attendance in Europe and America, even by those who self-identify as Christians (Barna Group, “Churchless” 2014; Barna, “State of the Church”; Kinnaman, et al., 15; Pew Research Center, “Being Christian” 6; Pew Research, *In US - Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, 2019). Though set in a different historical context, the Methodist Revival in eighteenth-century Britain led by John Wesley provides lessons in sustained group discipleship practice that might represent

hope for church revival and growth, qualitatively and quantitatively, in the contemporary context. The class meeting was the linchpin group discipleship construct used widely and effectively by Wesley and other Methodist leaders to nurture believers in both Britain and America from the eighteenth century through the early years of the twentieth century (Henderson, 93; Richey, *Methodism in the American Forest*, 47). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century American revivalist and evangelist, Dwight L Moody, also came to depend on the Methodist class meetings for training new converts (Goodell, 15).

Wesley's educational innovations in the class meeting and other discipleship constructs were based on biblical models such as that seen in the early Church where those who came to faith in Christ "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers." (Acts 2:42 NRSV). Researchers are also finding, as documented in the literature review, that Wesley's methodology was founded on andragogical principles that are the basis of modern adult learning research and practice. Software-based social networking and learning management systems are increasingly pervasive in contemporary culture and can be used in adult learning and, by extension, might be efficacious when used with the class meeting. Further, a well-designed blended learning system that leverages social networking technology, to either enable remote participants to join in-person gatherings or to fully hold meetings online, can enhance the class meeting experience while making it easier for the pastors and leaders of the church to use it in their discipleship practice, thereby making rapid adoption and spread of Class meetings in the modern Church probable. The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief the need for such blended learning systems in the life and ministry of the Church.

## Definition of Key Terms

The key terms used include:

Band is a group of three to four which met regularly for close mutual self-examination on their practice and adherence to the teachings of the Christian faith, naming their struggles and concerns, etc. Members had to be all male or female, married or unmarried, in order to facilitate the intimacy required in sharing their deepest thoughts and struggles.

Class Meeting was used in the early Methodist movement to refer to the group of five to fifteen people who met weekly to discuss their faith, struggles, and progress in their Christian walk. Membership included a mixture males and females, and sometimes children.

Life Together Group (LTG) is the name the Congregation at Duke Chapel calls its discipleship small groups. It is the *class meeting* equivalent. LTG is used interchangeably with class meeting in this document.

Society was a local community of Methodists which met typically on Sundays for fellowship and instruction in the early Methodist movement. It was usually an aggregation of class meetings and had no limit on the number of members.

Andragogy is “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Budd and Freeman, 65).

Blended Learning refers to the combination of online learning and face-to-face instruction to enhance the learning experience (Simonova, Blended Learning Conference 2018 69). In this research project, the phrase is used as an aggregation of the in-person interactions of the class meeting and the extension of the learning experience through the

use of online conferencing and other software that enables the continuing interaction of participants beyond face-to-face meetings.

Social Network refers to set of nodes or network members in society tied together by one or more types of relations (Wasserman and Faust). To put it simply, the idea is that society is defined by its members and their relationships, thus forming a network. *Social network analysis* is the science of examining these nodes and their relationships within specific social bounds to unearth patterns that inform particular objectives.

Social media is the popular phrase that refers to the technologies that seek to provide tools that ease and enhance the functioning of social networks. Such tools and technologies include blogs, online chat rooms, and instant messaging. Social Networking firms such as Facebook provide aggregations of such tooling in an easy-to-use manner enabling wide usage.

Learning Management System (LMS) refers to a set of tools that brings together stakeholders in an educational context (including teachers, students, and administrators) and facilitates their interaction as well as helping each stakeholder perform their function in the learning activity.

### **Delimitations**

This research project focuses on Methodist discipleship theology, the United Methodist Church (UMC) in America, and the adoption, with adaptations, of the class meeting group discipleship model in the Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina. The Congregation has named its discipleship small groups Life Together Groups (LTGs). With regards to Methodist discipleship theology, the research specifically involves the class meeting and does not cover other modes such as bands.

Similarly, the research investigates social networks, and social networking technology, in the context of the technology being used to facilitate the creation and management of class meetings/LTGs, and discipleship practice within LTGs in the Congregation at Duke Chapel. Thus, social network, social media, social network analysis, and wider blended and online learning research are all outside the bounds of this research project.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The review of current and past research and other literature on the themes of this research covered two large categories. The first was literature on the problem under consideration, and the second was the underpinnings of the solution proposed and investigated by way of a technological intervention in the class meeting discipleship program of the North Carolina Conference of the UMC. The problem under consideration is the overall decline of the western mainline Protestant Church (and specifically the UMC) relative to population growth (Barna Group, Churchless; Barna State of the Church & Family Report, 2016; Pew Research, In US - Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace, 2019) and some of the factors that have led to this state of affairs, particularly the effect of moving away from the class meeting in the Methodist Church, which was one factor instrumental in grounding and growing Christians in their faith from the start of the Methodist Revival in eighteenth century Britain. Thus, the literature reviewed on the problem statement covers the impact and scale of the problem, focuses on issues related to the young adult demographic, and compares the contemporary context with the historical context of the Methodist Revival when the class meeting discipleship practice was introduced and was demonstrably efficacious.



The second category of literature reviewed focused on the proposed solution to the problem. To map out the path for the proposed solution, the biblical and theological foundations were first reviewed followed by how John Wesley and the early Methodist leaders modeled their pastoral and discipleship methodology on theological underpinnings and innovative best practice in group education in their day. The literature on what constitutes effective discipleship was next reviewed, followed by how modern andragogy maps to the Wesley model and a review of blended learning and social network concepts. Lastly, the literature on contemporary social technology was also reviewed as well as how it might be used in the church context.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology used in this research is the mixed method using both qualitative and quantitative components, details of which are summarized in the sections that follow.

#### **Type of Research**

The type of research carried out in this project was an intervention introducing a new discipleship ministry into the Congregation at Duke Chapel, with discipleship small groups at its core. The small groups were modelled after the Wesleyan class meeting construct and adapted for the non-denominational congregation and the modern context. The program had a dependence on technology for the actual starting and management of class meetings, with social technology, specifically Zoom, used as a tool to facilitate and enhance participants' experience of the class meeting. This intervention used a mixture of methods for data collection and analysis. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed, including attitude surveys and usage questionnaires, which were then statistically analyzed.

## Participants

There were groups of participants in the research project:

1. *The Senior Pastor and Lay Leaders of the Education Committee* were invited to participate in the research. This group was selected because their leadership of the Congregation and its education programs puts them in a unique position to create and manage Life Together Groups and increase their footprint in the life of the Congregation.
2. *Life Together Group Leaders* are the conveners and facilitators of the class meeting/LTG. They are mostly lay people who participated in the pilot of the LTG concept that was a training ground for LTG leaders. They were selected because of their leadership role in the LTG, giving them an intimate knowledge of its dynamics and impact.
3. *Class Meeting/LTG Members* are generally church members who have voluntarily joined an LTG. This group was selected because they are the direct participants in and beneficiaries of class meetings and can provide insights of what works and does not work in their context.
4. *Intergenerational Class Meeting/LTG* were a mixture of young adults and members over 40 years of age in the same class meeting. The reason for investigating this group's participation was to get insights of the challenges of this kind of class meeting and whether this model would continue to work well for the future.

## **Instrumentation**

Qualitative and quantitative instruments were used in the research. Quantitative instruments consisted of scoring and statistically analyzing user responses to survey questions.

The research method/instrument employed to answer Research Question #1 consisted of two teaching seminars organized to explain the class meeting model of discipleship to members of the Congregation, and a twelve-week pilot of two discipleship small groups made up of members of the education committee and three seminary students from Duke Divinity School. A template for the discipleship groups was developed with a view to using it in the ongoing groups post the pilot.

The research method/instrument employed to answer Research Question #2 was a class meeting post-test user experience survey to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the participants of the social technology (Zoom) facilitated discipleship small groups. This consisted of a qualitative experience questionnaire which was scored and quantitatively analyzed statistically.

The research method/instrument employed in answering Research Questions #3 consisted of one-to-one interviews with a represented sample of young adult and intergenerational participants.

## **Data Collection**

A twenty-five-question participant experience survey aligned to the previously stated research purpose and questions were pre-loaded into the Qualtrics online survey tool, which has built-in tools that were used to present surveys and questionnaires to users, to collate responses and help to statistically analyze the results. In addition, one-on-

one Zoom video interviews were conducted with five leaders and members of participating LTGs, and these interviews were securely captured with Zoom's secure call recording software. The survey and interviews were conducted after the Life Together Groups had been meeting every other week for six months.

### **Data Analysis**

Participant responses in the freeform comment section of the participant experience survey as well as representative sample interviews were the qualitatively analyzed to unearth patterns and trends in the responses. Quantitatively, participant experience survey question responses were scored and measures of central tendency including mean and standard deviation were computed.

### **Generalizability**

This research project is significant in that it took pre-existing concepts of small group discipleship that have proven successful in the Church since the eighteenth century in the United Kingdom and United States, particularly in Methodist Church denominations (Henderson, 12), and sought to modernize and update for the contemporary context by leveraging social technology readily available in the public domain. The Covid-19 pandemic that spread around the globe in 2020 forced many churches to move their worship services online. Sometimes this was in response to an existential threat since members could no longer meet nor contribute in-person. What this research has shown is that, in addition to online services, churches can leverage commonly available social technology such as Zoom for effective small group discipleship ministry as well. Further, while the theological underpinnings of the research were largely drawn from Methodism, the research was conducted in an

interdenominational context, thus making the results easily transferrable to non-Methodist contexts, providing the sample size of research respondents proved to be large enough.

### **Project Overview**

The chapters that follow cover the historical, theological, and biblical underpinnings of this research through a detailed review of existing literature in Chapter Two, a detailed treatment of the research methodology in Chapter three, examination of the research evidence gathered in Chapter Four, and finally Chapter Five reviews lessons gleaned from the research and their generalized applicability. The appendices provide detailed documentation of research instruments, test results, and other supporting material that the reader may delve into for greater clarity of the research and its findings.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

### Overview of the Chapter

The Methodist Revival of the eighteenth century in Great Britain (Wedgewood, 128), which spread to America and many other nations around the world, employed a number of methods in its discipleship practices that could be applicable for the modern Church in many areas, including evangelism, effective discipleship, church growth, and leadership. The lessons in effective discipleship are a particular focus of this research. Thus, an examination of the historical record of this revival and its aftermath is first carried out in this literature review, to help with a good understanding of what worked and why, how decline came about over time, and how previously successful tools and methodology might be revived with a modern adaptation for the revival of the Church in the present age.

The life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament gospels, and the record of the founding of the Church and how it flourished and overcame challenges in its early years as depicted in the second through sixth chapters of the book of Acts, provide rich biblical and theological foundations for this research. The leaders of the Methodist Revival, in particular John Wesley, seem to have sought to model their effective ministry methods on the successful practices of the Jesus and the first apostles depicted in the scriptural and theological antecedents, because the Bible was their “method” book for making and helping disciples grow in grace and faith (Henderson 11, 46; Maddox, Wesley Prescription for Making Disciples 4,9; Wesley, Sermon 16 – Means of Grace). The biblical and theological foundations of sustained discipleship and growth in the church are reviewed next.

The Methodist Revival and Wesleyan discipleship and ministry practice introduced and utilized many innovations in education including the application of educational strategy to the masses and the use of group interaction strategies as an instructional methodology, particularly in adult learning (Henderson 37,127; Budd and Freeman 65). An important focus was pastoral care, and the methods used were the result of a search in how best to cater to the spiritual needs of converts and members in a growing discipleship movement in the church. Thus, this research also examines the educational foundations of effective discipleship, including the literature on adult learning and pastoral care.

John Wesley and his team sought to build a network of interlocking groups (Henderson 11), with shared benefits across the national and international Methodist network. Part of the thesis of this research is that modern social networks inadvertently implement many of the tenets of effective group discipleship methodology employed by Wesley and extend the reach of these methods using today's rich social technologies. Thus, literature on social networks and the use of software technology to implement them are reviewed in this chapter. A particular focus is the use of social technology in communal organizing and education for different age demographics.

## **Problem Statement**

### **Protestant Church Decline**

The Protestant Church has experienced decline in recent decades, relative particularly to population growth in the west. Some argue that the church faces an existential threat, with every denomination experiencing decline (Willimon, *Pastor* 216),

though recent research presents a more nuanced picture. The Pew Research Center (PRC) reports that, while the Christian portion of the population of the United States is declining in absolute numbers as well as a share of the US adult population (In US, Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace, 2019). In the same report, PRC states that the number of American adults describing themselves as Christians is down 12 percent over a decade to 65 percent. This statistic relates to self-professed Christians and, thus, does not necessarily mean that these are genuine Christians, but it does give an indication of sentiment related to the importance of Christianity in people's lives. In the same decade, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population has risen 17 percent to 26 percent. One core problem faced by the Protestant Church seems to be that it is not keeping up with population growth, and this gives the impression of a deeper decline overall than the research shows. Research by the Barna Group affirms this nuanced picture. Its published research findings indicate that the percentage of unchurched in the US increased from 30% of the population in the 1990s to 43% in 2014 and 45% in 2016 ("Churchless" 2014; "State" 2016). However, engagement with the Bible by Americans is on the rise, with more than half the population being people who "engage with the Bible on their own by using, listening to, watching, praying or using Bible text or content in any format" (Barna, "State of the Bible - Engagement" 2018). With respect to biblical engagement, from 2018 to 2019 there was an 8-point increase among "Bible Friendly and Neutral Groups," and a 9-point decrease among those disengaged, who rarely interact with the Bible if at all (Barna, "State of the Bible - Engagement" 2019).

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is the largest denomination within the mainline Protestant tradition in the US and its size in this tradition has largely held



steady, decreasing from 28% in 2007 to 25% in 2015 (Pew, “America’s Changing”). However, while some have experienced sharp decline, not all UMC jurisdictions have experienced decline. Analyzing data from the UMC General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) for the years 2010, 2014, and 2018, David Scott found that, though total UMC membership has grown in the eight years to 2018, the growth lags population growth in its host countries by about 6%. In the case of the UMC in the US, there is a slower rate of membership decline in the south relative to the north and this can be correlated to greater population growth in the southern states, which is in part due to inward migration from the northern states. Membership appears to have stagnated, relative to population growth, in the North Central, North Eastern, South Central, and South Eastern Jurisdictions while the Western Jurisdiction has experienced significant membership decline relative to rest of the UMC in the US (UMC Membership Growth and Decline Relative to Population Growth 2018).

The Pew Research Center also indicates that Western Europe has become one of the most secular regions of the world that most adults surveyed in Europe seldom attend church but still consider themselves Christian (“Being Christian” 6). Of those surveyed, the median across Europe is 46% non-churchgoing professing Christian, 18% churchgoing Christian, with 24% being religiously unaffiliated and 5% in the other religion/unknown category (“Being Christian”, 7). A specific of instance of Church decline is in Great Britain, which The Pew Research Center reports has three times as many non-practicing adults who profess to be Christian but do not attend church (55%) relative to the 18% professing Christians who attend church (“Being Christian” 7). The British national population is growing and currently stands at nearly sixty-eight million

(UK ONS, “Population estimate”), indicating that church decline is not due to a population contraction.

The British Methodist Church uses three measures to statistically capture trends of growth or decline: membership, attendance, and community roll. The first two are self-explanatory, and the community roll refers to the number of people “within the pastoral care of the local church” (Methodist Standing Order 054(7)). By each of these measures the Methodist Church in Britain experienced precipitous decline in the decade to 2013, a trend that appears to be continuing (*Statistics for Mission, 2017; Statistics for Mission, 2020*). The statistical measures indicate that from 2003 to 2013 the overall membership and attendance declined by 33%. The overall membership dropped from 304,971 to 208,738, and the attendance declined from 326,400 to 224,500, with a further 16% decline in membership in the following three years (*Statistics for Mission, 2017*). The total membership now stands at almost 170,000 with weekly attendance averaging 133,000 (*Statistics for Mission, 2020*). The attendance of children dropped 58% in the decade to 2013, an eight percent year-on-year decline, and the community roll decreased from 861,000 to 446,600. About a third of the local Methodist churches were closed between 2003 to 2013 with the number of local churches dropping from 6,286 to 4,812), (*Statistics for Mission, 2014*) and 702 more churches or 15% of the local churches permanently closed from 2013 to 2020, with total number of churches now being 4,110 (*Statistics for Mission, 2020*).

Faith Survey, a group that gathers and synthesizes statistics across all Church denominations in the United Kingdom to measure the growth/decline of Christianity, reports that in the period from 2010 to 2015, church membership across all

denominations fell from 11.2% (5.5 million members) to 10.3% of the population (Faith Survey, Christianity in the UK). These statistics are consistent with Methodist data explained above. According to Faith Survey, the Anglican and Catholic churches have the largest memberships of around 1.4 million each while the Baptist, Methodist, and Independent churches with longer histories have equivalent membership statistics. All these denominations are experiencing similar declining membership trends, with the trend looking set to continue into the foreseeable future (Faith Survey, Christianity in the UK). Faith Survey also reports that there are a group of four relatively small newer denominations (New Churches, Pentecostal, Orthodox and Smaller Denominations) which are bucking the trend and grew between 7 and 14% in the same decade to 2015. However, their overall membership and attendance are relatively small, with the aggregate membership in 2015 standing at approximately 1.3 million. The Fresh Expressions movement, a Church of England initiative that started in 2004, and which has heavy investment from the Methodist and Anglican churches, is helping to birth new discipleship units. Faith Survey estimates that 61,000 of these were started in the decade to 2015.

### **Young Adults, the “Missing Generation”**

The decline in Church membership, attendance, and participation is particularly precipitous in young adults. This decline has a long history. In 2011, Kinnaman lamented the paradox whereby teenagers were the most religiously active Americans, but twentysomethings were the least religiously active. He described the eighteen to twenty-nine age demographics as the “black hole of church attendance,” and the missing in action from most congregations in the US (Kinnaman 22). Further, he cited as reason a

fading away of much spiritual energy when young people are in their twenties (22).

Kinnaman revisited his young adult research eight years after publishing his initial findings in *You Lost Me*. Their 2019 research report states, “the percentage of young-adult dropouts has increased from 59 to 64 percent.” (Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%, 2019). However, the situation is not altogether bleak. They found that ten percent of young Christians in the United States, whom they dubbed “Resilient Christians,” are rather steadfast in their faith walk, “follow Jesus and are resiliently faithful... In spite of the tensions they feel between church and everyday life, they keep showing up.” (Kinnaman and Matlock 31).

In Britain, the young adult demographic who are largely not found in church have been labelled the “Missing Generation.” Technically, the phrase “Missing Generation” (MG) refers to the largely 20-40 age demographic, Generations X and Y in sociological terminology, who have been identified as largely absent from congregations (Clutterbuck and Janowski 2). The British Methodist Church conducted a two-year research on the MG and the causes of the phenomenon in the Methodist Church. The research was led by Liz Clutterbuck and Monica Janowski with a formal findings report produced in June 2011. An overarching theme uncovered in that research is that, especially to the MG demographic, the conventional church does not easily fit, socially and spiritually, into modern life, and that new models of doing and being Church are needed (Clutterbuck and Janowski 3). Interestingly, while 82% of those surveyed have a negative view of the Church and have left, the research found that MG demographic are drawn to particular local churches, Methodist or otherwise, which meet their needs (4). Further, the MG value the mixture of modern social media technology and the in-person contact afforded

by local church contexts that meet their needs (6). Given the focus of this research, it is notable that the Clutterbuck and Janowski research found 68% of those surveyed expressing an interest on being involved in small group contexts in Church that had specific characteristics (21). The top desirable characteristics expressed are, the opportunity to discuss the Bible/Theology/Ethics, belonging to a close-knit community, and being in a safe space which enabled them share life with others (22).

### **Biblical and Theological Foundations**

#### **From Spiritual Birth and Infancy to Adulthood**

Discipleship, the notion of following Christ in word and deed, seems to be modelled in The New Testament in a set of metaphors that paint the picture that a person's spiritual journey in Christ is akin to the natural physical development of a person, from gestation and birth through childhood nurture and growth into adulthood. Jesus first used the phrase "born again," in conversation with Nicodemus, to explain how one enters the kingdom of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit (John 3). Paul aligns with what Jesus asserted to Nicodemus, when he explains that faith in Christ justifies a person with God, granting access to and peace with God and, as a result, God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5). Peter urged the recipients of his first letter to see themselves as "newborn babies" and, thus, "crave pure spiritual milk," to ensure their spiritual growth (NIV, 1 Pet. 2:2). Specifically, the spiritual growth Peter was talking about is, growth "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (KJV, 2 Pet. 3:18). Paul uses similar metaphors in his letters. To the Corinthian Church, he explained that he had to relate to them as "infants in Christ," feeding them "with milk, not solid food," because they were not ready for solids, since

they exhibited an absence of love and an abundance of behaviors such as jealousy and quarrelling amongst themselves. (NRSV, 1 Cor. 3:2-3) Further, Paul talked about the mature Christian mindset, which apparently includes the choice to forget what lies behind and press towards the purposes for which one is called in Christ (Phil. 3:10-15). The writer of Hebrews berates some in his audience who ought to have grown up to the point of being teachers but were still in need of teachers to teach them the fundamentals of the faith. (Heb. 5:11-14).

