LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY

FAMILIFICATION IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Michael Vincent Jenkins

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2022

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY

FAMILIFICATION IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

by Michael Vincent Jenkins

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

December 14, 2022

APPROVED BY:

_____
George Hege, Ph.D., Dissertation Supervisor

_____
Steven L. Yates, Ph.D., Second Reader

ABSTRACT

In Matthew 8:22, Jesus says, "Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" (*Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2007). With these jarring words, He demanded that His hearers reject the social norms of their society and join His new group (Hellerman, 2009a). That change creates a compelling shift in the social order and draws believers into the family of God and into community with one another. This phenomenological study investigated whether something similar to the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first century church, exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community. In this research, Familification is defined as "the gaining of a new Father, and a new group of brothers and sisters as believers respond to the gospel" (Hellerman, 2009a). This research seeks to build upon the work of Hellerman by investigating a theoretical foundation for his thinking in a specific local context.

Keywords: familification, community, affective solidarity, family unity, material solidarity, family loyalty

Dedication

For Jesus Christ, Parker Isabelle, and the pastors, presbytery, and people of the

Abundant Grace Bible Church. All of you are more patient with me than I deserve.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Patrilineal Kinship Group (PKG)

Qualtrics Experience Management (XM)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Immediately following the world's creation, God examined His handiwork and affirmed, "it is good" (English Standard Version Bible used throughout this work unless indicated otherwise, 2007, Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). However, God saw that it was not ideal for His created son Adam to be without a companion. As a result, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). God took one of Adam's ribs (selā') and used it to create Eve as a new side (Davis, 1998). By this act, God enlarged Adam's actual person into a companion and produced not just a family but also a community of people who can look at each other and perceive themselves as well as God (Towns, 1996). The first family is drawn into a connection with one another in a way that defies explanation and appears to be influenced by supernatural forces. Indeed, humanity is intrinsically relational since it was fashioned in the image of a relational God" (Morrow, 2008).

Background to the Problem

In Matthew 8:22, Jesus said, "Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." (English Standard Version). With these harsh words, He demanded that His hearers reject the social norms of their society and join His new group (Hellerman, 2009a). That change created a compelling shift in the relationship of believers to God. It drew them deeper into community and the family of God. Hellerman assumed a problem that many believers, though converted, had not accepted; their justification also demanded more than participation in community. Justification also demanded what Hellerman termed "Familification." Familification is the act of gaining a new Father and a new group of brothers and sisters when people respond to the gospel (Hellerman, 2009a). This idea supported the socially inclusive nature of the early church as Jesus

assumed that His new followers would naturally interact with each other according to the existing cultural norms and continue the solidarity already shared among nuclear families in the known Mediterranean world (Hellerman, 2009a).

Through Christ, every believer is reconciled to God and enters into the family of God (2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 8:17). Justification and Familification demand that every believer participates in both the community and the family created in Eden (Gen. 2:18). As believers navigated the new realities of their conversion, those realities had an impact of every aspect of their relational life (Hellerman, 2009a). Consequently, Hellerman's work assumed a digression away from the traits ascribed to community in the first century. However, the researcher will seek to determine whether Hellerman's supposition is accurate, that is, whether those historical first-century traits can still be found in contemporary Christian community.

Statement of the Problem

Previous researchers have investigated Christian community (Bock, 2008; Halter and Smay, 2008; Issler, 2008; Johnston, 2008; Lowe and Lowe, 2018; Morrow, 2008; Samra, 2008). There is also extensive research on the Christian family motif (Harland, 2005; Karayakina, 2013; Osiek, 2002; Parsons, 2018; Seidel, 2008). However, there is limited research on the concept of Familification, as it is presently experienced among Christian brothers and sisters in contemporary Christian communities. There is a gap in the literature because no previous studies focus primarily on this study's focus. The focus of this study is whether there exists any parallel between the new family described in Hellerman (2009a) and Paul's writings about the first-century church and within the contemporary Christian community of churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention.