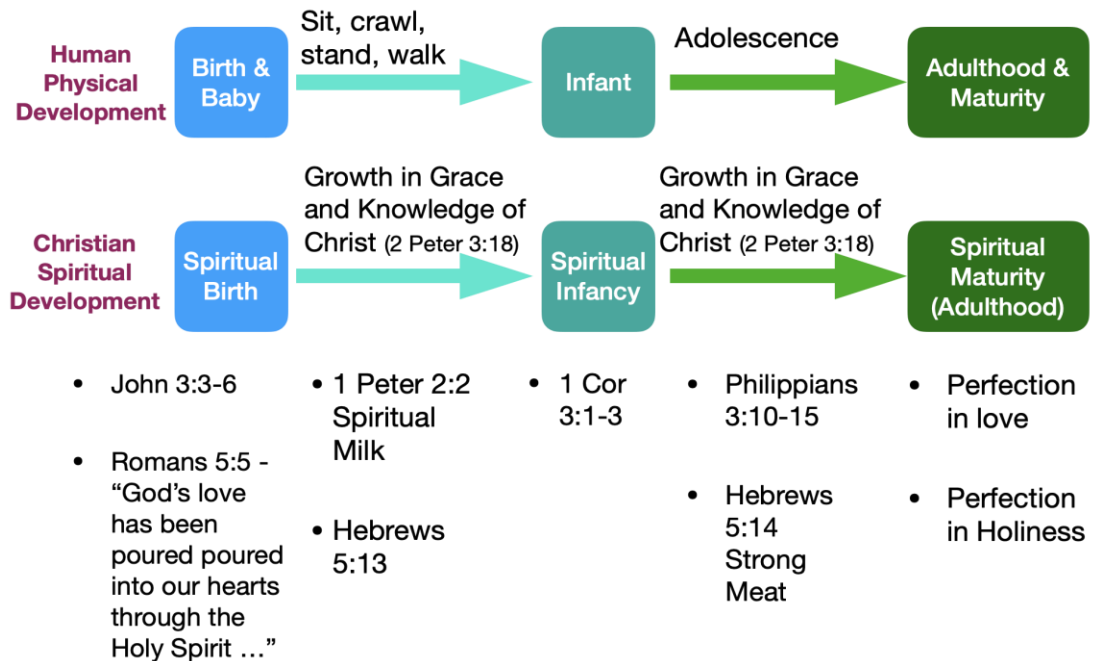


Fig. 2.1. Human Physical Development vs Christian Spiritual Development

### Jesus and the Early Church Modelled Discipleship

It is instructive to examine how Jesus conducted his ministry in first century Palestine. At the very start of his ministry at age thirty (Luke 3:13), he handpicked twelve men to live and work with him (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-21, 2:13-14, 3:13-19; Luke

5:3-11; John 1:29-51). In this sense they were followers or disciples who learnt how to follow Christ through a practical apprenticeship. The disciples watched as he embodied and demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit and God's kingdom in a ministry that sought to fulfill the manifesto Jesus outlined, to wit, to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19). He taught them to pray (Matt. 6:1-18; Luke 11:1-5), and with many parables and stories taught them how the kingdom of God works (for instance, parables outlined in Matt. 13 and Mark 4). In fact, what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer came about because the disciples watched as Jesus prayed by himself and, when he finished praying, asked him to show them how to pray (Luke 11:1).

Jesus not only provided a discipleship apprenticeship for the disciples, he also worked with them in person. Gregory Moore points out that Jesus modelled how discipleship in community works (Good Friends, A Wesleyan Way of Discipleship 2019). Jesus had an inner circle of three, Peter, James, and John); then the twelve disciples that included the three; then the seventy he sent out in pairs.

### **Wesleyan Discipleship Modelled on Biblical Patterns**

The New Testament model of the development of a life in Christ seems to have been the basis of the discipleship that John and Charles Wesley taught and practiced in the eighteenth-century Methodist Revival in Britain. On the night of May 24, 1738, in a Moravian meeting at Aldersgate in London, John Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed," and found that he could now trust that he was pardoned. (Maddox, *Change of Affections* 11). In the lead up to this Aldersgate experience, John Wesley's focus

“sharpened on the importance of “feeling” the love of God,” and he longed to sense “God’s reconciling love for him.” (Maddox, *Change of Affections* 11). Subsequently, John Wesley encouraged those who heard him to both pray for, and expect to experience God’s love shed abroad in their hearts (Maddox, *Change of Affections* 11). Charles Wesley, who had a similar experience a few days prior to John’s, theologically articulated this experience in a hymn he wrote, asking “How can a sinner know his sins on earth forgiven?” and answering, “The things which freely of his love He hath on us bestowed: His Spirit to us he gave, and dwells in us we know, the witness in ourselves we have ...” (J. Wesley, et al 189). Wesleyan theology on the start of life in Christ includes experiencing the love in Christ that reconciles one to God, through faith that justifies, and knowledge of the love of God freely bestowed in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley considered the Bible to be not only his source of doctrine but also the “method book” for life in Christ and, particularly in his role as a revival leader, for the important practical task of leading and instructing others in the way of Christ. (Henderson 46). The phrase “grow in grace,” used by Peter in his second letter, was one Wesley quoted in quite numerous sermons, including “The New Birth,” “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” “Self-Denial,” “The Good Steward,” and “Christian Perfection.” In his later years he lamented that as some young Methodist preachers grew in years, they did not grow in grace at all but rather grew “less simple, less alive to,” and less devoted to God (“The Wisdom of God’s Counsels”). But what did Wesley mean by growing in grace? Wesley’s understanding of the word “disciple” helps to explain his understanding of growing in grace.



Though he recognized the word “disciple” as a biblical and traditional name for the followers of Christ, John Wesley seemed reticent to use the word, lest he appear to ascribe it to either Methodism or the Christian life (Maddox, *Wesley Prescription for Making Disciples* 3). Maddox explains that this might be because of three connotations of the term “disciple” Wesley was not keen on. First, it seemed to mean persons who unquestioningly accept teachings of some human leader; second, it seems to have the connotation of an “adherent” and, third it seems to have implied being a “pupil.” (Maddox, *Wesley Prescription for Making Disciples* 3). Wesley did not find any of these connotations satisfactory because he deemed discipleship incomplete until a person who has experienced new birth in Christ is “fully transformed into Christ’s likeness.” (Maddox, *Wesley Prescription for Making Disciples* 4). Further, to Wesley, an indispensable part of being a disciple of Christ was a “regular participation in the means of grace” (Maddox, *Wesley Prescription for Making Disciples* 9). Wesley includes in these the means or conduits of grace, prayer, study of scripture, participation in Christian community and fellowship, and partaking in the sacraments (“The Means of Grace”). Wesley further emphasizes that it is “impossible to grow in grace” if a Christian does not take up their cross, which includes fasting and early rising for prayer and study (“The Wisdom of God’s Counsels”).

In addition to growing in grace, Wesley believed holiness to be both fundamental and mandatory in the Christian life. Further, Wesley taught that there is “no holiness but social holiness,” by which he meant that holiness “was best nurtured through a supportive and disciplined community.” (Watson, *Pursuing* 2). The teaching on discipleship in the eighteenth-century Methodist Revival was that a Christian disciple must live a holy life

enabled by growth in grace and knowledge of Christ, a primary conduit of this enabling grace being a person's active participation in supportive Christian community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the twentieth-century German Lutheran minister and martyr, agreed with Wesley on the efficacy of Christian community in effective discipleship, to wit, "visible community is grace," meaning that even the act of Christians gathering around God's word and the sacraments is enabled by God's grace. Bonhoeffer expands, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer" (Bonhoeffer 28).

John Wesley set about putting structures in place to help Methodist Christians "watch over one another in love."<sup>8</sup> (Wesley, *General Rules in Works* 9 69). These were the Society, Class, and Band Meetings, which were structures designed to "bring Wesley's vision for social holiness to life." (K. Watson). Henderson explains that Wesley's model was the combination of several "interlocking group techniques to construct a ladder of personal spiritual improvement" (11), with each group in the Wesley system representing an educational mode (83). These groups are "The Society: The Cognitive Mode" (83), "Class Meeting: The Behavioral Mode" (93), "Band: The Affective Mode" (112), "Select Society: The Training Mode" (121), and the "Penitent Bands: The Rehabilitative Mode" (125). The Society is what later evolved into Methodist churches. The class meeting consisted of a group of typically five to twelve people who met weekly to discuss how things were going with their souls. The bands were smaller unisex groupings in which members were deeply open with each other on their spiritual state, and struggles with sin.

Henderson provides detailed descriptions of how these modes worked together to achieve the overall effect. The society, which evolved into the local church, provided opportunity for cognitive learning with “little or no provision ... for personal response or feedback” (84), and consists of the public use of “lecture, preaching, public reading, hymn singing, and ‘exhorting’” (84). “The major aim was to present scriptural truth, and have it clearly understood” (93). The class meeting was designed as a “set of instruments designed for behavioral change” (93), whose subject matter was the individual’s walk with God, and “personal experience, not doctrinal ideology or biblical information” (100). It consisted of up to twelve people and was a “coeducational experience in small group development” (97) which was mandatory for every Methodist as a prerequisite to Society membership (95). Henderson states that, the class meeting has “elicited the praise of educators and religious leaders as a profoundly effective educational tool,” which leaders include Henry Ward Beecher and D. L. Moody (93). Bands, the affective mode, was a voluntary group of up to three members and went a step further than the class meeting. “It was what Wesley termed ‘close conversation,’ by which he meant soul-searching examination ... of motives and heartfelt impressions” (113). The Select Society consisted of a group “hand-picked ... to model or exemplify,” and “provide a training experience in the doctrines and methods” of Methodism (121). Lastly, in Wesley’s system, the Penitent Bands represented the rehabilitative mode “specially designed for those who lacked the will power or personal discipline to live to the behavioral demands of the class meeting but still had a desire to overcome their personal problems” (Henderson 25).

### Effective Discipleship

Kenda Dean outlines what it means to be a disciple of Christ, arguing that faith, for Christians, means “cleaving to the person, the God-man, of Jesus Christ, joining a pilgrim journey with other lovers and following him into the world.” (Dean 7). In Wesley’s model described above, ample provision was made in the Class Meeting to bring about the behavioral changes that, over time, help to transform the believer into the image of Christ. In the modern context, James Smith describes effective discipleship as a set of “embodied practices” (26) that collectively work together towards a person’s spiritual formation. These practices include the liturgical emphasis in weekly worship including scriptural reading and preaching, the use of Sunday School as an aid to cognitive learning, the curriculum followed in Sunday School, the demographic-oriented ministries shaped to meet the spiritual and other needs of specific age groups, the emphasis on Bible study and deepening prayer, and a focus on community building and engaging with the world. The approach might be what James Smith characterizes as “formation of the imagination by affective practices” (38) by establishing a “connection between liturgy, learning, and formation.” (39). Smith offers a view of education that seems to encapsulate the education-heavy spiritual formation trajectory followed by many protestant churches. To Smith, education involves a “holistic endeavor that involves the whole person, including our bodies, in a process of formation that aims our desires, primes our imagination, and orients us to the world—all before we ever start *thinking* about it” (40). Thus, good educational practice that covers word, thought, and deed is at the heart of good discipleship.

Maddox argues that Wesley highlighted three factors in a typical church life that are crucial for effective discipleship. These are, “adequate understanding of Christian doctrine,” “corresponding provision of appropriate Christian discipline” to match good Christian doctrine, and the “Christian practice of self-denial.” (Maddox, *Wesley's Prescription for Making Disciples* 3). The class meeting was at the heart of “appropriate Christian discipline,” making it possible for Wesley and his team to provide pastoral care to the masses.

### **Young Adults, “Resilient Exiles”**

Kinnaman and Matlock in their book *Faith for Exiles* present analysis and findings of 2019 research by the Barna Group into the US young adult demographic and their thought patterns and attitudes to Christianity and the Church. They posit that young adults are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of the “digital Babylon” that includes the “binge television, immersive gaming, and social media” which is choking their “deep spiritual longings” (16). However, their thesis is that, while young non-Christians are staying clear of Christianity and young Christians are decamping from the Church, young adults can still form and be formed into disciples of Jesus who thrive as exiles in digital Babylon (15). They offer five solutions, characterized as practices, for making disciples in this digital Babylon:

- Practice 1: To form a resilient identity, experience intimacy with Jesus.
- Practice 2: In a complex and anxious age, develop the muscles of cultural discernment.
- Practice 3: When isolation and mistrust are the norms, forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships.

- Practice 4: To ground and motivate an ambitious generation, train for vocational discipleship
- Practice 5: Curb entitlement and self-centered tendencies by engaging in countercultural mission. (Kinnaman and Matlock 34-35)

These Practices align well with the ethos, objectives, and practices of the Wesleyan class meeting, which was designed to facilitate personal growth in faith and grace within the context of an intimate small group, accountability for spiritual stewardship, the sharing and bearing of each other's burdens, and "speaking the truth in love" (Henderson, 14). Thus, young adult and intergenerational class meetings can largely fulfill these practices in the Church.

### **Adult Learning and Social Network Foundations**

The class meeting model was primarily aimed at helping adult learn to be disciples of Christ through using small group methodology. Thus, andragogical foundations are important in this study. In addition, the class meetings were a network of small groups, in effect constituting a social network.

### **Wesley and Andragogy**

Albert C. Outler posits that the Methodist class meeting that was the bedrock of the group discipleship system implemented by John Wesley in the eighteenth-century Methodist Revival in Britain was a *schola animarus*, that is, "a school for growing souls," as well as an important agency for permanent Christian revolution (Outler ix). Though Wesley established the Kingswood School for children just outside Bristol (Heitzenrater, 256), his primary focus seems to have been on the adult masses who came under the pastoral care of the Methodist movement, and how to facilitate what he deemed

complete discipleship which, Maddox points out, involved a person who had experienced new birth in Christ becoming, over time, “fully transformed into Christ’s likeness.”

(Wesley Prescription for Making Disciples 4).

Wesley was both the leader of the Methodist Revival and an innovator in education, and many of the tenets of his educational philosophy and methodology are traceable to his childhood upbringing at home (Henderson, 34). Henderson provides important insights into the beginnings of Wesleyan innovations in Methodist ministry. The seeds were sown by his parents who were keen on encouraging personal spiritual growth in themselves and others, including their children (37). An innovator in community education (38), Susanna Wesley home-schooled her children at a very young age (Hall, 75). This education included making time for a one-on-one session with each of her children every week to discuss and evaluate their spiritual growth (Henderson 37; Hall 75-76). John was introduced, by his father Samuel, to the group discipleship model used by the French Catholic nobleman Monsignor de Renty (Henderson 48). He also became acquainted with the Moravians and their way of life during his missionary stay in Georgia in 1737 (Henderson 52), and then visited their home settlement in Herrnhut, Germany, in 1738, to study their communal discipleship model (Henderson 58). Wesley’s wide reading also informed his thinking. This included the works of Voltaire and John Locke, an Oxford-educated innovative educational thinker and writer (Hall, 105). Thus, Henderson surmises, the group discipleship system Wesley designed, implemented, and refined was an educational framework whose format was largely in shape by 1742, with its methodology evolving gradually into a “unified and cohesive system” (33). For spiritual nurture and moral development of the the urban masses, Wesley effectively

applied an educational strategy (Henderson 37), and the group interaction strategies employed “coalesce into an instructional methodology” (Henderson 127). Andragogy is “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Budd and Freeman, 65). To the extent that Wesley’s unified and cohesive system was largely focused on helping adults learn in word and deed, it may be deemed andragogical.

### **Social Network Analysis (SNA) Foundations**

Henderson’s framing of the Wesleyan discipleship system as a set of “interlocking group techniques” (11) evokes the imagery of a network of groups. Such a network lends itself to Social Network Analysis (SNA). In the contemporary Methodism context, which has evolved from the early days of British and American Methodism, the United Methodist Church (UMC) is essentially a social network of people organized in local churches, with each church having many small groups within it. The British Methodist Church is self-described as a “connexion,” and the UMC sees itself as “connectional,” that is, a network. Local churches are aggregated in a loosely connected fashion into the larger group construct named the Annual Conference. The conference is presided over by the President in the British Methodist Church and by a Bishop in the UMC. The Wesleyan class meeting is a small non-gendered group of eight to twelve people in a local church who meet weekly or biweekly to share with each other their Christian lived experiences. The mutual sharing includes challenges, struggles, encouragement, and prayer. In SNA terms, the individuals in the church are the nodes in the network. As posited by Granovetter, ties between nodes can be strong, weak, or absent (1361). In the Methodist network, all these tie types exist. Between people in different churches the ties are typically absent but can be weak depending on whether



they are in a leadership or pastoral role in their church or at the conference level. That the conference is able to hold all the churches together seems to be due to a strong conference leadership structure and team but might also be due to the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1365). Within a particular church the predominant ties are strong and weak. These network characteristics are not unique to the UMC and the Methodist Church of Great Britain. Across the globe, Methodist Conferences in different countries use Wesley's networked system to varying degrees. Kwanglim Methodist Church (KMC) in Seoul, South Korea, reportedly the largest Methodist Church in the world, has a membership of about one hundred thousand. It is a keen adherent of Wesley's methods and has used them to grow from one hundred and fifty members in 1971 to its present size (Sundo Kim , Miracle of Five Minutes). The class meeting is central to their method of discipleship methodology.

From a sociological standpoint, the Wesleyan class meeting shares similarities with communes. The work of Benjamin Zablocki and others resulted in the Urban Communes Data Set (UCDS), a longitudinal, multi-wave study of sixty social groups in what is known as the Urban Communes Project (Zablocki; Arceneaux 125). In the Urban Communes Project, a commune consists of three families or five non-blood-related adults who shared a particular thing in common such as a voluntary membership in some entity, a geographic location, and so forth. What held the commune together could be a common enterprise or program that was spiritual, cultural, political, social-psychological, or a combination of these (Arceneaux 125). The commune sample consisted mostly of young adults, more men than women, with a majority having Protestant backgrounds but with Catholic and Jewish representations. Almost 50% of the commune sample had pre-

existed for two or more years, 10% pre-existed for four or more years, 25% were started in the same year as the study, and one commune had been in existence for eight years. Fifty percent were located in the inner city and transitional neighborhoods, with the rest in city limits and suburban areas (Arceneaux 126). The communes study used a sociometric instrument to map the social relations within each commune. The instruments enabled the measurement of the importance of power or hierarchy and loving as in communion, equality, or equity in the functioning of the commune (Arceneaux, 128). The structure of the network was then determined from this relational data using Bradley's model (Bradley and Roberts 105).

SNA might help churches in a Methodist conference to better understand how they might grow through the building of resilient small commune-style subnetworks in the form of active class meetings. The UCDS study and secondary analysis carried out by researchers give clues on how this might be achieved, involving several key measures. The first is the structural balance of the class meeting commune network. A class meeting network seems intuitively to be, in essence, a sentiment network and a theoretical framework exists for testing this assertion (Rawlings and Friedkin).

Secondly, while intuitively the class meeting network is a sentiment network, Scott Feld's Focus Theory provides a sociological framework in which shared relations to foci such as persons, places, social positions, activities, and groups create positive sentiments indirectly through the generation of positively valued interaction (1017). Feld argues that when individuals are brought together by shared foci, the network has greater transitivity, there is less bridging in the network, and the more constraining the focus the greater the density of the network (1023-1024). Transitivity refers to the tendency for two

individuals both tied to a third to also be tied to each other. Feld argues that two individuals tied to a third may share a focus with the third, and when two share a focus with a third they share that focus with each other and are likely to be tied to each other. Density refers to the extent to which the associates of an individual are tied to each other. Perfect transitivity means all the associates know each other. If associates are drawn from the same focus, then the more constraining the focus, the greater of the individual's network. In sum, Feld's focus model highlights some of the benefits of using SNA for the Church, which benefits include a closer and stronger community of believers who are interconnected through the class meeting network. The diagram below is what Field used to illustrate the virtuous cycle of his focus model.

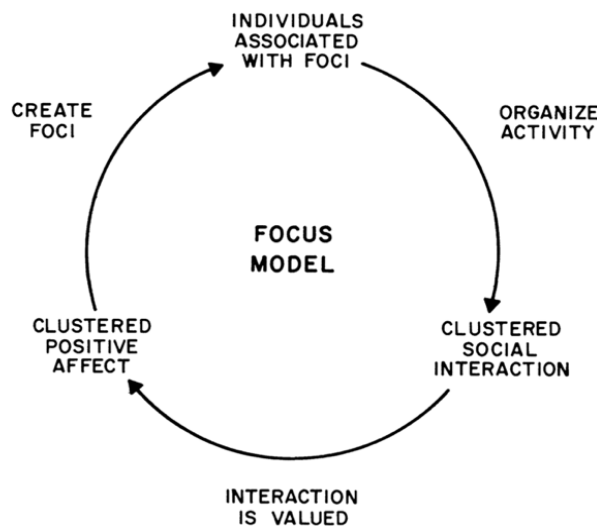


Fig. 2.2. Dynamics of the Feld Focus Model (1026)

The third SNA measure worth seems applicable in the church class meeting network is resilience. Arceneaux argues that resilience of a network is its ability to retain one or more specified properties under perturbation, and that for a small network, connectedness and symmetry are of prime importance (Arceneaux, iii). Her secondary analysis of the

UCDS commune data set led a theoretical formulation of love and power relations among members of a commune. A fourth applicable SNA model in the church context for class meetings is the Small World Phenomenon, which espouses the benefits of “high local clustering and short global separation” nature of sparse decentralized networks (Watts), which the Methodist system seems to represent quite well. The commune-like class meetings are all at the local level. A particular church might have quite a large cluster of these small groups, each group being a small network. The local church is then decentralized within the conference structure.

### **Blended Learning**

Blended learning is the combination of online learning and in-person instruction for the purpose of enhancing the process of learning (Simonova, Blended Learning Conference 2018, 69). Studies by the non-profit Educause found most students preferring courses with online components (Simonova 2018; Educause ECAR 2011). Blended learning offers flexibility and novel ways of learning using technology for both teachers and students, and facilitates skills development using state of the art devices and software (Simonova, 2018; Amaral & Shank, 2010). Simonova posits that blended learning has been applied in high education for years with, more recent implementations to be found within “smart environments and approached through smart devices” (2018). The criteria which influence the choice of blended learning as a pedagogical method include the learning objective and outcomes, motivation to learn, the level of starting knowledge, and the appropriateness of blended learning in the particular contexts (Simonova 2018; Uskov et al 2017).