In American megachurches, people are largely disconnected from one another and struggle to form meaningful relationships. This disconnection prompted megachurches to emphasize small groups to resolve the dearth of community (Thumma & Bird, 2008). However, of the 400 megachurches surveyed, there was only a slight increase in membership participation in small groups over eight years. This slight increase remained valid despite a 34% increase in churches' emphasis on and proliferation of small groups (Thumma & Bird, 2008). Moreover, 10% fewer churches described their interactions as being "like a close-knit family," causing the researchers to conclude that the renewed emphasis on small groups by over one-third of the megachurches was rooted in a perceived social disconnectedness, as opposed to being a proactive strategy (Thumma & Bird, 2008).

Roman Catholic religious communities and religious orders served as the focus of participation in spiritual life (Wittberg, 1997). These religious communities, a large body of adherents, assembled as strangers for Mass and departed into isolation throughout the remainder of the week. An Australian study confirmed this idea. The study observed that one of the main reasons Roman Catholics stopped attending Mass altogether was what they described as poor community life (Dixon & Australian Episcopal Conference, 2007). This poor community life included the absence of a sense of welcome, a lack of ministries for divorced or single people, and the overall sense that community had eroded or did not exist at all. Finally, the researchers noted that the respondents shared a sense of sadness for the community they had lost (Dixon & Australian Episcopal Conference, 2007).

Without some clear definition of Familification and how it operates, grows, and aids in community development, Christian leaders are poorly positioned to shepherd an authentic expression of the newly formed, and growing, family. Pastors are perhaps doomed to be

responsive – as the megachurch leaders were – or caught off guard by members who leave their local churches and lament the lack of community – as the Roman Catholic adherents did. The present researcher will address the gap and seek to contribute to the current literature by addressing Hellerman's dilemma: the reported reduction of family-related traits in a modern community.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community. In this research, Familification will be generally defined as "the gaining of a new Father and a new group of brothers and sisters as believers respond to the gospel" (Hellerman, 2009). Community is defined as "those who possess a shared identity, undertake a shared mission, and gather in one location to act in concert as the united people of God" (Johnston, 2008). This research sought to build upon Hellerman's work by investigating a theoretical foundation for his thinking in a specific local context.

Research Questions

This qualitative research was designed to obtain data from the experiences and perspectives of members that provided answers to the following questions:

RQ1. How does Hellerman define and describe Pauline Familification?

RQ2. How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention describe their experiences of Christian community?

RQ3. How do the descriptions found in RQ2 compare and contrast to historical descriptions of Christian community known as Pauline Familification?

RQ4. How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention describe the impact of social distancing on their experience of Christian Community?

<div align="center">

Assumptions and Delimitations

</div>

Assumptions and delimitations help frame the research for the reader. Assumptions are those aspects of the study generally accepted as being accurate or plausible. Delimitations encompass the study's boundaries that are in the researcher's control. Assumptions provide a starting point, and delimitations offer boundaries.

Research Assumptions

This researcher does not seek to prove that God intends for believers to exist, grow, and participate in community and does not try to establish the essential functions of that community. It is assumed that the reader fully understands the value and importance of community. Additionally, it is assumed that adult church members who are the participants in this study comprehend the necessity of community participation.

Delimitations of the Research Design

A delimitation of this qualitative study is that it is focused on Pauline Familification in contemporary Christian community among brothers and sisters in God's family within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. Therefore, the findings will not be generalizable to other congregations or settings. However, the researcher hopes that the data will provide deep insight into the dynamics of Pauline Familification and provide the foundation for future researchers interested in the phenomenon of experiencing Familification in contemporary community. The other specific delimitations of the study include the following:

1. This study is delimited to members of churches within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention.

2. This study is delimited to churches within the Los Angeles District Association that provided a new media experience for people participating in community.

3. This study is delimited to church members within the Los Angeles District Association that canceled or abstained from all physical church gatherings of more than ten people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Definition of Terms

The key terms related to the focus of this study are defined below. These terms are

critical in understanding this study's title, purpose, research questions, and population.

1. *Affective Solidarity*: The emotional bond Paul experienced among brothers and sisters in God's family (Hellerman, 2009a).

2. *Community:* Those who possess a shared identity, undertake a shared mission, and gather in one location to act in concert as the united people of God (Johnston, 2008).

3. *COVID-19 pandemic:* A severe infectious disease that spreads rapidly between people and coincides in one country and around the world (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Sulkowski & Ignatowski, 2020).

4. *Credible Leadership:* The effective exercise of leadership that is established through longstanding relationships with followers; it is exhibited through honesty, competence, vision, and motivation (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Malphurs, 2003).

5. *Familification*: The gaining of a new Father and a new group of brothers and sisters as believers respond to the gospel (Hellerman, 2009a).

6. *Family Loyalty:* the undivided commitment to God's group to mark the value system of brothers and sisters in God's family (Hellerman, 2009a).

7. *Family Unity:* The interpersonal harmony and absence of discord that Paul expected among brothers and sisters in God's family (Hellerman, 2009a).

8. *Followership:* A process in which one or more persons accept other individuals' influence to achieve a common objective (Northouse, 2018).

9. *Humble Leadership:* A form of leadership that accurately understands oneself and recognizes that there is something more important than oneself (Diab & Walters, 2016).

10. *Material Solidarity:* The sharing of resources that Paul assumed would characterize relationships among brothers and sisters in God's family (Hellerman, 2009a).

11. *Oneness*: Aspects of the lives of believers that contributed to their relationship with one another and worship of God (Halter & Smay, 2008).

12. *Otherness*: Components of believers' shared lives with individuals who are not believers (Halter & Smay, 2008).

13. *Structural Description*: A constant process of data comparison to identify the invariant structures from the participants' transcripts. This description emerges from an understanding and appreciation of the identified structural themes of the experience, the bedrock on which the textural elements rest (Conklin, 2007).

14. *Textural Description*: A sensitive narration that emphasizes the characteristics shared by respondents (Conklin, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

15. *Togetherness*: Everything believers share as they construct their lives together in community (Halter & Smay, 2008).

Significance of the Study

The demand that all believers participate in the family of God, within the context of Christian community, brings with it certain assumptions of conduct and behavior towards other believers. This construct, taken together, has Familification as its primary outgrowth. This study is significant because it seeks to measure whether contemporary Christian community can accurately be described as operating in agreement with the Familification characteristics of community in the first century. This study could have significant implications for other denominations and their sub-groups (districts, jurisdictions, etc.), connectional churches, and faith groups as they seek to foster an authentic Christian community that demonstrates the Familification concept of the Christian family in the first century.

Summary of the Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to carry out the purpose of this study, which was to explore whether Familification, as described by Hellerman, exists in Christian community among adult church members within a specific ministry setting. Qualitative research seeks to explain human experiences and behaviors within specific contexts by

describing and interpreting the social world (Creswell, 1998; Denny & Weckesser, 2019). Because this study focused on exploring church members' experiences, a qualitative design allowed for in-depth consideration of their viewpoints and values.

The researcher used the Qualtrics Experience Management (XM) online survey tool to acquire detailed information and sentiments from the respondents and NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software to organize the data. Qualtrics XM allowed the researcher to maintain a pre-determined and consistent survey instrument for the data collection process. At the same time, NVivo provided a solution to properly store, organize, and manage the data to generate the codes, their definitions, and the sub-themes and themes that make up the findings at the end of the research project.