In the particular case of the class meeting, where lived Christian experiences of members are shared as a matter of course, literature on research into digital storytelling in the blended learning context is of particular interest. Lui et al. define digital storytelling as “a creative activity of telling stories with video, audio, images and other multimedia types.” Their 2018 study found that the sense of belonging of freshman university student participants in their increased significantly, especially among the male students, during group assignment when digital storytelling was employed. They argue that digital storytelling is flexible in nature, making it a natural fit into a blended learning context (Lui et al. 2018).

Any considerations of blended learning usage in the church setting for class meetings must necessarily factor in demographics. Internet usage generally falls the older the demographic, with the age 75+ being an important threshold of decline in usage that seems to be in line with overall deterioration in cognitive function (Klimova et al 2018; Klimova 2017). Blended learning also lends itself to collaborative learning using peer-to-peer technologies, where students work and learn together in an online space. This is the case particularly among technology-savvy young people. Tsuei and Huang found in their research that young students had positive attitudes toward online peer learning, with girls showing a significantly stronger positive attitude (Tsuei & Huang 2018).

### **Research Design Literature**

This research study is an intervention into the life of a church to introduce the Wesleyan class meeting style small group into their discipleship practice and to determine its effect in that context. For this kind of project, Sensing provides detailed guidance in research design including the clear articulation of objectives, tasks to be

carried out, representative sampling, types of data to be collected, ethical issues related to informed consent of participants, tools and protocols for data gathering, and the methods and procedures for analyzing data gathered (Sensing 50-78). Sensing posits that a multi-method qualitative research that gathers the most relevant data is appropriate for the kind of intervention research undertaken in this project (52). He argues that the multi-methods approach “allows various perspectives to engage in a critical dialogue that leads to several sets of rich data,” which in turn makes for “deeper understandings” (54).

Sensing advocates a three-step process: Rationale, intervention, and evaluation. The rationale lays out the objectives of the research, intervention includes the actual on-site tasks, and evaluation involves the analysis of data gathered to tease out findings. The specific methods used in this intervention are qualitative, to wit, preparation of sample space using lectures, experience surveys, and participant interviews. With respect to evaluation, Sensing advocates focus on the research problem as the collected data is studied (70). In particular, he recommends the use of triangulation to obtain richer interpretative results, including data triangulation that involves using a variety of data sources and theory triangulation that uses multiple perspectives.

### **Summary of Literature**

The literature review in this chapter has reviewed the decline of the protestant church in the western context, particularly in the United States and in the specific case of the US United Methodist Church. This decline is the problem that this research project is seeking to find some mitigations to. The proposed solution examined has as its basis the theological foundations of Christian discipleship as practiced by Jesus and his first disciples in first century Palestine, and the practices followed by the first disciples and

apostles in the rapid growth of the early Church. The historical application of these discipleship practices in the eighteenth-century Methodist Revival in Great Britain, which spawned American Methodism, has also been examined in some detail as a model that might hold clues to stemming the decline, and revitalization of the UMC. In particular, the Wesleyan discipleship small group construct, the class meeting, is of interest in this study as the tool that could be used by churches for sustained revival and discipleship of local church members.

Given that the class meeting is an old conceptual and practical discipleship tool that was first introduced in the eighteenth century, and which has fallen into general disuse, its re-introduction seems to require adaptation to the modern context. Advances in educational methodology and technology present opportunities for using modern tools to make the class meeting a more engaging, enriching, and relevant experience. In addition, modern Social Network Analysis (SNA) models may be applied to the class meeting to help the church better understand its efficacy and how best to leverage it in the wider church network to support church revitalization and growth. This project posits that a blended learning approach to implementing the class meeting in the contemporary context is feasible and would make them more useful to the local church. Thus, the literature on blended learning has also been examined and its concepts elucidated.

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter provides details of the research project and how it was conducted. It includes an overview of the nature of the project and details the reasons for selecting participants, ethical consideration, participant demographic and roles, instruments and methods used, data collected, and the analysis carried out to reach the conclusions and recommendations that are outlined in this document.

### **Nature and Purpose of the Projects**

This research project was a pioneering intervention assisted by software technology to create a new discipleship ministry based, in essence, on the template of the class meeting format of discipleship small groups in the Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina. Prior to this project no discipleship small groups of a similar format existed in this church. Thus, methods including teaching seminars and a pilot were used to seed the project, after which four discipleship small groups, christened Life Together Groups (LTGs), were formed in August 2020 wholly facilitated by online conferencing software technology given the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic and governmental restrictions on in-person gatherings. A participant experience survey including a free form comment section and participant interviews were the qualitative research methods. Quantitatively, the participant experience survey question responses were scored and measures of central tendency including mean and standard deviation were computed.

The purpose of the intervention with attendant research instruments was to evaluate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral effectiveness of the Wesleyan small



group discipleship construct, the class meeting, in the contemporary context when implemented in a blended learning fashion, using in-person and remote interactions facilitated by a software-based social technology, in particular the Zoom conferencing platform. The underlying premise of this purpose, which the project sought to validate, is that in the contemporary context with seemingly continual decline in the western protestant church and pervasive technology driven culture, the impact of the Wesleyan class meeting can help to revive the church if implemented in a manner that maintains its substance but adapts its method to the modern context. The qualitative and quantitative evaluation of Participant Experience Survey and interviews was the method of evaluation used to get a measure of commitment, effect on behavior, and potential impact on the witness and mission of the participating local church.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ #1. What changes are required to adapt and implement the Wesleyan small group discipleship construct, the class meeting, for relevant use in a blended learning model leveraging modern social technology such as Zoom?**

To answer this question, two teaching seminars and the results of two pilot class meetings organized by the education committee of the church was reviewed and used to seed the research and get a sense of what it takes to interest congregants in discipleship small groups. The length of meeting and template of the meeting's content were also experimented with, starting with the Wesleyan class meeting format and adding elements such as a short period of communal prayer in each meeting.

**RQ #2. What was the impact of small group discipleship facilitated by blended learning using social technology (Zoom) on the spiritual lives of participants?**

To answer this question, a class meeting post-test in the form of a 25-question user experience survey questionnaire was used to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of current active participants in the Life Together Groups. Questions 1-5 of the questionnaire addressed knowledge; Q6-10 addressed attitudes; Q11-15 addressed behaviors; and Q16-25 covered feedback on the meeting format, content, and the use of Zoom technology to facilitate the meetings.

**RQ #3. What lessons can be drawn from the use of a blended learning approach facilitated by software for class meetings that might help with its adoption among the social media savvy young adult as well as the older demographic?**

To answer this question, one-to-one recorded interviews with a represented sample of young adult and older participants was used.

**Ministry Context(s)**

Then ministry context of the research project is the Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina. The geographical coverage of the Congregation spans the Duke University community, both on-campus and off-campus, Durham county, and surrounding counties in North Carolina. While most members of the Congregation live in Durham and neighboring counties, members who have moved further afield are able to continue their participation in worship services and other programs that are mediated by social technology, in particular the Zoom online conferencing software.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

The criteria for the selection of participants were:

1. People in a position of spiritual leadership in the Congregation were invited because of their overall grasp of the realities of the local context and understanding of the pastoral needs of the community.
2. Lay participants in Life Together Groups, the typical recipients of pastoral care in the community, were selected for an evaluation of their knowledge, attitudes and experience, and feedback on the meeting template and content and the use of facilitation technology.
3. Young adults, aged 18 through 34, were selected and invited to participate because they represent the age demographic with the highest rates of decline in membership and participation in the protestant Church, and the United Methodist Church in particular.
4. Adults over 35-55 years of age willing to participate in the research were included and invited to join with young adults in a Life Together Group as a representative sample of intergenerational discipleship community. The reason is to evaluate the relevance of blended learning in an intergenerational discipleship small group.

### **Description of Participants**

The participants in the research project were:

1. The senior pastor and lay leaders of the education committee were invited to participate in the research. This group was selected because their leadership of

the Congregation and its education programs puts them in a unique position to create and manage Life Together Groups and increase their footprint in the life of the Congregation.

2. Life together group leaders are the conveners and facilitators of the class meeting/LTG. They are mostly lay people who participated in the pilot of the LTG concept that was a training ground for LTG leaders. They were selected because of their leadership role in the LTG, giving them an intimate knowledge of its dynamics and impact.
3. Class meeting/LTG members are generally church members who have voluntarily joined an LTG. This group was selected because they are the direct participants in and beneficiaries of LTGs and can provide insights of what works and does not work in their context.
4. Intergenerational class meeting/LTG are a mixture of young adults and members over 40 years of age in the same class meeting. The reason for investigating this group's participation was to get insights of the challenges of this kind of class meeting and whether this model would continue to work well for the future.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations for the project were informed by and in compliance with the US National Institute of Health Protecting Human Research Participants guidelines and rules. Specifically, these ethical considerations included:

1. obtaining written permission from participants before they were involved in the research. Participants were clearly informed of the nature and objectives of

the research project as part of the process of obtaining their permission in writing.

2. ensuring privacy protection, confidentiality, and anonymity of research participants. All electronic data collected was encrypted in transit or storage where possible and access was restricted with passwords. Further, outputs of the research did not include any personally identifiable information about participants and the published research results is a synthesis of findings gleaned from all participant responses and quantitative analysis in the form of aggregated statistical outcomes.
3. offering or giving no payment to any participants for their involvement in the research.
4. choosing participants who had no prior power relationship with the researcher, such as employment and/or other relationship with a power dynamic. Care was taken to ensure that participants were not directly selected by the researcher but by leaders in the North Carolina Conference of the UMC and pastors of local churches who participated in the research.

### **Instrumentation**

The instruments used in the research for data collection included two teaching seminars, an attitude survey and experience questionnaire, and one-on-one interviews.

First, two teaching seminars were organized to explain the class meeting model of discipleship to members of the Congregation, and a twelve-week pilot of two discipleship small groups made up of members of the education committee and three seminary students from Duke Divinity School. The content of the teaching seminars was derived

from historical, theological, and biblical concepts outlined in Chapter Two, the literature review for this project. A template for the discipleship groups was developed with a view to using it in the ongoing groups post the pilot. This template is available in Appendix A.

Second, an attitude survey and experience questionnaire, an instrument used for evaluating the knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and feedback of the participants, was employed six months after starting four Life Together Groups. Some questionnaire responses were designed to be scored and quantitatively analyzed statistically. Provision was also made for freeform textual comments from respondents, and these were qualitatively analyzed for insights.

Three, one-on-one recorded interviews with a representative sample of participants was the instrument used to collect data about the participant's experience in the project. It information collected during the interviews complemented the data collected with the attitude survey and experience questionnaire.

The type of research used in the project was a pioneering intervention to introduce discipleship small group ministry into an existing church, the Congregation at Duke Chapel, with the help of social technology coupled with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The research was appropriate for the evaluation of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral effectiveness of a blended learning approach for the Wesleyan class meeting in the ministry context. The mixed methods utilized included pre-test teaching seminars and pilot, post-test experience survey, participant interviews, and statistical analysis. The mixed methods provided triangulation and cross-validation of results. The methods used and instrument designs followed standard protocols for such instruments as outlined in literature including Tim Sensing's *Qualitative Research*.

Collectively, the multiplicity of instruments ensured a high degree of trustworthiness and generalization of findings.

### **Data Collection**

The research utilized two pre-intervention seminars, a pilot, a post-intervention experience questionnaire, and post-intervention interviews to collect data. The survey, questionnaire, and interview protocols used are those outlined by Tim Sensing (103-120) and Earl Babbie (2010). These protocols stipulate the coding of questions and standardized processes for their usage and analysis. Appendix A lists the survey, questionnaire and interview questions used as well as the meeting template first used and refined in the pilot and now used on an ongoing basis by the Life Together Groups.

### **Data Analysis**

Participant responses in the freeform comment section of the participant experience survey as well as representative sample interviews were qualitatively analyzed to unearth patterns and trends in the responses. Quantitatively, participant experience survey question responses were scored and measures of central tendency including mean and standard deviation were computed.

## CHAPTER 4 EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

### Overview of the Chapter

Effective discipleship since the early days of the Church, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts in the New Testament, has involved the pastoral nurture of individuals within small groups in the larger local Christian community. The Wesleyan discipleship construct, the class meeting, is based on this model and was very effective in the spiritual nurture and formation of many Christians within Methodism from the eighteenth-century revival in England through the rapid growth of American Methodism that started in the late eighteenth and continued through early twentieth century. Over time it has fallen into disuse. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral effectiveness of the Wesleyan class meeting in the contemporary context when implemented in a blended learning fashion, using in-person and remote interactions facilitated by readily available social media software in the public domain, in particular Zoom, in the Congregation at Duke Chapel in Durham, North Carolina.

This chapter presents the evidence gathered in the research project. This evidence includes a description of the participants of the study, the qualitative evidence gathered in the pre-test, the post-test participant experience survey data and their further statistical analysis, and the data gleaned from post-test interviews. The chapter concludes with five major findings obtained from an in-depth review of the data.



## Participants

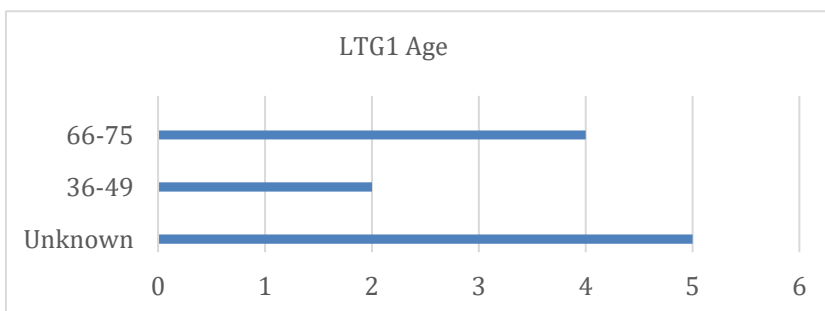
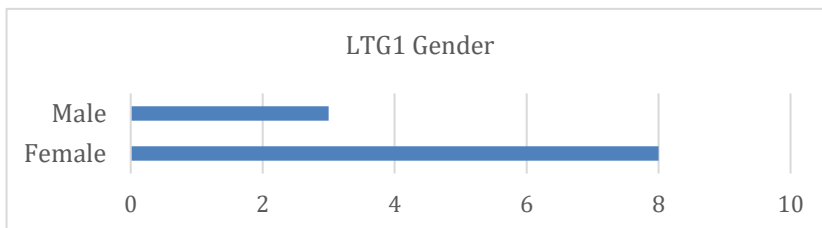
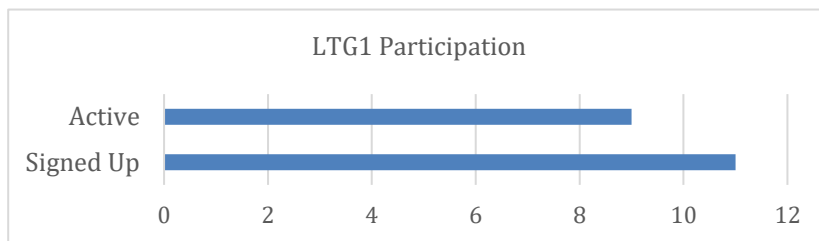
Most of the participants of this research project were regular worshippers at Duke Chapel and participants in the programs of the Congregation at Duke Chapel. In addition, a number of young adult Duke University students were invited to participate in order to facilitate the study of the intergenerational small group format. The education committee of the Congregation was actively involved. It conducted its own discipleship small group pilot testing, the results of which informed the pre-test of this research. The education committee also conducted a consultation of a cross-section of the leaders of the Congregation to gain insights into the form the new discipleship ministry should take. At my request, it formed a sub-committee of members with a background in education, and Christian especially education, to help think through the format of the discipleship small groups that would be appropriate for the Congregation. I chaired the sub-committee.

The pre-test of the research drew on the results of the education committee's consultation and discipleship small group pilot. This pilot had the dual purpose of evaluating the discipleship small group concept while training potential leaders for post-pilot groups. Thus, only members of the education committee and three students took part in the committee's pilot, a total of fifteen participants divided into two discipleship small groups. The pre-test involved two seminars where I taught on discipleship, and particularly small group discipleship, at the Congregation's adult forum, which is open to all every Sunday morning, with an average attendance ranging from fifteen to thirty-five members. The seminars took place on November 3 and December 8, 2019. Notes were captured from the question-and-answer section of these seminars. The Congregation has published both the handouts and audio recordings of the seminars on its website, and

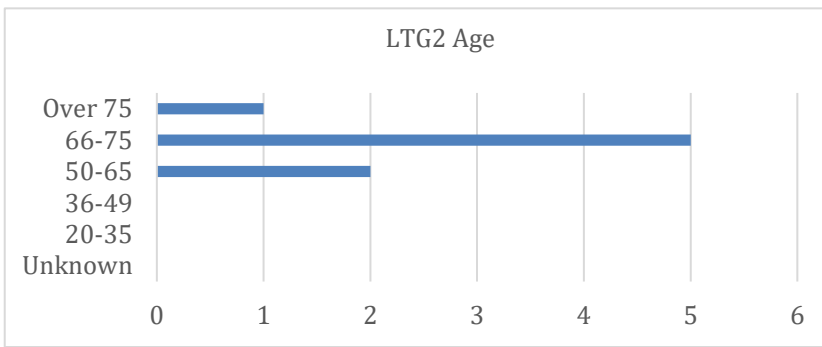
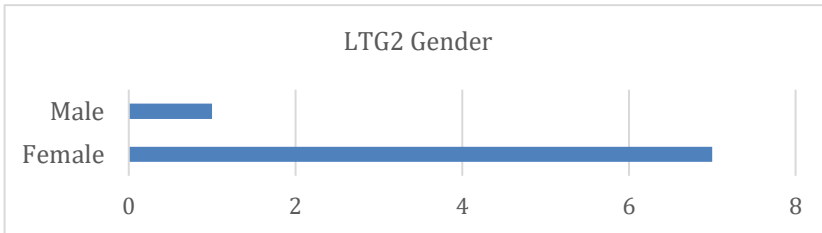
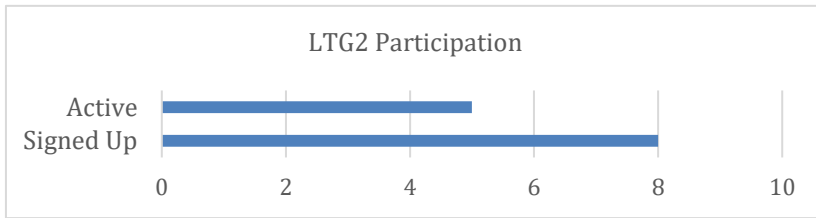
these were available to all members and the general public. These handouts are reproduced in Appendix A.

The post-test involved an experience survey of the members of four Life Together Groups with a total membership of thirty-five. The ages of participants ranged from mid-twenties to the eighties. One group was focused on the parents of young children, and this group met mostly at night when their children have retired for the day. All members of the Congregation were invited to sign up to join LTGs. They were given the option to state their preferred day and time of week for their group to meet, and this was the basis of the grouping. In addition to the experience survey, interviews were conducted with a representative sample of the members of LTGs.

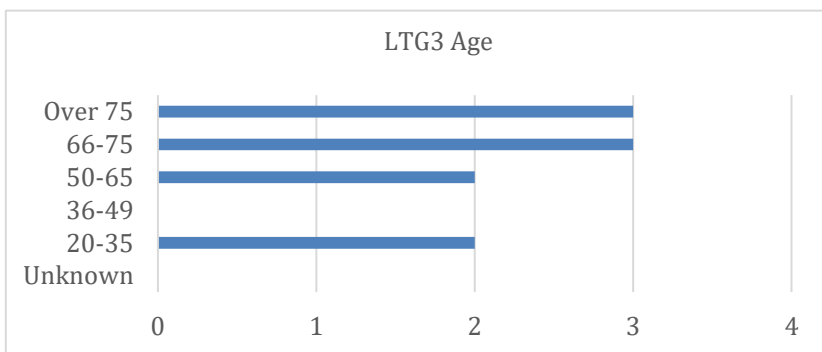
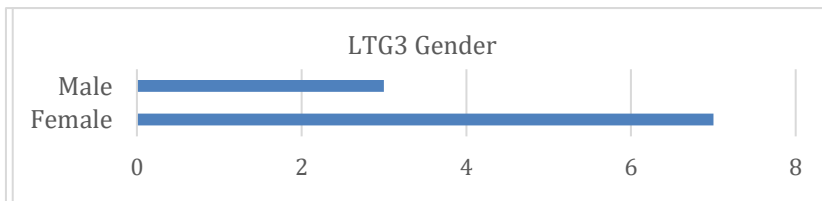
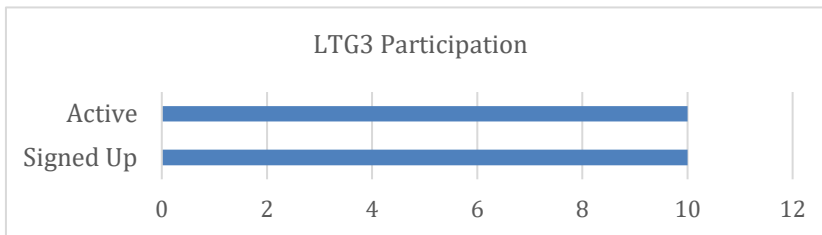
**Life Together Group 1**



**Life Together Group 2**



**Life Together Group 3**



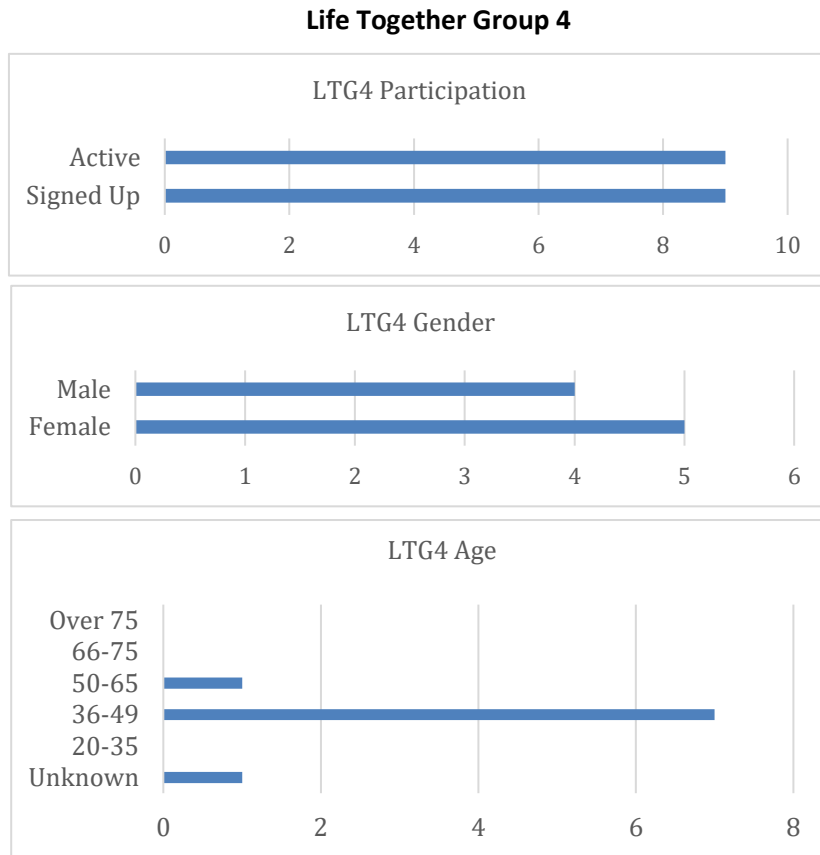


Fig. 4.1. Demographics of Participants

### Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What changes are required to adapt and implement the Wesleyan small group discipleship construct, the class meeting, for relevant use in a blended learning model leveraging modern social technology such as Zoom?

The evidence gathered to answer Research Question #1 includes the content used to run teaching seminars to explain small group discipleship concepts to the members of Congregation, and the format experimented with in the education committee's spring 2020 pilot, and the finalized template and content used in the current Life Together Groups. This evidence showed the process and outputs of starting in a church with no

pre-existing small groups to getting members enthused and involved in such a discipleship program.

### Teaching Seminars

Two teaching seminars were held a month apart in November and December 2019 at the Congregation's Sunday Adult Forum, a form of adult Sunday School.

#### Purpose, Focus and Character of Discipleship Small Groups

- **Purpose** of Discipleship Ministry at the Congregation  
The Discipleship Ministry fosters growth in grace, faith, and knowledge of Christ, individually and in community.
- **Function: Discipleship Involves**
  - living out our faith
  - growing in our faith
  - inviting people into intentional discipleship within and outside the Congregation
  - growing in size as a congregation
  - growing in friendship and relationship with, knowledge of, and support of one another
  - helping each other grow, and
  - growing in grace and the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18)
- **Form** follows purpose and function  
We are aiming to fulfil the above purpose and would learn, through some experimentation, from existing types and styles of groups, including:
  - **Methodist Model:** Mutual Accountability and Support
  - **Ignatian: The Examen Model** - noticing when we experienced God during the day, when we experienced spiritual freedom
  - **Quaker Model:** Listening for the Holy Spirit within
  - **Mennonite Model:** Spiritual Direction Groups - Seeking to increase understanding of God's movement in our lives
  - **Summit Church Model:** Intentional variety of Bible study, discipleship, family time

Fig. 4.2. Content Template – Teaching Seminar

These seminars were titled, “Thoughts on Discipleship and Discipleship Ministry in The Congregation.” The key points covered in teaching what discipleship is and giving members the background to the new discipleship ministry were extracts from the handouts shown in Figure 4.2. The purpose, function, and form of discipleship were developed in consultation with the discipleship sub-committee of the education committee.

### **Piloted Format and Content**

Following a leadership and member consultation process on the start of the new discipleship ministry centered on discipleship small groups in the fall of 2019 the education committee of the Congregation organized a twelve-week pilot consisting of fifteen members divided into groups. Figure 4.3 shows the format and content that with the education committee agreed to and used in the pilot. The content was purposely chosen to help participants get a good grounding in the concepts of small group discipleship and introduce them to spiritual disciplines. To help explain spiritual disciplines and make it easier for the pilot groups to practice these, the chapter titles and ideas of Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline*, were used as shown in Figure 4.3.

Start time: 7pm

Closing time: 8:15pm - When your turn comes to lead, please use this template as much as possible.

1. Share Food: either a snack or a meal (15 minutes)
2. Share Spiritual Food for Thought (15 minutes)
  - a) Week 1: Read and discuss Matthew 4:12-23
  - b) Week 2: Read and discuss John 1:29-42
  - c) Imagine you are one of the characters of the story. What is that character thinking? Feeling?
3. Share our Stories (30 minutes)
  - a) Week 1: What does it mean to you to follow Jesus? Are there memorable points along your journey?
  - b) Week 2: How would answer Jesus’s question, “What do you want?” Consider this question for your present reality.
  - c) Allow each person to speak without interruptions
4. Share in Prayer (15 minutes)
  - a) Articulate prayer requests: gratitude, joy, concerns, worries
  - b) Pray for each other
    - i) Week 1: Have one person pray for the group
    - ii) Week 2: Circle prayer – Go around the circle letting each person contribute as they wish.
5. Share Information  
 Brief logistics discussion regarding next meeting, who is bringing food, who might be absent, or related matters.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Food for Thought Theme</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
Tuesday, 4 February 2020	Discipleship: Following Christ	Matthew 4:12-23
Tuesday, 11 February 2020	Discipleship: What do you want?	John 1:29-42
Tuesday, 18 February 2020	Discipleship: Why is love essential?	1 Corinthians 13:1-3
Tuesday, 25 February 2020	Discipleship: Which aspect of love comes most naturally for you? Which is most challenging?	1 Corinthians 13:4-7
Tuesday, 3 March 2020	Discipleship: What childish ways have you put aside?	1 Corinthians 13:8-11
Tuesday, 10 March 2020	Discipleship: What is it you cannot yet see clearly?	1 Corinthians 13:12-13
Tuesday, 17 March 2020	Inward Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer	
Tuesday, 24 March 2020	Inward Spiritual Disciplines: Bible Study	
Tuesday, 31 March 2020	Outward Spiritual Disciplines: Simplicity	
Tuesday, 7 April 2020	Outward Spiritual Disciplines: Service	
Tuesday, 14 April 2020	Corporate Spiritual Disciplines: Confession	
Tuesday, 21 April 2020	Corporate Spiritual Disciplines: Worship	
Tuesday, 28 April 2020	Reflections, Assessment, Evaluation	

Fig. 4.3. Pilot Weekly Meeting Template

## Finalized Format and Content

The education committee made three decisions following the pilot and its review. The goal is that all Life Together Groups should follow the same format and use the same content for consistency, to enable the easy replication of the model in new groups and facilitate the growth of small group discipleship in the Congregation. The first decision was to stick to the seventy-five-minute meeting duration and the format used in the pilot. The second decision was to select and use a book as a conversation starter which also contained questions that could be model questions to be discussed from week to week. The book chosen was *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation* by Brian D. McLaren.

1. Catchup Time: Welcome and conversation, catching up with each other (15 minutes)
2. Share Spiritual Food for Thought (15 minutes)  
This will consist of leaders sharing with the group a summarized chapter from the book we are using: *We Make the Road By Walking*.
3. Share our Stories (30 minutes)  
This is typically in line with the theme from the Food for Thought.  
The objective is to reflect on our experiences, challenges, and successes in the application of those themes in our practical day to day living. By so doing, over a period of time, we expect to grow in our faith and support of each other.
4. Share in Prayer (15 minutes)
  - a) Articulate prayer requests and pray together: gratitude, joy, concerns, worries
  - b) Pray for each other
5. Closing: Logistics and information sharing  
Brief logistics discussion regarding next meeting, who might be absent, and/or related matters.

Fig. 4.4. Finalized Meeting Template

### Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What was the impact of small group discipleship facilitated by blended learning using social technology (Zoom) on the spiritual lives of participants?



The responses of participants to the survey questions are analyzed and presented in this section. Figures 4.5 to 4.20 represents the analyzed results of the responses of survey participants.

**Q1 - I am a Christian. I believe Jesus died and rose again and, by God's grace, I am saved from the power of sin, guilt, and condemnation.**

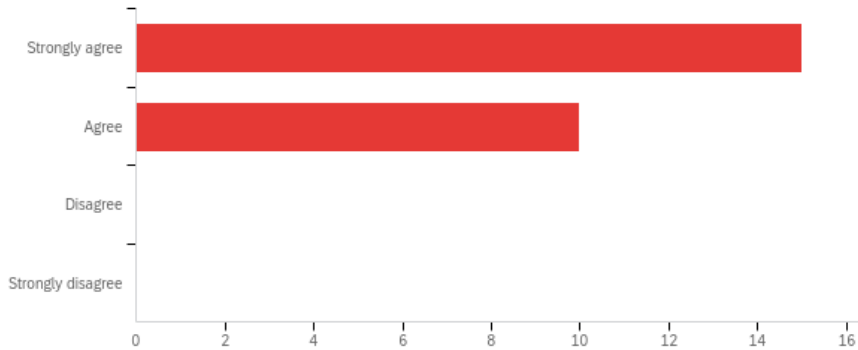


Fig. 4.5. Q1 I am a Christian

Table 4.1 Responses to Q1

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I am a Christian. I believe Jesus died and rose again and, by God's grace, I am saved from the power of sin, guilt, and condemnation.	1.00	2.00	1.40	0.49	0.24	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	60.00%	15
2	Agree	40.00%	10
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q2 - I am a child of God**

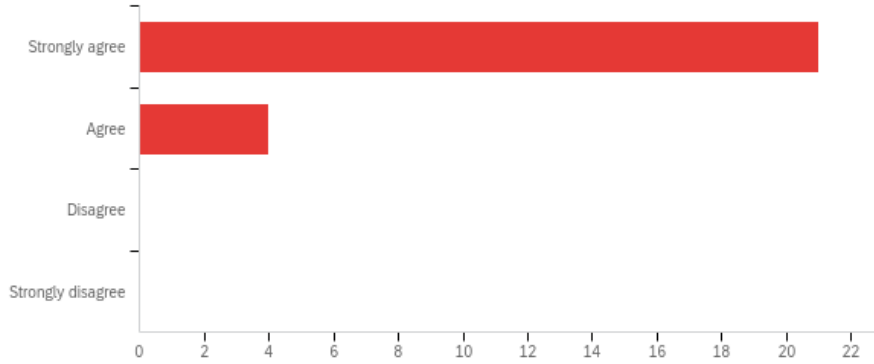


Fig. 4.6. Q2 I am a child of God

Table 4.2 Responses to Q2

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I am a child of God	1.00	2.00	1.16	0.37	0.13	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	84.00%	21
2	Agree	16.00%	4
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q3 - I consider Jesus to be Lord of my life, and I let Him influence what I think and say, and how I live**

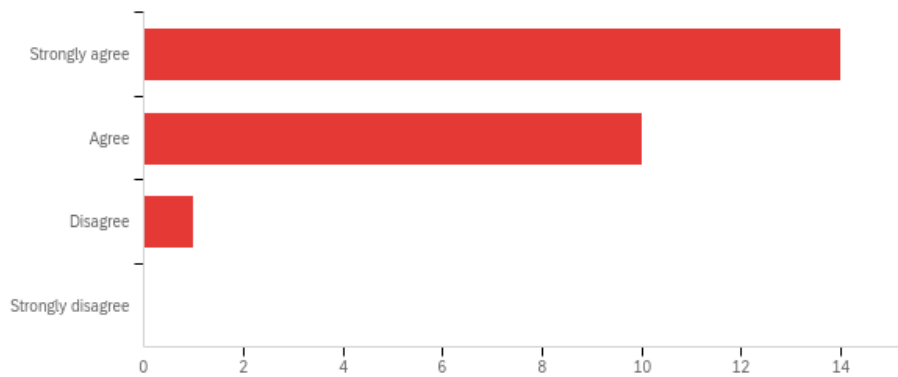


Fig. 4.7. Q3 I consider Jesus to be Lord of my life

Table 4.3 Responses to Q3

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I consider Jesus to be Lord of my life, and I let Him influence what I think and say, and how I live	1.00	3.00	1.48	0.57	0.33	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	56.00%	14
2	Agree	40.00%	10
3	Disagree	4.00%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

Q4 - I have been baptized, and so I have been buried with Christ and risen with Him

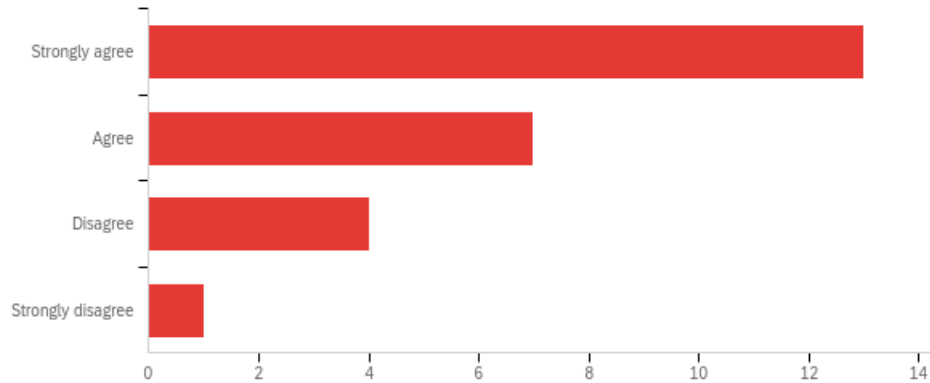


Fig. 4.8. Q4 I have been baptized

Table 4.4 Responses to Q4

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have been baptized, and so I have been buried with Christ and risen with Him	1.00	4.00	1.72	0.87	0.76	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	52.00%	13
2	Agree	28.00%	7
3	Disagree	16.00%	4
4	Strongly disagree	4.00%	1
	Total	100%	25

**Q5 - I am a disciple (follower) of Jesus Christ**

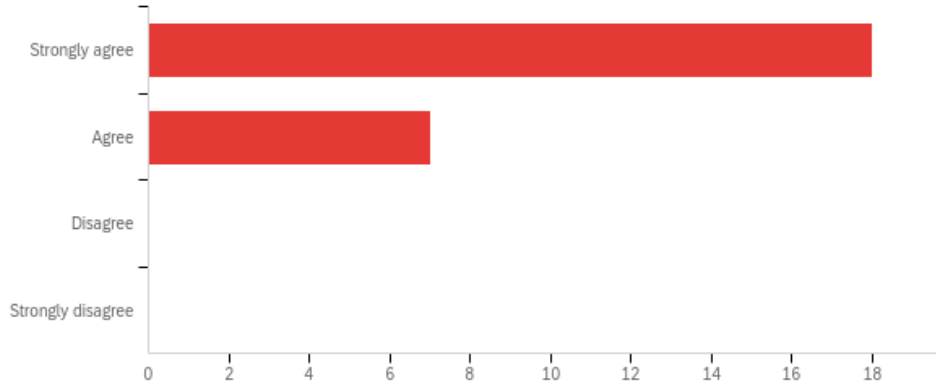


Fig. 4.9. Q5 I am a disciple of Jesus Christ

Table 4.5 Responses to Q5

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I am a disciple (follower) of Jesus Christ	1.00	2.00	1.28	0.45	0.20	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	72.00%	18
2	Agree	28.00%	7
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q6 - Praying regularly, and at set times of every day, is a must if I want to grow spiritually**

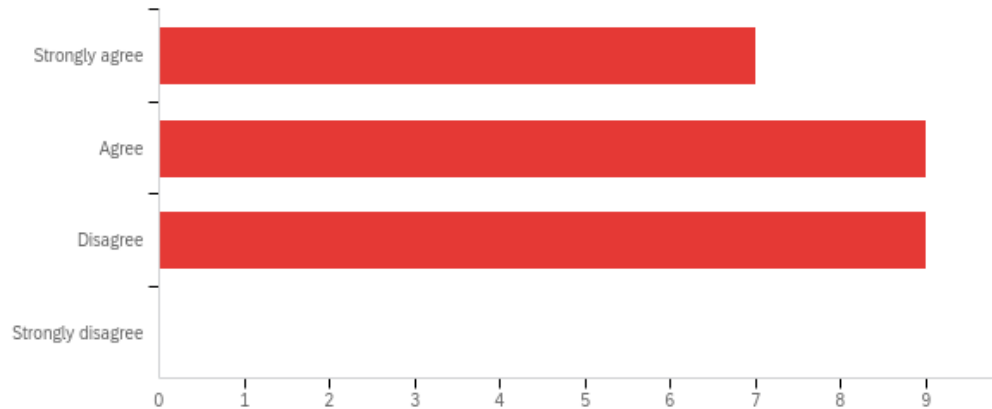


Fig. 4.10. Q6 Disciplines for spiritual growth

Table 4.6 Responses to Q6

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Praying regularly, and at set times of every day, is a must if I want to grow spiritually	1.00	3.00	2.08	0.80	0.63	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	28.00%	7
2	Agree	36.00%	9
3	Disagree	36.00%	9
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

Q7 - In addition to prayer, making time to fast regularly will help me grow as a Christian

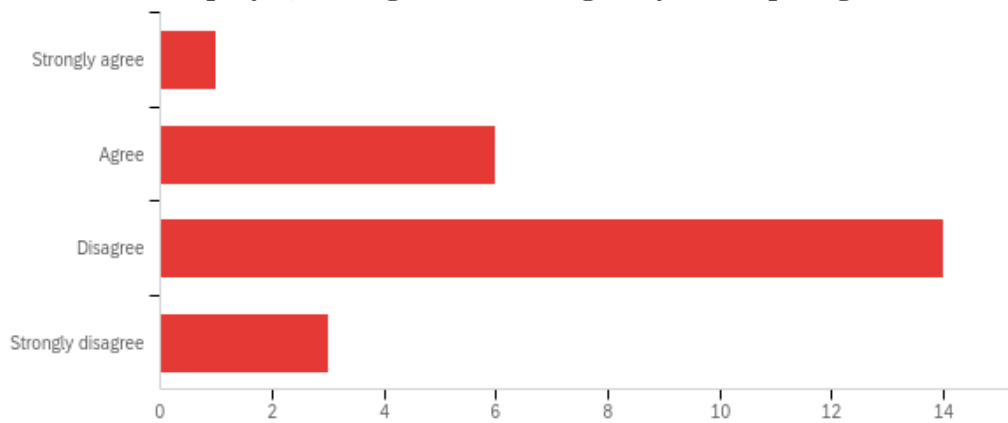


Fig. 4.11. Q7 Fasting and Christian growth

Table 4.7 Response to Q7

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	In addition to prayer, making time to fast regularly will help me grow as a Christian	1.00	4.00	2.79	0.71	0.50	24

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	4.17%	1
2	Agree	25.00%	6
3	Disagree	58.33%	14
4	Strongly disagree	12.50%	3
	Total	100%	24

**Q8 - Because the Bible is vital spiritual food for my nourishment, it is important that I read it daily and spend time reflecting on what I read.**

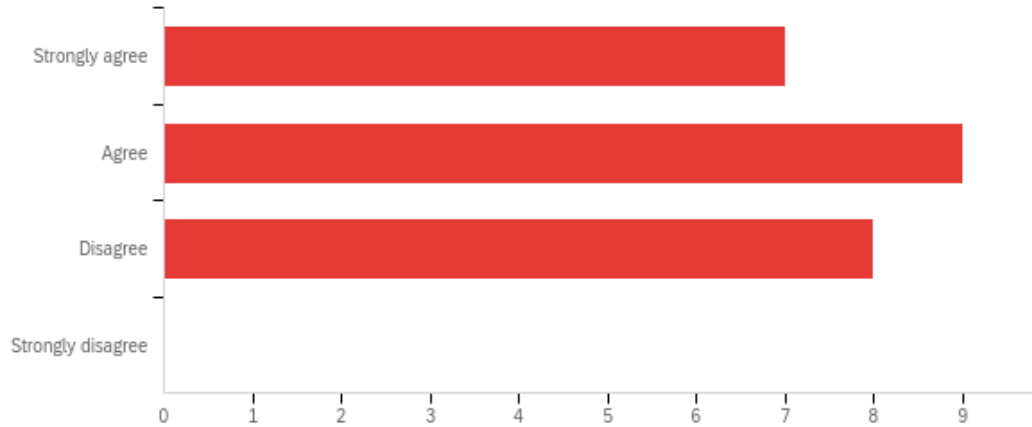


Fig. 4.12. Q8 The bible as spiritual food

Table 4.8 Response to Q8

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Because the Bible is vital spiritual food for my nourishment, it is important that I read it daily and spend time reflecting on what I read.	1.00	3.00	2.04	0.79	0.62	24

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	29.17%	7
2	Agree	37.50%	9
3	Disagree	33.33%	8
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	24

**Q9 - Regularly meeting with other Christians for worship and fellowship is a necessity for my growth as a Christian**

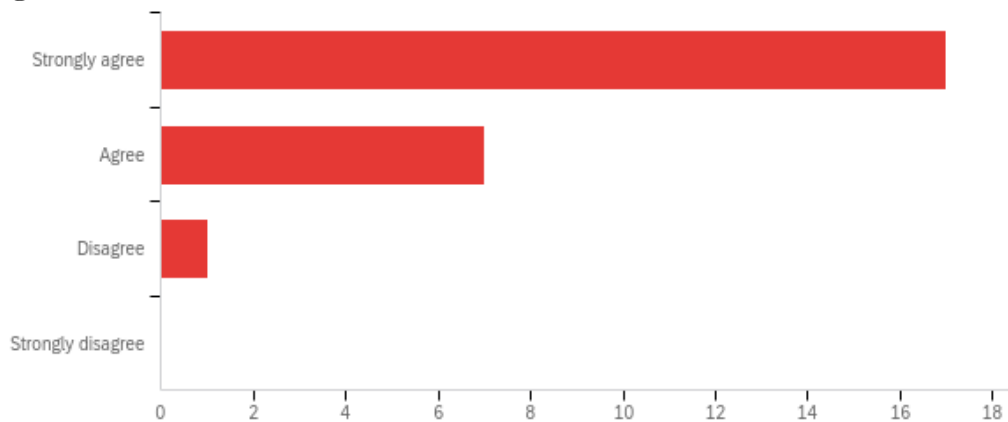


Fig. 4.13. Q9 Regular fellowship with other Christians and growth

Table 4.9 Response to Q9

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Regularly meeting with other Christians for worship and fellowship is a necessity for my growth as a Christian	1.00	3.00	1.36	0.56	0.31	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	68.00%	17
2	Agree	28.00%	7
3	Disagree	4.00%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q10 - Having other Christians watch over me by regularly sharing with them my spiritual goals, successes, failings, and challenges will help me grow as a Christian**

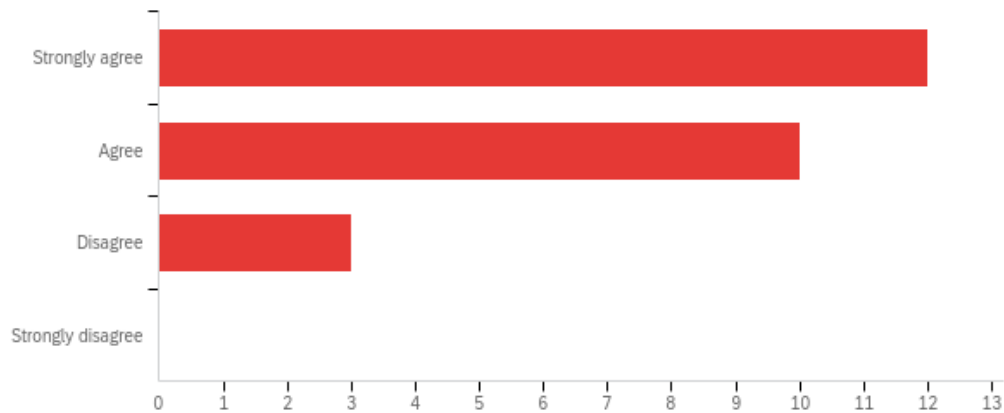


Fig. 4.14. Q10 Role of other Christians watching over me

Table 4.10 Response to Q10

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Having other Christians watch over me by regularly sharing with them my spiritual goals, successes, failings, and challenges will help me grow as a Christian	1.00	3.00	1.64	0.69	0.47	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	48.00%	12
2	Agree	40.00%	10
3	Disagree	12.00%	3
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0

**Q11 - I am a church member and attend worship services at least two times a month**

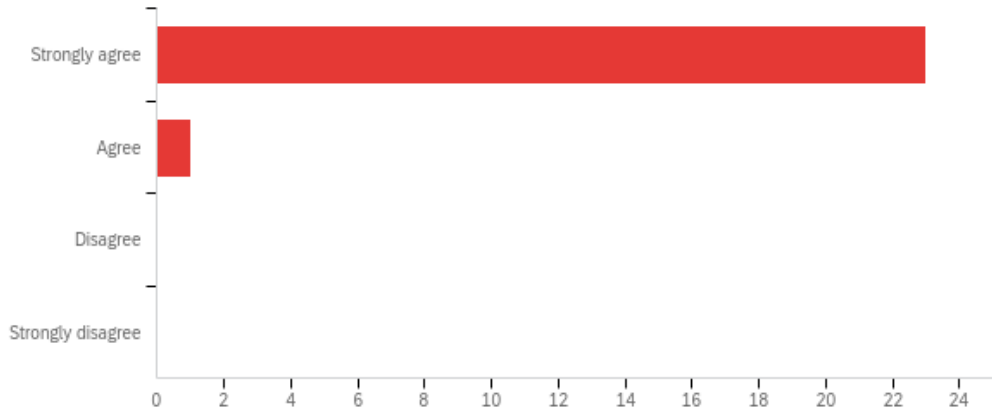


Fig. 4.15. Q11 Church membership and attendance

Table 4.11 Response to Q11

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I am a church member and attend worship services at least two times a month	1.00	2.00	1.04	0.20	0.04	24

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	95.83%	23
2	Agree	4.17%	1
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	24

**Q12 - I am a member of a Life Together Group, attend its meetings regularly, and participate in its activities.**

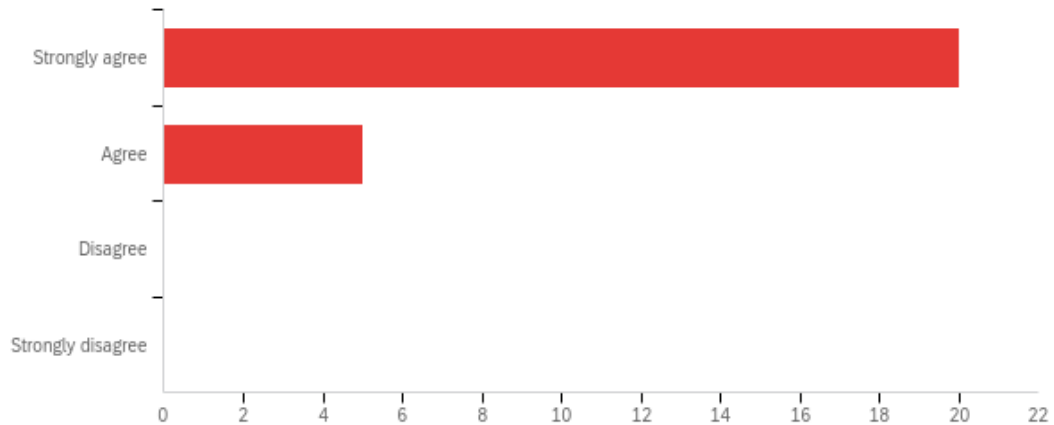


Fig. 4.16. Q12 Membership of life together group



Table 4.12 Response to Q12

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I am a member of a Life Together Group, attend its meetings regularly, and participate in its activities.	1.00	2.00	1.20	0.40	0.16	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	80.00%	20
2	Agree	20.00%	5
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

Q13 - I have found my Life Together group inspirational.

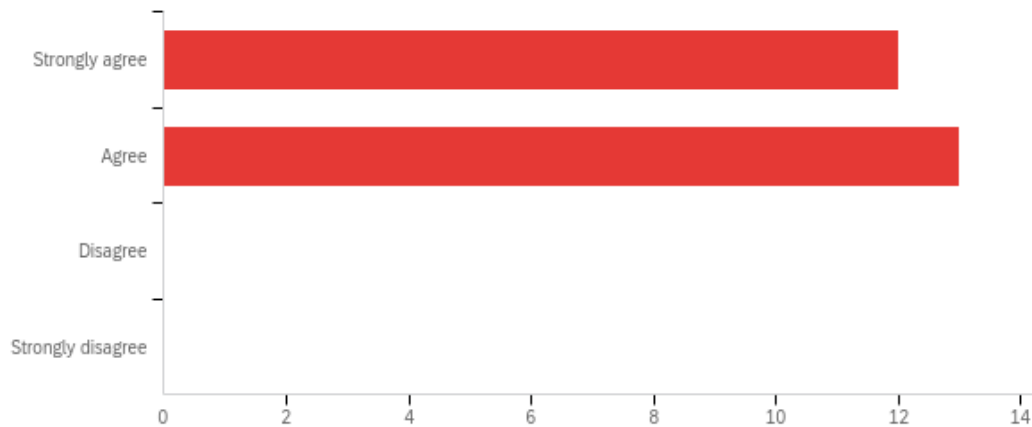


Fig. 4.17. Q13 Is life together group inspirational?

Table 4.13 Response to Q13

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have found my Life Together group inspirational.	1.00	2.00	1.52	0.50	0.25	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	48.00%	12
2	Agree	52.00%	13
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q14 - Interacting with and sharing my life and faith with others in a small group has strengthened my faith**

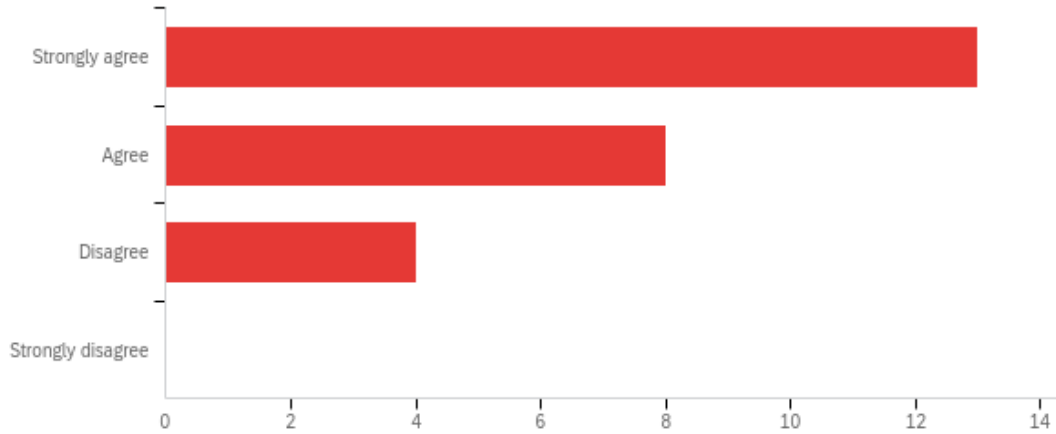


Fig. 4.18. Q14 Impact of small group on personal faith

Table 4.14 Response to Q14

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Interacting with and sharing my life and faith with others in a small group has strengthened my faith	1.00	3.00	1.64	0.74	0.55	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	52.00%	13
2	Agree	32.00%	8
3	Disagree	16.00%	4
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q15 - My participation has encouraged me to live a more faithful Christian life**

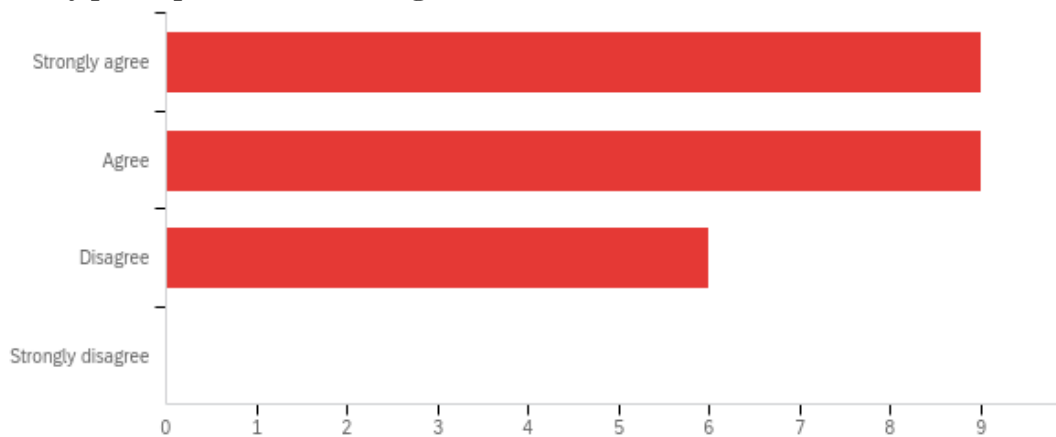


Fig. 4.19. Q15 Impact of participation on faithful Christian living

Table 4.15 Response to Q15

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	My participation has encouraged me to live a more faithful Christian life	1.00	3.00	1.88	0.78	0.61	24

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	37.50%	9
2	Agree	37.50%	9
3	Disagree	25.00%	6
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	24

**Q16 - I have learnt or been reminded of practical spiritual disciplines to help me grow in my daily life as a Christian**

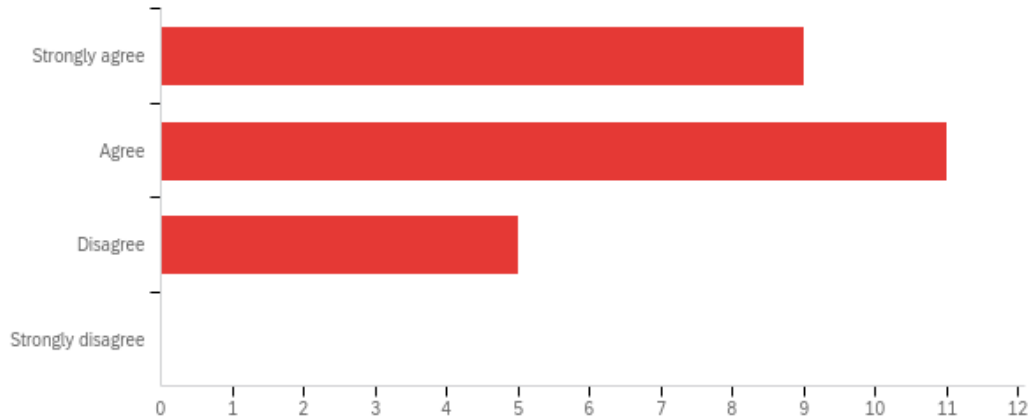


Fig. 4.20. Q16 Learning about spiritual disciplines in the group

Table 4.16 Response to Q16

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have learnt or been reminded of practical spiritual disciplines to help me grow in my daily life as a Christian	1.00	3.00	1.84	0.73	0.53	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	36.00%	9
2	Agree	44.00%	11
3	Disagree	20.00%	5
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q17 - The topics discussed in the meetings have been appropriate and helped everyone engage in the discussions**

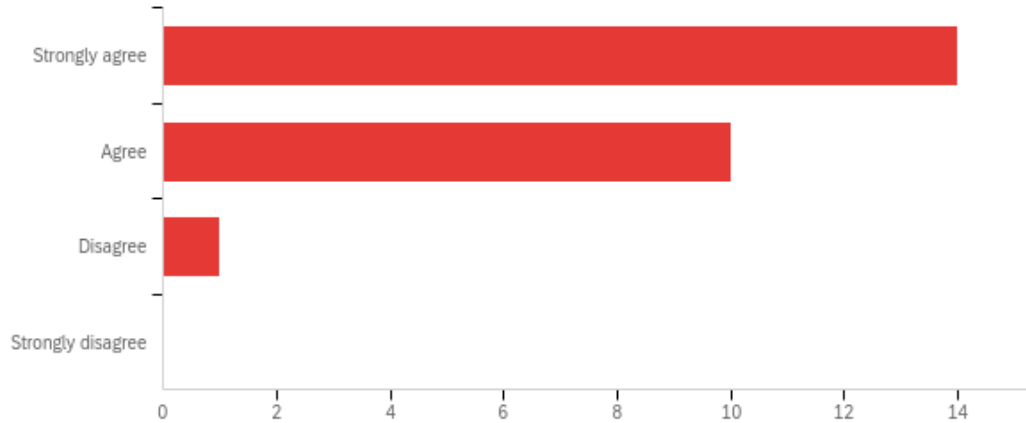


Fig. 4.21. Q17 Appropriateness of discussion topics

Table 4.17 Response to Q17

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The topics discussed in the meetings have been appropriate and helped everyone engage in the discussions	1.00	3.00	1.48	0.57	0.33	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	56.00%	14
2	Agree	40.00%	10
3	Disagree	4.00%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q18 - The amount of time given to praying together in the meetings is adequate**

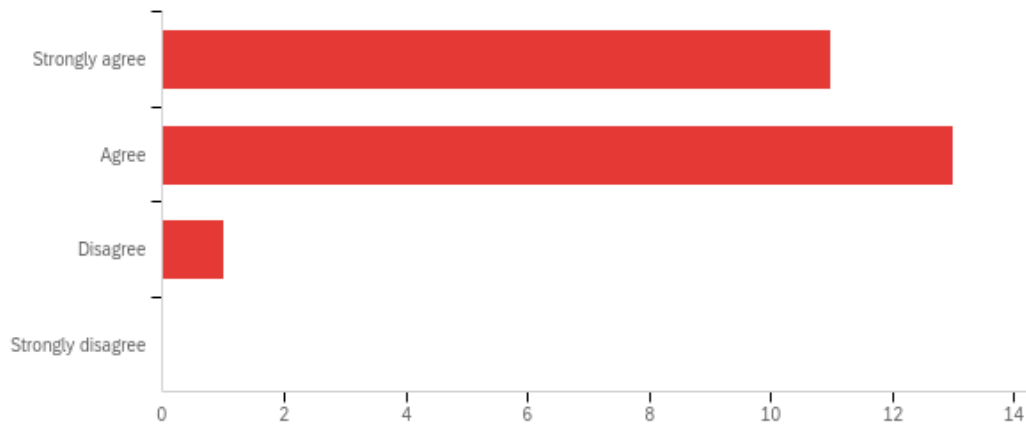


Fig. 4.22. Q18 Adequacy of time allocated to prayer

Table 4.18 Response to Q18

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The amount of time given to praying together in the meetings is adequate	1.00	3.00	1.60	0.57	0.32	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	44.00%	11
2	Agree	52.00%	13
3	Disagree	4.00%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

Q19 - When I have had a chance to lead my group, I had enough guidance to help me lead well.

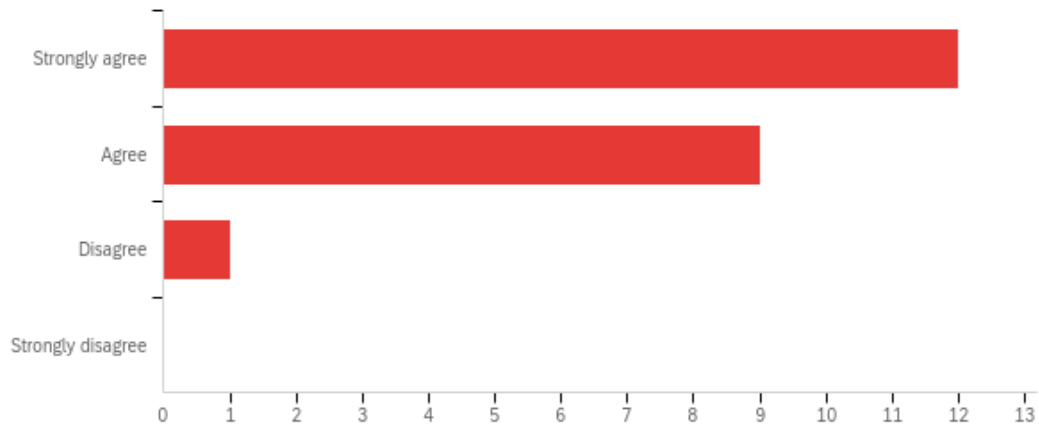


Fig. 4.23. Q19 Adequacy of guidance for leading a group

Table 4.19 Response to Q19

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	When I have had a chance to lead my group, I had enough guidance to help me lead well.	1.00	3.00	1.50	0.58	0.34	22

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	54.55%	12
2	Agree	40.91%	9
3	Disagree	4.55%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	22

**Q20 - The 75-minute duration of the Life Together Group meeting is appropriate**

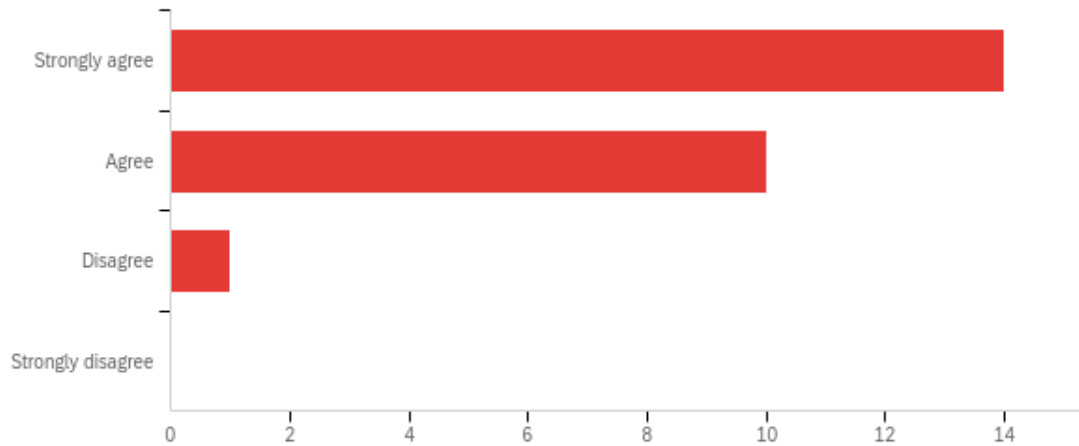


Fig. 4.24. Q20 Duration of life together group meetings

Table 4.20 Response to Q20

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	The 75-minute duration of the Life Together Group meeting is appropriate	1.00	3.00	1.48	0.57	0.33	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	56.00%	14
2	Agree	40.00%	10
3	Disagree	4.00%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q21 - Technology (Zoom, email, etc.) has made it easier to be part of a Life Together Group**

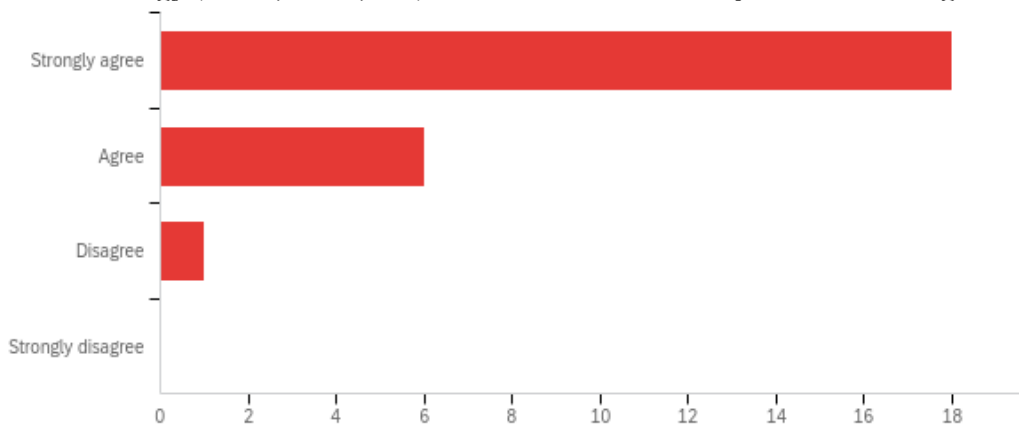


Fig. 4.25. Q21 Whether technology has made it easier to participate

Table 4.21 Response to Q21

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Technology (Zoom, email, etc.) has made it easier to be part of a Life Together Group	1.00	3.00	1.32	0.55	0.30	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	72.00%	18
2	Agree	24.00%	6
3	Disagree	4.00%	1
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

Q22 - Technology (Zoom, email, etc.) has made it easier to collaborate with others in the Life Together Group - during and after meetings

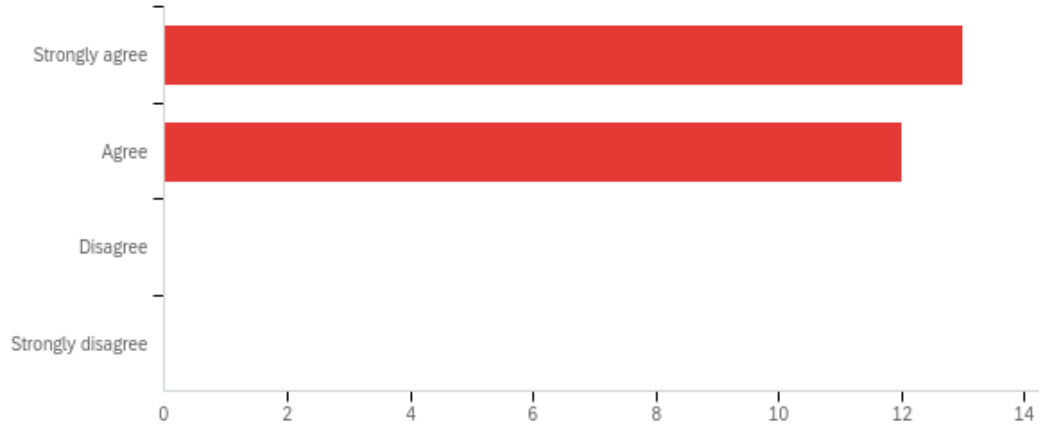


Fig. 4.26. Q22 Impact of technology on collaboration within group

Table 4.22 Response to Q22

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Technology (Zoom, email, etc.) has made it easier to collaborate with others in the Life Together Group - during and after meetings	1.00	2.00	1.48	0.50	0.25	25

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	52.00%	13
2	Agree	48.00%	12
3	Disagree	0.00%	0
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	25

**Q23 - After coronavirus restrictions are lifted, the Life Together Group experience will be better when we meet in-person**

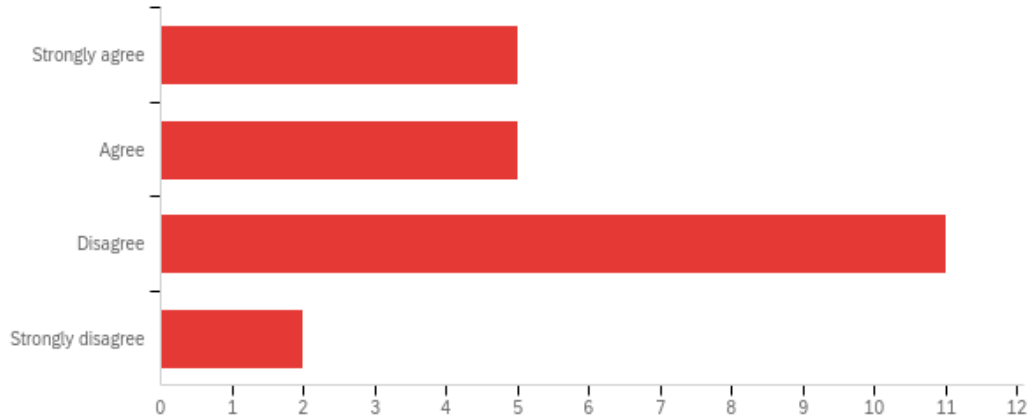


Fig. 4.27. Q23 Anticipated experience post-coronavirus pandemic

Table 4.23 Response to Q23

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	After coronavirus restrictions are lifted, the Life Together Group experience will be better when we meet in-person	1.00	4.00	2.43	0.92	0.85	23

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	21.74%	5
2	Agree	21.74%	5
3	Disagree	47.83%	11
4	Strongly disagree	8.70%	2
	Total	100%	23

**Q24 - If we have hybrid Life Together meetings, with some in-person while others join via Zoom, the meetings will still be effective.**

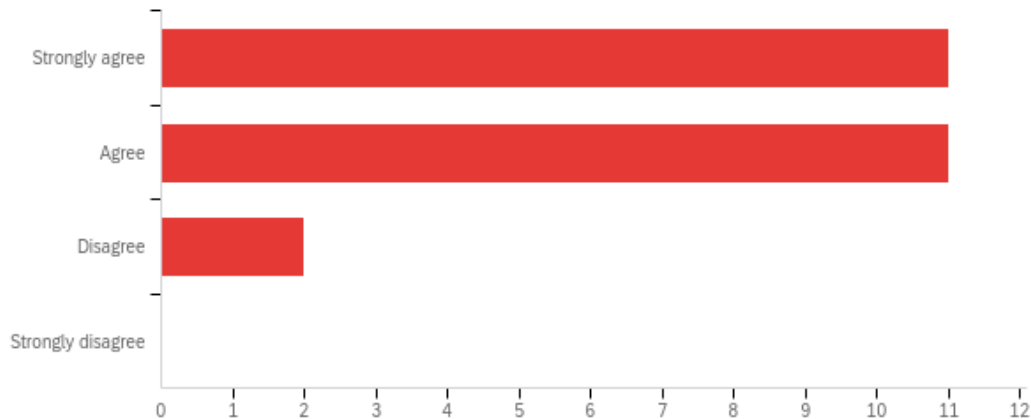


Fig. 4.28. Q24 Anticipated effectiveness of hybrid meetings



Table 4.24 Response to Q24

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	If we have hybrid Life Together meetings, with some in-person while others join via Zoom, the meetings will still be effective.	1.00	3.00	1.63	0.63	0.40	24

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	45.83%	11
2	Agree	45.83%	11
3	Disagree	8.33%	2
4	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	24

**Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**

What lessons can be drawn from the use of a blended learning approach facilitated by software for class meetings that might help with its adoption among the social media savvy young adult as well as the older demographic?

The Congregation is a church located on Duke University campus. Thus, particular effort was made to include young adults and early parents in the research. Thus, as shown in Figure 4.3, one of the Life Together Group there was a multi-generational group (LTG3) with the demographic age ranging from the twenties to the eighties. LTG4 is predominantly made up of young parents.



Fig. 4.29. Multigenerational and Young Parent LTGs

Unfortunately, despite strenuous effort to interest young adults, the sample size of young adults in the study is too small to draw widely applicable lessons with respect to that demographic. However, the few young adult participants involved have indicated that the LTG is having a positive impact in their lives. For instance, Participant P20 in LTG3 has stated that, “the intergenerational aspect has been an important part of our Life Together group and allows me to learn and share life experiences.”

### **Summary of Major Findings**

A number of major findings are evident in the data gathered in this this research project. Significantly, the research investigated the contemporary reintroduction of a Wesleyan discipleship construct, the class meeting, facilitated by modern social technology but the project was carried out in the inter-denominational setting of the Congregation at Duke Chapel. The findings of the research cannot be generalized because of the size and structure of the research sample and are, thus, only valid for the sample groups. While the findings might have wider relevance, further study is needed to generalize the findings for any church that seeks to implement a new small group discipleship ministry or enhance one that currently exists. These findings are summarized here and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

1. The Wesleyan small group discipleship construct, the class meeting, has relevance in the contemporary context for individual spiritual formation and growth, with group members providing mutual pastoral care and support for each other in an intimate setting.

2. Contemporary implementation of the class meeting requires careful adaptation, modelling, and preparation for the local church if it is to take root and grow.
3. Modern social technology, in particular Zoom conferencing, provides a helpful platform for implementing the class meeting either in full online only mode or in a hybrid mode that combines in-person meetings with others able to participate from remote locations.
4. An important consideration for a contemporary class meeting is flexibility to modify the format and content to facilitate greater sharing and discussion, without turning it into a Bible study or other form of cognitive learning.
5. In the local church's implementation of the class meeting, it is important that all groups share the same format and content of the meetings and for group leaders to meet regularly, review, agree, and implement changes together across all groups.

## **CHAPTER 5 LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

The results of the research were outlined in the last chapter, which ended with a summary of major findings. The sections in this chapter cover the major findings in detail and provides insights into the ministry implications of the study, unexpected observations, and recommendations for the adaptation and use of the class meeting with blended learning, as well as thoughts on potential future study and research.

### **Major Findings**

#### **Wesleyan Class Meeting Has Contemporary Discipleship Relevance**

This research project has shown that the Wesleyan small group discipleship construct, the class meeting, has efficacy in the contemporary context for individual spiritual formation and growth, with group members providing mutual pastoral care and support for each other in an intimate setting. Participants have, over the period of the research, shown an increasing devotion and participation in their groups as benefits have accrued with their consistent attendance and involvement in their group's meetings and activities. All survey respondents have found their Life Together Group inspirational. Eighty four percent of respondents indicate that interacting with others in their LTG has strengthened their faith. The LTG has encouraged three quarters of the respondents to live a more faithful Christian life, and eighty percent have been reminded of or learnt about practical spiritual disciplines to help them in their faith and growth. The testimonial comments of participants in interviews and responses to the survey questions indicate that through their participation they have grown and continue to grow in their faith and spiritual formation. The low number of young adult participants in the study means that

there is not enough data to draw conclusions with respect to that demographic. A future study is, thus, recommended to specifically investigate the impact on young adults.

The Congregation at Duke Chapel, where the research was conducted, is a very active church with many members consistently involved in its teaching, mission, book study, bible study, and fellowship programs. Thus, at the beginning of the new discipleship ministry, the concepts and rationale for discipleship small groups had to be carefully explained in a consultative exercise undertaken by the education committee, and in preparatory teaching seminars. Prospective participants asked recurring questions about the difference in the class meeting model from the normal bible study and other study and teaching programs of the Congregation. However, once members understood the concepts and rationale well, they voiced expressions of interest.

The education committee's pilot showed that participant appreciation for the benefits of the small group form of discipleship increased over time. This research pattern has confirmed the pattern of increasing appreciation for the model in the post-test groups that were the focus of study in this research. Participants reported that their lives and faith were enriched by the regular and close sharing of their ongoing Christian walk with the members of their group and by the opportunity to share burdens and joys and to pray together.

These observations are consistent with the growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ of the Christian disciple in community that is the primary focus of the Wesleyan class meeting construct, as explained in the literature review in Chapter 2. In addition to growing in grace, Wesley believed holiness to be both fundamental and mandatory in the Christian life. Further, Wesley taught that there is "no holiness but social holiness," by

which he meant that holiness “was best nurtured through a supportive and disciplined community.” (K. Watson, *Pursuing* 2). The survey responses depict a validation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s assertion that “visible community is grace,” meaning that even the act of Christians gathering around God’s word and the sacraments is enabled by God’s grace. In particular, the experience of LTG members agree with Bonhoeffer that, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer” (Bonhoeffer 28). Ninety six percent of respondents in the survey agree that they need other Christians to, as Wesley put it, “watch over one another in love.” (Wesley, *General Rules in Works* 9, 69). Participant responses also indicate a positive impact on their Christian faith, inspiring and strengthening them to live more faithful Christian lives. This is a behavioral impact that aligns with the Wesleyan objectives for the class meeting. As Henderson puts it, the class meeting was designed as a “set of instruments designed for behavioral change” (93), whose subject matter was the individual’s walk with God, and “personal experience, not doctrinal ideology or biblical information” (100). Notably, all respondents in the experience survey indicate regular attendance in church, but a third of respondents do not believe the Bible to be spiritual food warranting daily study and meditation and seventy one percent do not deem fasting to be helpful for spiritual nurture and growth, but they all believe themselves to be Christians who desire and are benefitting from the nurture of the LTGs.

The Life Together Groups in the Congregation are fulfilling for members the objectives of spiritual nurture, growth in grace, and growth in the knowledge of Christ that Peter urges in his letters (2 Peter 3:18). Members are growing in their faith in a way that brings to mind the experience of the early Church as recounted in Acts 2:41-47,

where new believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... Day by day, they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home ...”

### **Contemporary Implementation of The Class Meeting**

This study has explored and validated some of the careful adaptations, modelling, and preparation required for the contemporary implementation of the class meeting in local church to take root and grow. As shown in Table 4.2. the Congregation explored other models for discipleship small groups including the Quaker model and that used in Ignatian spirituality. In discussions leading to the teaching seminars, members of the education committee and others in the congregation expressed knowledge of models other than the Wesleyan class meeting. It became apparent that some members have experienced small group discipleship in many different church contexts and came to the Congregation with different expectations. Some had also not previously experienced small group discipleship. Given this background, the class meeting template could not simply be implemented without carefully explaining the concept and adapting it to the local context. Explanations included the emphasis that the discipleship small groups are not for Bible study or any other form of study but an opportunity to share the lived Christian experience on an ongoing basis with others in the group. It was also necessary to present and explain some of the different models in the training seminars and what template was going to use. These careful preparations have borne fruit in helping members understand what discipleship small groups are, how they function, and what can be gained from them. The pilot helped the Congregation to model its own pattern and template suitable for its members, and to refine the model.



The Wesleyan class meeting used a set of questions that members asked each other at each meeting. The questions did not vary from week to week. One question was, “How is it with your soul?” The meetings occurred weekly and lasted an hour. In this project, the education committee decided to use a format that encouraged such exploration of individual Christian experience in the small group setting but which also made it possible for members to learn and experience practical spiritual disciplines. Thus, the template includes a fifteen-minute food for thought section, during which the leader of the meeting shares the content. In the pilot, some spiritual disciplines or means of grace, such as prayer and Bible study, were covered in this food for thought section, as shown in Figure 4.3. The food for thought section also gave opportunity for members to explore what discipleship and spiritual growth means.

Following the pilot, the education committee decided that a bi-weekly meeting better suits the Congregation better than the weekly meeting pattern of the Wesleyan class meeting. Further, they decided that a book on spiritual formation should be used for the food for thought section, making it easier for leaders to have a standard format to follow. The book chosen, *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation* by Brian D. McLaren, goes through topics that align well with the liturgical calendar and takes two years to go through in the bi-weekly meeting pattern. In addition, the book provides discussion questions that are practical but based on the Bible reading and commentary for each meeting. Consequently, the discussion questions vary from meeting to meeting, unlike the Wesleyan class meeting template. However, the questions, like those in the class meeting template, are aimed at eliciting personal responses from members on their lived

experience. For instance, one food for thought section that covered miracles in Jesus' ministry had the question, "Share a story about a time when you felt you experienced a miracle, or when you prayed for miracle that never came" (100). The survey and research interview respondent comments indicate that these contextualized adaptations are working well. An example is the comment by participant P27 that, "I think the way it has been set up and operated has been very effective" in getting members engaged and learning together in their Life Together Group.

There is biblical support for the model being used in the Congregation. The food for thought section of each LTG meeting aligns well with the practice of the early church in Acts 2:41-47, where new believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... Day by day, they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home ...". While the LTGs started in August 2020 have only met online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some groups are already planning in-person sessions as soon as restrictions are eased. They want to have meetings in which they can also 'break bread' by having meals together and having other forms of fellowship.

### **Modern Social Technology Can Facilitate Class Meetings**

This research has shown that modern social technology, in particular Zoom conferencing, can provide a facilitation platform for implementing the class meeting either in a full online only mode or in a hybrid mode that combines in-person meetings with others able to participate from remote locations. The Life Together Group implementation in the Congregation at Duke Chapel necessarily had to rely on the Zoom video conferencing because the current groups were all started at the height of the Covid-

19 pandemic where in-person meetings were banned for public health reasons. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents indicated that the use of technology made it easier to be part of a Life Together Group. All respondents indicated that the technology made it easier to collaborate with others in their LTG during and after the meetings. A slight majority of respondents, fifty-seven percent, do not believe the LTG experience will be better with in-person gatherings. While ninety-one percent of respondents believe that a hybrid model (in-person meetings with some joining remotely over Zoom) would work well, a few expressed doubt. Participant P17 commented that, “There is pedagogical evidence that having some people in-person and some zoomed in with them breeds inequity. It’s hard to facilitate.” Some research interviewees agreed with this comment and felt that it would be better to have all in-person, or all Zoom meetings, as that would be easier for members to fully participate and not miss anything in the meeting.

The foregoing observations on the use of technology aligns well with the concepts of blended learning, where part of the learning experience is in-person teaching and facilitation and the rest is facilitated by online technology tools.

Biblically, an important foundational element of discipleship seems to be the teaching and nurture of believers as shown in the early Church in Acts 2. The small group construct was a means of achieving this in Acts 2, where people met in each other’s homes, continued in the apostles’ teaching, and shared everything in common. Sometimes, however, the technology that is available provides the best means of providing and attaining this nurturing experience. Paul used letters from his jail cells to encourage and strengthen the churches he had founded and some of these letters are an important part of the canon that is the New Testament. The flexible approach of Paul in

using whatever means was necessary to nurture believers is a good lesson in point for the Church of today. Today's social technologies provide many opportunities for providing nurturing structures for believers, such as the Congregation's LTGs implemented with Zoom technology.

### **Contemporary Class Meeting Must Resist Becoming A Bible Study**

An important consideration for a contemporary class meeting is flexibility to modify the format and content to facilitate greater sharing and discussion, without turning it into a Bible study or other form of cognitive learning. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents indicated that the topics discussed in the meetings had been appropriate and helped everyone engage in the discussions. This has been by design in choosing food for thought and questions that elicit member participation in the discussions and the sharing of their lived Christian experiences. What has been observed, however, is a natural tendency to drift towards Bible Study mode where the discussion takes on a theological tenor rather than a focus on the lived Christian experience of participants. One LTG leader, participant P17, admitted during a research interview that, "Our group gravitated to doing more Bible study though it wasn't the intent." Notably, one Congregation leader in this LTG expressed, when interviewed, the desire for more lived experience discussion in their group. The experience is not unique to this LTG. The observation here is that leaders must be constantly reminded and, where necessary, re-trained to focus on the objectives of the discipleship small group construct.

An antidote to this tendency to veer towards Bible study mode might be a periodic retraining of leaders of the class meeting in its purpose and explaining well the structures and tools in the church that complement the discipleship small group. As explained in

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, Henderson provides detailed descriptions of different modes of education in the Wesleyan discipleship model that worked together to achieve the overall effect of fully nurturing the believer. The Society, which evolved into the local church, provided opportunity for cognitive learning with “little or no provision ... for personal response or feedback” (84), and consisted of the public use of “lecture, preaching, public reading, hymn singing, and ‘exhorting’” (84). “The major aim was to present scriptural truth, and have it clearly understood” (93). The class meeting was designed as a “set of instruments designed for behavioral change” (93), whose subject matter was the individual’s walk with God and “personal experience, not doctrinal ideology or biblical information” (100). A good understanding of these modes by class meeting leaders can help them focus on what their group is aimed at, “personal experience, not doctrinal ideology.” (Henderson 100)

### **Standardized Template Needed in All Local Context Class Meetings**

In the local church implementation of the class meeting, all groups need to share the same format and content of the meetings and group leaders must meet regularly to review, agree, and implement changes together across all groups. Standardization makes it possible for members to transition to different groups without losing much of the material being used. In the Congregation, while each LTG has its own characteristics, the template and content are standardized. Thus, the LTGs are interchangeable for members with respect to template and content. However, a new member in an LTG would affect the dynamics of the group while the new member settles in.

In the Wesleyan class meeting model, the means of standardization was the set of question raised and responded to in each meeting, the pattern of meeting weekly, and the

size and composition of the membership, but any Methodist could join any class meeting and follow the proceedings and participate.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

This study and its findings provide tools that might help churches wanting to use the Wesleyan class meeting as the basis for their discipleship ministry practice. The step-by-step approach used in this study provide clues to the steps needed to successfully introduce discipleship small group ministry in a given context – education, pilot, and execution. Further, although these are not generalized finding for every context, the findings provide some guidance on what to do and what to avoid.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The research project in this study focused on one inter-denominational church, the Congregation at Duke Chapel. The findings are, thus, hard to generalize though they can inform further research in a wider study. The research aimed to determine what lessons might be drawn from the use of a blended learning approach facilitated by software for class meetings that might help with its adoption among the social media savvy young adult demographic. Unfortunately, despite strenuous effort to interest young adults, the sample size of young adults in the study is too small to draw widely applicable lessons with respect to that demographic. Another limitation of working with only this single church is that there is only one clergy viewpoint whereas a more generalized study would include more ordained clergy.

As shown in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, modern Social Network Analysis (SNA) holds a lot of promise for the Wesleyan discipleship system with the class meeting at its center. This research did not have enough data, being set in a single local church

and as a pioneering effort, to test any SNA models to gain any additional relevant insights.

### **Unexpected Observations**

The main surprise observation of the research is that while all respondents in the experience survey indicated regular attendance in church, some do not believe the Bible to be spiritual food warranting daily study and meditation, and more than two-thirds do not deem fasting to be helpful for spiritual nurture and growth although they all believe themselves to be Christians who desire and are benefitting from the nurture of their discipleship small group. What this seems to indicate is that, at least in this context, the class meeting construct can be a means of uniting Christians of differing theological persuasions while helping to nurture them in their Christian journey as they regularly share their lived experience with each other.

### **Recommendations**

The primary recommendation from this study is that the findings should be tested in a wider study, possibly involving several churches, to confirm or amend and generalize the findings. The approach used in this research can be a helpful framework for such a study and may be used unmodified in the wider context. A second recommendation for future research is the modelling and evaluation of a network of class meetings using the models of Social Network Analysis (SNA).

### **Postscript**

Having studied the discipleship methodology of John Wesley and his colleagues in establishing and growing a ministry that has lasted for centuries, the class meeting template seemed to be of critical importance as a timeless construct for the nurture and

growth of Christian disciples. Whether or not the class meeting could work well when adapted to the modern technology and science-driven world with busy lifestyles and seemingly short attention spans was a strong motivation for this study. While the results of the study cannot be generalized, much has been observed that offers hope for the Church if the journey of exploration, adaptation, and implementation of the class meeting continues in multiple contexts.



## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Survey Responses and Interview Summary Transcripts

## A1: Survey Freeform Responses

Participant	Free Form Survey Comment
P1	Further reading with a suggested reading list might be helpful. Sending out bible reading in advance so we can read them and think about them before the meeting might also be helpful for a deeper conversation level.
P10	Finding a way to natural rotate small groups over time while maintaining some level of consistency within groups would be helpful. One would feel guilty leaving their group and joining another.
P12	There is pedagogical evidence that having some people in person and some zoomed in with them breeds inequity. It's hard to facilitate. Maybe consider some all in-person and some all on Zoom. If to be both, please adequately train leaders for this and provide specific expectations for how to engage distance participants.
P14	Wonderful addition to my spiritual growth during a challenging time
P21	I have greatly enjoyed and benefited from my Life Together group. I think the format has worked well. My question is whether we are to stay together as a group after this year (which is fine with me) or whether the decision might be for the Congregation to "reshuffle" those who sign up so that we have a chance to get to know other members in a deeper way. I think there might be good reasons for either approach. In any case, I would like to continue being part of a Life Together group.
P23	The small group concept has worked well for me at this time, but I have had this experience twice before and some of my fondest memories of fellowship and spiritual growth have arisen from these experiences. The intergenerational aspect has been an important part of our Life Together group and allows me to learn and share life experiences. I do not have any suggestions for improvement. I love how our group seems to grow closer over time.
P27	I think the way it has been set up and operated has been very effective. I don't have any suggestions for improving it.
P35	More structure in the group setting might make for a better range of conversation. Example- taking scripture and reviewing what it means/applies to us and our families. Could also be short excerpt from a book or article- just something to get everyone thinking on the same line
P6	I feel too much emphasis was put on the Biblical text itself rather than discussing what the meaning was for it of the participants. Perhaps a reading selection could be given before the meeting to the participants
P7	Have group members commit to five guidelines for learning circles—appendix 2 in the book.

P8	Our meetings have only been 60 minutes. I think that 75 minutes would be better.
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## A2: Interview Themes and Responses

Participant P17 - Life Together Group Leader	
Theme Explored	Answer or Response Summary
Need help of other Christians to grow?	Absolutely. Left to our own devices you stagnate. You could read but you could be in an echo chamber.
Most rewarding features of LTGs?	Amazing group of people. Everyone is committed, everyone is prepared. Not that you have to be prepared but people are. Everyone contributes every single meeting.
Most frustrating aspects of LTGs?	I am fairly easily frustrated but I cannot remember being frustrated. Maybe it is because I am a leader.
Do you see yourself doing it for a long time	I see being in small groups for a long time. I really like this group and I hope it continues for what its season is. And I hope its season is longer than just this year. But we have to realize that the Congregation attracts a number of people who are kind of in and out of Durham. And so, part of it is tending to people where they are when they are here.
Technology Used?	We use Zoom for the meetings, of course. And we have emails back and forth.
Impact of Technology Usage?	I've been leading groups like this for 30 plus years, but this is the first time with Zoom. It is not terribly unlike preparing for a face-to-face meeting. Once you're comfortable with Zoom, in some ways it is easier to see the whole group, to see who is engaged. If someone wants to talk, it is a little easier to see on Zoom
Desirable Technology Improvements?	The only difficulty I have with Zoom has to do with screen sharing. We don't do that very often. Sometimes we share Bible text or other text. In our group everyone shows up with a Bible.
Spiritual disciplines and Zoom?	I can't speak for the group. I go back and forth personally looking at things like the Upper Room disciplines.
In-person, Online Only, or Hybrid LTG Meetings?	I had some initial concerns. But for us to be able to have X and Y [join from out state], we won't have been able to do that. There is a real difficulty with some in a room and some remote and it is hard for remote participants to participate in the conversation in the room.
Spiritual lives improving?	I can't say that I can tell. I think some of the members have become more engaged and confident in the meeting itself. Not sure what has caused that.
LTG Improvement Suggestions?	Trying to get more people engaged, by which I don't mean those who are already involved. Help them to help us get encourage other people to participate
Impact of LTGs on Congregation's Mission and Witness?	For me, small groups are kind of the heart of a congregation. And so, I think that small groups can help the Congregation in all kinds of ways. They don't all have to be discipleship groups. Broadening the definition of small groups and perhaps enabling groups like the mission committee and others to use some of the same strategies, not only within their scope but also doing a bit of community building and spiritual development just as a routine part of what they do might be a possibility. This should be a covert rather than overt operation given how the Congregation sees itself.
How to grow LTGs numerically and spiritually?	Mobilizing the current members will be one way. I am increasingly wondering whether, instead of asking students to join us, maybe we should be joining the students. Ask Dean of Chapel what is going on and how we can be helpful. Maybe some of the campus ministries have Bible Studies and programs for students and may appreciate some help and we could partner with them.

General Comment	Our group gravitated to doing more Bible study though it wasn't the intent. I think each group is going to have its own personality
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<b>Participant P39 - Congregation Leader</b>	
<b>Theme Explored</b>	<b>Answer or Response Summary</b>
What motivated the desire for a discipleship ministry, with the Congregation having many ministries?	The Christian Education Committee and I long knew that we could benefit from an intentional small group ministry. At various times we had folks talk about it and talk about various models. So, it's been simmering. Especially because we are so geographically dispersed, and because we are a subset of a much larger organization, having a vehicle to develop strong Christian relationships was missing, in my opinion and in the opinion of at least some of the members of the Committee. And so, it was waiting for the <i>Kairos</i> moment when we could get it going.
Have you participated in the groups yourself?	In the pilot, yes.
How essential is it to you to have members of the Congregation provide pastoral support to each other?	Yes, essential. There are five hundred members ... can't do pastoral support for all of them. So, they need to support one another and grow together. I am about empowering others to do ministry.
Has it improved growth in the Congregation numerically and spiritually and, if so, how is it doing that?	There has not been an increase numerically at this point that I know of. Spiritually, I think those who are participating, from reports, value it very much, feel deeper connection with God and with one another. My hope is that that is a seed that is being planted in the Congregation that will grow.
What is the impact of technology in this ministry so far, and do you think technology is helping or getting in the way?	I think we've discovered through Covid that Zoom works just fine. The Church is always slow to adapt to technology. We are a 2,000-year-old organization and we move slowly. The weight of that tradition is also our momentum. But Covid forced us to do new things and some of them will continue. I don't think it's inhibited - for those who are comfortable with technology, the Zoom meetings have been just fine. We know that there are those who wanted to be part of the small group but are not comfortable with technology, and so self-selected themselves out. So, there are folks who are left behind as a result.
What prospects do you see for growth in the congregation's witness and mission through LTGs and the use of technology for such ministry?	I would like to see the groups expand. The other thing that the technology has done is that people who are out of state can participate. I hope it will grow as a seed, that there will be more LTGs as time goes on, and ideally it will be an outreach as well and this would be a place where new folks could join and feel connected. It has potential.
In some churches, new members are put immediately into small groups and that becomes the mode of discipleship. Do you see this happening in the Congregation?	It could. I could see it certainly for a minimum of six months. It would be a great way. It does happen that we attract more mature Christians and people who have been Christians a long time. Some need more discipling. But there are some that are already teachers when they come.
In your normal pastoral work, have you seen people engaging more in spiritual disciplines as a result of their being members of life together groups?	Well, I think the LTGs are a spiritual discipline in and of themselves, right? Because of community, fellowship, prayer, etc. Beyond that, I don't know. Nobody's mentioned that they've prayed more or served more or read scripture more.

<p>Have you seen greater interaction between members of the Congregation as a result of LTGs?</p>	<p>It's a covid year and I haven't seen much interaction. But anecdotally, what I have heard is that people are using their LTG for significant support, and do turn to their group for prayer requests, for sharing what is going on. And those, to a large degree, are new relationships.</p>
<p>Do you envisage that post-Covid, do you envisage that there will be more in-person groups, more online groups only, or more hybrid LTGs? What would be your preference?</p>	<p>I think we should offer a mix. I think to offer all the options you just mentioned. Some groups like the parent group might always be online because they want to be home when their children are sleep, not the time to drive somewhere. And yet there are others who won't participate unless it is in person. And there are others who might be primarily virtual but might enjoy having dinner together once a quarter or something.</p>
<p>Pedagogically, do you see the LTGs as a good model for discipleship and imparting training in discipleship?</p>	<p>Yes, it is a good model. Because, for much of Christianity, we learn in the doing. And so, it is doing a spiritual discipline together. The togetherness is the discipline, the sharing is the discipline, the prayer is the discipline, etc. And so, inasmuch as the group is helping people practice the discipline it is helping them grow.</p>

<p align="center"><b>Participant P22 - Young Adult LTG Member</b></p>	
<p><b>Theme Explored</b></p>	<p><b>Answer or Response Summary</b></p>
<p>Need help of other Christians to grow?</p>	<p>I think so, absolutely. I think there is a really a benefit from talking with and learning from people who have had a wide variety of Christian experiences, people who are more mature in the faith, and less mature. There are things to be learned in both directions. One of the cool things about the LTG is that we take a lot of time to share faith journeys. And honestly, sometimes we are just talking, more than we're necessarily studying or looking at the lesson for that week.</p> <p>Just hearing how people have grown up, not in churches or in churches or in churches that are very different from those experiences that I've had, I think is instructive. And I think we've also talked about a lot of different faith practices. One of our members talked a lot about how fasting has been a very important part of his journey. I went to a Catholic university and so my fasting is limited to Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is not the same thing as an extended fast and thinking about what that does physically to you and what that can mean to you in a spiritual way. I think part of it is there is intellectual growth. And I think there is also such a benefit to community, and I think we've all been feeling that through the pandemic, particularly as we are not able to gather on Sundays or at service project. And to just sort of be surround by that community of believers and people who can lift you up and share in your struggles and in your joys, I think that is something that we've all been missing a little bit. Zoom is great but is not a replacement for that community.</p>
<p>How long a part of LTG?</p>	<p>I have been there from the beginning of this particular group (7 months). I try to attend pretty much every meeting. I think I've missed two. Everyone pretty much shows up just about all the time. Every now and again people miss but I think it is something we all value.</p>
<p>What attracted you to the LTG?</p>	<p>A couple of things.</p> <p>One is, it was August/September. We were six months into the 'new normal.' I was very much missing people. I am an extroverted person, so I definitely missed that sense of community.</p> <p>I think also the opportunity to get to know more people in the Chapel. Both the Congregation and the Chapel can be tough places to get know people. It's a big building with lots of visitors and it can be kind of tough to identify the regulars. So, as I looked up through those groups of people on SignUp Genius, I intentionally signed up for a group - I picked one where I didn't know a lot of people because I wanted this to be an opportunity to form some new connections and make some new bonds.</p>

<p>Most rewarding features of LTGs?</p>	<p>It is a Bible Study, but it is not a traditional BS, where we all get together, read a passage, kind of talk about it and then it's over. The way we've structured it is, at the beginning there is a bit of social time and someone shares their faith journey.</p> <p>We are now trying to figure out, now that we've all shared our faith journeys, what we do in that space, and what it's going to look like. The faith journey inevitably prompts questions. People ask about different parts of that journey. Then we generally get into what the chapter is for the day. [The leaders] have been picking the chapters for the most part and trying to align with where we are in the liturgical season and trying to pick things that match well with either the lectionary or the season we are in.</p> <p>We have a different person leading every week. And I appreciate that folks each have their own kind of method and style. And that's been a lot of fun. X brought an activity where we had to commit to a practice that we were going to do for the whole week. And you had to like draw something on a piece of paper that had little parts to it so you could color in the parts for each day that you did it during the week. And it was this hilarious little art project where we were all drawing and holding out our pictures on Zoom to show what we were doing.</p> <p>So, I think I appreciate that it is a group that gets together with the intention of study but not the sole purpose of study. There is a Christ-centered component that is academic but it's also a group of like-minded people and believers that come together to share that time, whether we are talking about God or not, or telling funny stories from our childhood. I think that is a really meaningful thing to me because in my professional life and some of my personal life outside of Duke Chapel I am not necessarily surrounded by people who are comfortable talking about faith or who have faith. And so, to be in that kind of supporting environment is freeing in not having to constantly defend what you believe.</p>
<p>Thoughts on Intergenerational nature of your group?</p>	<p>I love it, I think it's great. It's so fun. I am continually challenged. It is so fun to see the young struggling over life things like worrying over getting an internship or being stressed about mid-terms and all the older folk being like, "oh, you're okay!" But then to also sit back and say really insightful poignant things, about maybe the story or like connecting to someone else in a way that is just so powerful.</p> <p>And then we've got several folks who are quite a bit older than me, all in different stages of their lives and with children who are different varying ages. I think it's so instructive to see where people are in the different seasons of their lives, how some of those things are similar maybe to where you might be, and how some of those things are different.</p> <p>I'm always a fan of trying to understand where people are coming from and what their concerns are and what their values are. I think it makes us more well-rounded as people, to be able to think about how you are really close with a 74-year-old in my group. I was volunteering a vaccine connect today and I can think about what some of the older folks coming in are concerned or worried about. When I see that someone is clearly a college student, it's like 'okay here's when your next appointment, if you can't make it because of your class schedule, here is what you have to think about.'</p> <p>So, it helps to let us understand one another a little better. I think sometimes we all make assumptions about what a 30-year-old cares about or what a 70-year-old cares about and sometimes those things are true.</p>
<p>Helping you in your faith journey?</p>	<p>I think it does, I think it brings a lot of perspective.</p> <p>Maybe I share something I'm struggling with and someone who is older or younger says, "oh yeah I bet that really reminds me of this experience that I went through. Here is how I navigated that." Or even to just have people to sit with you and say, "that is really hard, I'll pray for you." That is a powerful thing.</p>

<p>Most frustrating aspects of LTGs?</p>	<p>Probably two frustrations.</p> <p>One is that the virtual format gets a little old. We've talked about meeting in-person when we're all vaccinated, when it's when it's safer and the weather is nice, and we can be outside. That is a frustration that is outside of anyone's control. It's just the world we live in right now.</p> <p>The other thing - I was a former teacher and so I almost wish there was a little bit more structure for the members of the group when it's their turn to lead. Some people just naturally do a really good job and some people not so much. And so, we've had a couple of sessions where, depending on who the leader is, you don't really talk about much or it doesn't necessarily go as deep as it could or go in a direction that is as useful. It's still nice to spend time with everyone but I don't know that it's as fulfilling as it could be.</p>
<p>Would you like to lead a group like this?</p>	<p>I will probably say "No" for right now, just with where I am in my life. I think for me I'm going at my max capacity right now and as a as a participant I very much enjoyed participating</p> <p>Yeah, if I were in there in a position where I had a little bit more time I think I would do that. I like to see a couple lead our group, and they come prepared. It's an interesting group with a number of married couples. I like that the LTG is a mix.</p>
<p>Would you like to join the young parents LTG?</p>	<p>No. This is an every church problem, not just a Duke chapel problem. You get to a point where you're not really a student and you're not a young adult anymore because you have a mortgage and a job. So, you no longer really fit in the 'kid' category. We don't do a good job, I think, of figuring out those adults that don't become parents and do things.</p> <p>Programmatically it's much easier to plan things for families. So, we have these family friendly activities. I completely support that, and I would in no way want for those things to go away. But if you're not in that category, I think we have the people who kind of wander their way through the 30 to 40 genre and then are adults and the leaders in the church. The diversity there of life choices is a little bit more present then. But there is a period there where it is somewhat challenging.</p>
<p>Do you sense yourself getting closer to the Lord and your faith growing? Over the past six months have you seen a change?</p>	<p>I think the answer is Yes. I said I think because it's a somewhat complicated question in that, in the same time that I've been doing what I consider as faith nurturing activity in the LTG, so many of the other aspects of my faith life have kind of fallen off. I did the virtual services for the first six months [of the pandemic]. People are working really hard on this [virtual services] and I don't want to diminish the work that goes into the services. But it's not the same in-person and it's not as fulfilling.</p> <p>So, I think the LTG has really, in a lot of ways, has been my one firm connection to God and to my faith, where you do pray regularly and you're reading the Bible and you're having a faith conversation.</p> <p>In a more normal time, I would be "absolutely, Yes." In this case, I don't know if it's getting stronger but I will say it is sustaining</p>

<p>Pedagogically, do you see the LTGs as a good model for discipleship and imparting training in discipleship?</p>	<p>I think that depends to a certain extent on the person. There is a really important of social and societal component to the LTG where it's probably more likely for most people that someone will say something in the LTG that resonates with them that they take into their week, more so than maybe with the pulpit.</p> <p>There are people who remember things people say in sermons. It has to be really good for me to remember it like that. I'm much more likely remember a funny story or something weird that happened than I am an important point from the sermon. in that sense, yes, the LTG has a better chance. But I also think there are people have lots of different kind of learning modalities.</p> <p>I think that all those modes have value, probably depending on how you learn and how your brain is wired. You might take more away from any of those individual things. But I think the LTG maybe has better shot at reaching more people on their level wherever they are that day.</p>
<p>In-person, Online Only, or Hybrid LTG Meetings?</p>	<p>Good question. I don't know. As we haven't had any in-person meetings yet I'm not sure. One of the things about Zoom is it both cuts down on the crosstalk, which can be a really good thing, but it can also be a silencing thing. Someone might be like, "I had a good idea," but they weren't able to really get in there and say something. But it can also prevent certain people from talking the whole time. So, it I'm not sure how we're going to do in-person.</p> <p>I also think that there could be a benefit to keeping the door open to a hybrid model. Because I think all the folks in my group are local. But if we had a young person who transferred to a different college or went to a graduate school or somebody who moved to a different location, I would hate for them to no longer be able to engage with the group because they moved away, especially now that we know we have the technology to bridge those gaps.</p>
<p>Over time, keep the same groups or re-create groups and mix members of different groups?</p>	<p>I think I lean in the direction of keeping the same group, at least for now. I can see a value in mixing up the group so that people get even more perspectives and learn new things. Maybe at the end of the academic year or at the end of the summer we create new groups, saying we really want to make it so people meet new people.</p> <p>But I think that, with the LTG, it really took us probably quite a bit of the fall to really get to that place where you're comfortable and you're comfortable being vulnerable. I think that that is one of the hard things about this group and Zoom does make it a little bit harder. It took us a little while in the Fall to get to that place. Now that we finally hit that stride, I think we feel very connected as a group, I would not want to shake that up just yet, I don't think.</p> <p>And I do you think if the groups go that way or there is a data to do so, it would be good to talk about that at the beginning of the group's formation. To say, 'we are forming the groups in August and you know at the end of July or the beginning of the year you will have a new group if you choose to participate.' So that people understand that expectation. I think if we just try to reform the groups, they will reform exactly the same way.</p> <p>I think it could plateau. You can get to the point where you feel like you've all said the things you need to say, and you almost need that injection of new ideas or new challenges and new personalities. I think it could get stale. So, maybe even just having that year to say, 'you'll be together with this group for a year and then obviously continue your relationships with these people. We don't want you to write them off but if you join a new group we will we will try to mix it up a little bit.'</p>

<p>Growing and keeping LTGs fresh by inviting members to be leaders of new groups?</p>	<p>I think it's good to encourage that, but I would not require it, for two reasons.</p> <p>One, I think there are people who might be in a position like I'm in, who can't commit to a multi-year thing. But I think you could even advertise it to say, 'you go through this process for a year and then we would love to invite you to be a leader and to take your own group and to really spread this.' Because it is this discipleship model</p> <p>I also think there are some people who you like to be members, who don't necessarily want to lead. I can think of at least one person, and probably more than one, frankly, in my group right now, where if that were a requirement that person would not be participating.</p>
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<b>Participant P27 - 66-75 Demographic, LTG Member</b>	
<b>Theme Explored</b>	<b>Answer or Response Summary</b>
<p>How long a member of Congregation?</p>	<p>6 months with Congregation</p> <p>I love it. Lots of elements about it that I love. A wonderful small group that means a lot to me. I love the Sunday school class. I love the worship services - the music, and the sermons as well as the way the service is structured. It suits me very well and is the kind of worship service I like and feel fulfilled by. I love the sense of outreach and mission that is built in.</p>
<p>Need help of other Christians to grow?</p>	<p>Absolutely. We all need to be inspired. Just on our own it's easy to run out of steam. And so, other people are sources of encouragement. Fellowship is a fundamental part of my entire religious life and have been used to it, and it's meant a lot to me. I've been looking for that and of course during covid it's been complicated and difficult. The small group has provided me with at least some sense of encouragement with other Christians. Sharing concerns and thoughts and ideas has been really terrific for me, and I'm happy to be a part of that.</p>
<p>How long a part of LTG?</p>	<p>That started back in September, I haven't missed one yet.</p>
<p>What attracted you to the LTG?</p>	<p>I just wanted to be a part of a small group. I've been in those before, and they provided an offering of which day and time of week would be suitable and this particular group seemed to fit my schedule the best. I knew no one who was in it, so I settled for that time. Wonderful people. Very diverse too.</p>
<p>Most rewarding features of LTGs?</p>	<p>The opportunity to share with each other who you are and what we are thinking and what's going on in our lives. Each week, we've had one person share his or her faith journey which ends up being sort of a brief autobiography in a lot of ways. And so, it's people sharing important things in their lives and what has meant a lot to them over the years from a faith perspective. That's like baring your soul in a sense. So, it's enabled me to get to know other people. And I've shared about myself in the group too. It's a sense of friendship and solidarity, even though I'd never met any of these people before face to face. This has been going on for six to seven months now. We're looking forward to having a picnic or something together.</p> <p>There is a pledge of confidentiality too which is built into it and is important. It's been really good. The group is quite diverse - divers in age, diverse in activities people do, people who are retired and people in college. We don't have any other racial categories or people from foreign nationalities, but it is still diverse.</p>
<p>Thoughts on Intergenerational nature of your group?</p>	<p>Giving people a chance to share where they are coming from which is different from where the other people are coming from.</p>



Most frustrating aspects of LTGs?	I would say that the opportunities to get to know each other better socially has been a little hard within the constraints of the Zoom meeting. For e.g. one of the things I learnt is that a couple in the group and one member in college have had extensive experience with the youth in the chapel. The chance to talk about something like that some more is harder to do in the group.
Impact of Technology Usage?	<p>The technology side has some real advantages to it. You don't have to get in your car and drive somewhere after supper. It's convenient in that way.</p> <p>The way Zoom is set up, you are automatically looking at everyone in the group. If you were in a circle, it might be a little bit harder. It's great to watch everybody, their faces and reactions.</p> <p>I'm going to be curious to see how the whole of society adjusts to the post-Covid world. I think it's going to be some kind of hybrid of technology and less face-to-face, though we still need the face to face.</p>
In-person, Online Only, or Hybrid LTG Meetings?	Yes, I guess so. You might need a bigger screen than just a personal laptop screen, if you've got 3 or 4 in the same place. That would work pretty well, I think.
Pedagogically, do you see the LTGs as a good model for discipleship and imparting training in discipleship?	I personally like it. I don't know if all the small groups are set up that way. There is a book we are reading, and we take a chapter per meeting and we address the questions derived from that chapter. There is really not too much pedagogy that is involved. In terms of learning about the Bible or what the writer is saying, there is not too much pedagogy but that suits me just fine. So, I think the main thing, developing the friendship and social solidarity that has a Christian basis to it is, to me, where the meat of it is. This is not a Bible Study or an educational class. It's a group fellowship. I like the way it's set up. I don't have to read the book, and frequently don't have the chapters, but that hasn't been necessary to really obtain value from the fellowship.
Do you sense yourself getting closer to the Lord and your faith growing? Over the past six months have you seen a change?	<p>Oh yeah, absolutely. Just to be able to share my life story from a spiritual perspective has helped me to rethink and reassess where I've come from and where I am going, has been really good. It's kind of a deeper psychological process. But I think it's been really great.</p> <p>Another great thing about our small group is that we have a lot of fun together. There's been a lot of laughing, it's been really fun.</p>
Over time, keep the same groups or re-create groups and mix members of different groups?	<p>That's a great question. We raised that last Thursday night. I'm really torn about it.</p> <p>I can see a lot of value for both approaches. It's good to know new people, particularly within the Congregation, to build social solidarity. I can see a lot of value in that.</p> <p>On the other hand, it takes a while to get a group formed, where people will feel comfortable. I guess I'm really on the border on that. I guess I would say that if we had been going for two years, I think it would be time to move on to something else. Maybe another year would make sense.</p> <p>I would give 51 votes for keeping for another year, and 49 votes to maybe turning over.</p> <p>Having some structure and well-trained leaders has been really great.</p>
Would you like to lead a group like this?	I haven't thought about that till you asked me. At some point I would be willing to consider it.

<b>Participant P27 - 36-49 Demographic, LTG Member &amp; Congregation Leader</b>	
<b>Theme Explored</b>	<b>Answer or Response Summary</b>
	Member of LTG since they started in September 2020, and been at every meeting
Need help of other Christians to grow?	<p>I think so. Christianity is a complex thing. It helps to have other perspectives to challenge one's own perspectives or falsehoods. Hearing other people talk about Christ or God can open up new viewpoints.</p> <p>Certainly, if you take the long view, yes, of course. Because a lot of it comes from one's parents. If you're brought up as a Christian, a lot of that comes from your parents. There are key times in that process of formation. Over time that need becomes less and less. You feel more formed in your own faith. I think it changes over time.</p>
LTG as a tool for formation	From my experience, no, not really. I sought it out more as a chance for building community and fellowship. I think there have been times when people have shared more deeply and that is helpful. But there have times when it's been run a little bit more like an extended Bible study where its more about interpretation and erudition and not necessarily getting to people's relationship with the Bible or the text. Sometimes it was run almost a little bit too much at a distance.
What attracted you to the LTG?	Couple of things. One is I like being in small groups instead of larger groups and having smaller conversations. So, I was looking forward to more of that for this group. I also felt that as [leadership position X] of the Congregation, I wanted to support this initiative by participating in it.
Most rewarding features of LTGs?	<p>It's been nice getting to know some of the other individuals in the group. And it's been nice, over the past couple of months, where sometimes there were things going on in my own life or my family life, and it felt good to be able to share that with a group beyond my own family. There is a different perspective or different type of empathy that was, in a way, less complicated, and also in a way it would bring out their own viewpoints and things that would help put things in perspective.</p> <p>They certainly would include prayers. I'm not big on prayer, and it's not a big part of my Christian faith, but I certainly don't mind it. It was also helpful, though it could go too far, them just asking about how Y is doing or how Z is doing. I found that more helpful than the immediate prayer.</p> <p>I find religion, and I find Christianity in particular, to be a very helpful mindset for approaching the world. Without a Christian faith, without a Christian background, it would be too easy to think too much of ourselves and be too unaware of the mysteries and splendor around us. I also find that there seems to be a limitless depth to the moral wisdom that Christian text and the Bible brings to bear, and that there is little waste of time when we gather and talk about these ancient texts, because they still resonate today, which is a rather remarkable thing.</p> <p>So, there is not a strong sense for me of a personal salvation or personal Jesus or those types of things, but I do think that being a Christian, paying attention to what it brings in terms of having a more stable and full view of life is deeply valuable. I certainly would be much shallower without it.</p>

<p>Most frustrating aspects of LTGs?</p>	<p>I think I wanted to just chat and talk more but I felt like we were a little bit in the mode of, 'well do a little bit of that but when that time is over, we need to pay attention to this passage from John or James or whatever it might be.' Some of those conversations were really good but they felt kind of sterile. I was looking for something that was a little bit more personal and connective. I was looking for something that was not like a mini-Bible study in a way, but something where I can share a little bit more about how I am feeling about things, and focus others, and be okay with that. [I know someone else in another LTG] and am a little bit jealous because they seem to laugh more and share more and talk more about what is bothering them, and maybe [theirs is] a little bit more therapeutic.</p> <p>I'm sort of working towards the best way to quietly slip out of this group, probably just waiting for the end of the year. The leaders set the tone and pattern and I think others might feel the same way.</p>
<p>Impact of Technology Usage?</p>	<p>I think our attendance would not be what it is without technology. We've had very consistent attendance. And it's very much like, if [it's 2 mins after the start time and] someone is not there, we very much want to know, 'are they okay?' There's been very high, very faithful attendance. Part of that is that there is a pandemic going on and also what people have to do [at the meeting time]. But I think, if we are trying to meet as a group [in-person], it wouldn't have so many people there.</p> <p>If we were meeting together as a group [in-person], I think it is a lot easier to read people. Even though we have video, which is helpful, which is good, it can be easier to feel like you are with people. And some of what I was describing earlier may not have been the case because it'd be easier to feel being with other people.</p> <p>[Technology] is convenient because it is easier to get people to commit because they don't need to drive somewhere or for the meeting to be around food. That could have been harder.</p>
<p>Members Collaborating more with Technology?</p>	<p>No, I think if we were in a circle, it would be easier - there's body language, how people are sitting... there's just other things that you can sort of get. There's also just know even how to judge a moment of silence and whether it's a moment that should be broken or whether it's a moment that should be allowed to sit a little bit. All of that is easier in person.</p> <p>We do have [two members out of state], so I don't want to discount that.</p>
<p>In-person, Online Only, or Hybrid LTG Meetings?</p>	<p>No, that [Hybrid] might be even more awkward. Then the group that is there [in a particular location] might want to get into something, and you lose the screen. I think it would make everyone happier to have both [online and in person but not hybrid] available.</p>
<p>Over time, keep the same groups or re-create groups and mix members of different groups?</p>	<p>I think having some natural ability to switching things, not necessarily leaders - there is the principle of diminishing returns. You get together with people - after a while you have some sense of what they are going to say in terms of any particular thing. And so, you are sort of getting less with those particular people. Whereas mixing it up every year or every six months, probably the limit of frequency of mixing it up, makes a difference. Just as you are giving people the opportunity to be in-person or virtual, also giving people the option to say you can join a different group or stay with the same group. There are lot of things to go into. Also, what time people are available and not available.</p> <p>I think it would be good to have new groups when we start in the fall. The Fall is the traditional start of the education season and so maybe just take a few weeks off, to let the Education Committee assess how things are going, then get a fresh start. Even if it's a new text to guide us or things like that. Even if you have the same group and you declare we're having a fresh start, it can reinvigorate the conversations.</p>

<p>Would you like to lead a group like this?</p>	<p>Probably not. My approach to faith is probably a little bit of a minority one as well. I'm a little bit over committed to volunteer stuff already.</p>
<p>Pedagogically, do you see the LTGs as a good model for discipleship and imparting training in discipleship?</p>	<p>I think that is incredibly valuable and very much support those sorts of groups. If anything, you've heard my disappointment that it feels too much like a mini-Bible study, and I want to go more in that direction. We are a pretty smart Congregation. A lot of people who come to Duke Chapel are attracted by the high level of preaching. People have a ton to offer. I don't think there is a strong need to have master teachers in every conversation.</p>

**Appendix B: Survey/Interview Schedule and questions**

**B1: Class Meeting Post-Test Experience Questionnaire**

<p><b>Life Together Group Experience Questionnaire</b></p> <p>The purpose of this survey questionnaire is to help with a better understanding of the impact of Life Together Groups in the lives of its members and the Congregation at Duke Chapel. The questions first seek to gain insights on your views on what it means to be a Christian and a disciple, and how one might grow spiritually as a Christian. It then focuses on your experience of the Life Together Group. For each question, please choose the option that best matches your response. After the responses are tallied and the study is completed, the results will be shared with the Education Committee and Council of the Congregation at Duke Chapel to help improve the Life Together Group experience for all.</p> <p>All data will be used in an aggregate manner and your anonymity will be protected. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time. Survey participants will receive no compensation. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell Michael Larbi, the doctoral student of Asbury Theological Seminary conducting this survey, who can be reached at michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu</p> <p>Thank you for your assistance.</p>		4. Strongly Agree	3 Agree	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Q1	I am a Christian. I believe Jesus died and rose again and, by God's grace, I am saved from the power of sin, guilt, and condemnation.				
Q2	I am a child of God				
Q3	I consider Jesus to be Lord of my life, and I let Him influence what I think and say, and how I live				
Q4	I have been baptized, and so I have been buried with Christ and risen with Him				
Q5	I am a disciple (follower) of Jesus Christ				
Q6	Praying regularly, and at set times of every day, is a must if I want to grow spiritually				
Q7	In addition to prayer, making time to fast regularly will help me grow as a Christian				
Q8	Because the Bible is vital spiritual food for my nourishment, it is important that I read it daily and spend time reflecting on what I read.				

Q9	Regularly meeting with other Christians for worship and fellowship is a necessity for my growth as a Christian				
Q10	Having other Christians watch over me by regularly sharing with them my spiritual goals, successes, failings, and challenges will help me grow as a Christian				
Q11	I am a church member and attend worship services at least two times a month				
Q12	I am a member of a Life Together Group, attend its meetings regularly, and participate in its activities				
Q13	I have found my Life Together Group inspirational.				
Q14	Interacting with and sharing my life and faith with others in a small group has strengthened my faith				
Q15	My participation has encouraged me to live a more faithful Christian life				
Q16	I have learnt or been reminded of practical spiritual disciplines to help me grow in my daily life as a Christian				
Q17	The topics discussed in the meetings have been appropriate and helped everyone engage in the discussions				
Q18	The amount of time given to praying together in the meetings is adequate				
Q19	When I have had a chance to lead my group, I had enough guidance to help me lead well.				
Q20	The 75-minute duration of the Life Together Group meeting is appropriate				
Q21	Technology (Zoom, email, etc.) has made it easier to be part of a Life Together Group				
Q22	Technology (Zoom, email, etc.) has made it easier to collaborate with others in the Life Together Group - during and after meetings				
Q23	After coronavirus restrictions are lifted, the Life Together Group experience will be better when we meet in-person				
Q24	If we have hybrid Life Together meetings, with some in-person while others join via Zoom, the meetings will still be effective.				
Q25	Do you have any suggestions on how the discipleship small group format might be improved for the Congregation? Any other comments?	Freeform Response			

**B2: Interview Questionnaire**

Michael Larbi  
Doctor of Ministry Research Instrument

Class Meeting Discipleship Semi-Structured Interview Questions

**A. Introduction**

1. Name/Pseudonym

2. Gender

Male     Female

3. Age

18-29     30-39     40-59     60 and 60+

4. Are you a member of the Congregation at Duke Chapel?

 YES

i. How often to attend worship services in the church, on average?

Weekly             Twice a Month     Thrice a Month     Once a Month

ii. Do you serve in any capacity in the Church? If so, in what capacity?

iii. How long have you been in the church?

0-6 months     6 months – 1 year     1 to 2 Years

2 to 3 years     3 to 5 years     5 to 10 years     10+ years

 NO

i. How often do you visit this church?

Occasionally     Once a Month     Twice a Month     Other

..... please specify

ii. Why do you come to this church?

**B. Views on Group Discipleship [Attitude]**

5. a. Are you a Christian?

Yes     No     Maybe     I don't know

b. If so, for how long?

0-6 months     6 months – 1 year     1 to 2 Years

2 to 3 years     3 to 5 years     5 to 10 years     10+ years

6. Do you think you need the help of others to grow as a Christian? Please give a reason for your answer.

**C. Class Meeting**

7. How long have you been a part of the Life Together Group?

8. How often do your Life Together Group meet?

9. How long are your meetings?

10. How often do you attend?

11. What attracted you to the Life Together Group?

12. What have you found most rewarding about the Life Together Group?

13. What have you found frustrating about the Life Together Group?

14. What do you think of the intergenerational nature of your group?

15. Do you sense yourself getting closer to the Lord and your faith growing? Over the past six months have you seen a change?

16. Would you like to lead an LTG?

17. How long should the groups keep meeting? Should they be mixed up after a while to keep things fresh?



**D. Technology (Zoom, Email, etc.)**

18. What is the impact of using technology for the LTG?
19. What improvements would you like to see in the technology for a more effective LTG?
20. Post the Covid-19 Pandemic, would you prefer a hybrid (virtual and in-person), in-person only, or virtual only LTG?

**E. Additional Questions for Life Together Group Leaders**

21. Do you see yourself leading an LTG for a long time?
22. Have you seen your members grow in their faith? Explain
23. How can the LTGs grow numerically and spiritually?
24. What prospects do you see for growth in the congregation's witness and mission through LTGs and the use of technology for such ministry?

**F. Additional Questions for Congregation Pastor/Leaders**

25. What motivated the desire for a discipleship ministry, with the Congregation having many ministries?
26. Have you participated in the groups yourself?
27. How essential is it to you to have members of the Congregation provide pastoral support to each other?
28. Has it improved growth in the Congregation numerically and spiritually and, if so, how is it doing that?
29. What prospects do you see for growth in the congregation's witness and mission through LTGs and the use of technology for such ministry?
30. In some churches, new members are put immediately into small groups and that becomes the mode of discipleship. Do you see this happening in the Congregation?
31. In your normal pastoral work, have you seen people engaging more in spiritual disciplines as a result of their being members of life together groups?

32. Have you seen greater interaction between members of the Congregation as a result of LTGs?
33. Do you envisage that post-Covid, do you envisage that there will be more in-person groups, more online groups only, or more hybrid LTGs? What would be your preference?
34. Pedagogically, do you see the LTGs as a good model for discipleship and imparting training in discipleship?

## **Appendix C: Ethical Considerations and Consent Forms Template**

### **C1: Online Survey Header Text**

#### *Life Together Group Experience Questionnaire*

The purpose of this survey questionnaire is to help with a better understanding of the impact of Life Together Groups in the lives of its members and the Congregation at Duke Chapel. The questions first seek to gain insights on your views on what it means to be a Christian and a disciple, and how one might grow spiritually as a Christian. It then focuses on your experience of the Life Together Group. For each question, please choose the option that best matches your response. After the responses are tallied and the study is completed, the results will be shared with the Education Committee and Council of the Congregation at Duke Chapel to help improve the Life Together Group experience for all.

All data will be used in an aggregate manner and your anonymity will be protected. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time. Survey participants will receive no compensation. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell Michael Larbi, the doctoral student of Asbury Theological Seminary conducting this survey, who can be reached at [michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu)

Thank you for your assistance.

**C2: Research Interview Consent E-mail**

Dear [Participant name],

On Friday, I sent you an email asking your kind participation in an experience survey as part of my research into the impact of the Congregation's Life Together Groups program.

To complement the survey, the research requires an interview of some participants to find out more about member experience in the Life Together Groups. The interview will be over Zoom and should last between 15 and 30 minutes.

Would you be happy for me to interview you, please? If so, could please let me know when you might be available for a Zoom call this week or next week, please?

Please read the INFORMED CONSENT portion of this email below. Responding to this email to indicate I may interview you will be taken to mean you have read the INFORMED CONSENT and are happy with what it states.

By way of reminder, Rev. Carol Gregg's email indicating Council approval for this research is also reproduced below.

With thanks and every blessing,  
Michael Larbi

## INFORMED CONSENT

### *Discipleship Study – Life Together Groups*

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Michael Larbi from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a member or leader or administrator of a Life Together Group in the Congregation at Duke University Chapel.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete an experience survey questionnaire on your Life Together Group. In addition, you may be interviewed about your experience in the Life Together Group and its usage of technology such as Zoom and emails to facilitate your meetings. Interviews will be audio recorded but the audio files will be stored on an encrypted disk and only accessible by passwords to protect your identity and ensure confidentiality.

The leadership of the Congregation at Duke Chapel will know that you are in the study. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or code (e.g. P1 for Participant 1) will be used instead of your name.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell Michael Larbi who can be reached at [michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu). 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.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Michael Larbi at [michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu). You can also ask the Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Carol Gregg, of the Congregation at Duke Chapel any questions you might have about this study. Her details are, email: [carol.gregg@duke.edu](mailto:carol.gregg@duke.edu), phone: 989.388.7127.

Responding to this email agreeing to be interviewed 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 the study, do not reply to this email with your consent. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not agree to participate 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.

Dear Life Together Members,

Michael Larbi, who has helped us begin our Life Together groups, is working on a research project pertaining to small group ministry. His original plan of working with local Methodist churches was disrupted by the pandemic. He has now asked the Council for permission to conduct the research with our Life Together group participants.

Last night, the Council has granted permission for online surveys to be distributed to our members. Michael's research is also following institutional review board policies.

I invite you to participate in the short online survey that Michael will send you. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to respond, please know that all data will be used in an aggregate manner and your anonymity will be protected.

Michael has designed this survey under the guidance of faculty at Asbury Theological Seminary. The first group of questions pertain to personal spiritual beliefs and practices; the second group addresses your experience with a Life Together group.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I am grateful for your participation in the Life Together Groups.

<Senior Pastor's Name>

Pastor

The Congregation at Duke University Chapel

401 Chapel Drive

Box 90974

Durham, NC 27708-0974

**C3: Informed Consent Letter**

## INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

## Discipleship Study – Life Together Groups

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Michael Larbi from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a member or leader or administrator of a Life Together Group in the Congregation at Duke University Chapel.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete an experience survey questionnaire on your Life Together Group. In addition, you may be interviewed about your experience in the Life Together Group and its usage of technology such as Zoom and emails to facilitate your meetings. Interviews will be audio recorded but the audio files will be stored on an encrypted disk and only accessible by passwords to protect your identity and ensure confidentiality.

The leadership of the Congregation at Duke Chapel will know that you are in the study. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or code (e.g., P1 for Participant 1) will be used instead of your name.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell Michael Larbi who can be reached at [michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu). 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.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Michael Larbi at [michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:michael.larbi@asburyseminary.edu). You can also ask the Senior Pastor, <Senior Pastor's name>, of the Congregation at Duke Chapel any questions you might have about this study. Her details are, email: <Pastor's email address>, phone: <Pastor's phone number>.

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 the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

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 Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

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 Date Signed

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