The survey consisted of a list of questions in a specific order to allow for comparison across the dataset (Cohen, 2006). However, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed the participants some flexibility to expand on the themes of the questions. Before participants began the survey, the researcher explained the research study and then asked them to complete an informed consent form. Data from the surveys were analyzed qualitatively using an inductive approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Following Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher began the analytic process after the initial surveys to identify emergent patterns in the data. To facilitate data analysis, the researcher used Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step framework to conduct a thematic analysis of the texts. As an analytic method, thematic analysis was especially useful for identifying meanings, mainly when analysis/coding was inductive.

Chapter Summary

Community remains a central characteristic of the shared Christian identity. As believers reject the social norms of their society and join Jesus's new group, they are grafted into the

family of God. Further, believers are commended for participating in and preserving the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Participation in this new group is central to the ecological growth of the body of Christ and provides meaningful relationships for every believer. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community. The combination of community and Pauline Familification appears largely absent in the literature. The following chapter will review the literature that considers Pauline Familification in the larger community context and situate Hellerman's work in the larger context of leadership literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature review combines extant scholarly studies and research about community, the church family motif, and Hellerman's Familification. In this chapter, the researcher will survey the creation of Jesus's new family and its importation into the fledgling New Testament Church. Additionally, the researcher will present a Theological Framework by identifying and analyzing critical scriptures to support Hellerman's Familification (e.g., Affective Solidarity, Family Unity, Material Solidarity, and Family Loyalty). This chapter will then examine Hellerman's Familification as a Theoretical Framework. This information will frame the research questions of this study. Finally, the researcher will review related literature, provide the study's rationale, identify the literature gap, and give a profile of the current study.

Theological Framework for the Study

The theological framework for this study revolves around the Biblical concept that Jesus extended the idea of community by creating a new family. That new family existed on both sides of the cross and included a strict mandate to prefer the new family over professional requirements, personal commitments, or pious family responsibilities (Garland, 2011). This exploration will include an overview of community, the transition from community to family, and an analysis of significant Biblical texts supporting Hellerman's Familification.

Summoned into Community

God created community to summon believers in Christ to participate in the lasting love relationship between the three persons of the Trinity (Morrow, 2008). All humanity exists for relationship and fellowship with each other and the God of creation. The primary function of community is to create a conducive environment and furnish the necessary ingredients to

conform believers to the image of Christ. Paul suggested two ways that community supplied

those essential ingredients – birthing and building (Samra, 2008). Paul's birthing and building

were the beginning and completion of the lifelong excursion to "the measure of the stature of the

fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

All believers enter the family of God through the new birth (John 1:13; 3:3; 1 John 3:9;

5:18). Because it takes place after a person's actual birth, the new birth can be thought of as a

deuteron or "second birth." However, because it is "of God," it is also a birth that comes

*anothen, "*from above" (Towns, 2002). When Jesus said, "unless one is born of water and the

Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," (John 3:5), He was telling Nicodemus, that no one

could become His disciple, unless they had been as inwardly cleansed by the Holy Spirit, as the

outward man is cleansed by water (Ryle, 2015). Through the Holy Spirit, a person is reborn as a

son of God (Aquinas et al., 2010). Paul used analogies of parents and children to explain his

relationship to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:14), which suggests that he bears some responsibility

for ensuring their new birth (Samra, 2008).

When Paul referred to building up the church, it is apparent that he was talking about

building the individuals who are a part of the church and the whole community (Samra, 2008). In

2 Corinthians 10:8, Paul noted, "For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the

Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed." While Paul

was personally committed to building up believers (Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10), Paul

also transfers the responsibility of continued building to the local community. In 1 Thessalonians

5:11, Paul said, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are

doing." Finally, Paul details gifts given to every believer for the distinct purpose of "mutual

upbuilding" (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; 12:28; 14:3, Eph. 4:11-13).

Morrow (2008) and Paul stated that God's intent was not merely the salvation of individuals; God intended and demanded the creation of a community that bore His image and conformed others to the image of Christ. God took on the task of developing that first family into a people who will praise Him (Isa. 43:21). In contrast to God's creation of a single couple for the garden of Eden, God is forming a new community for the New Jerusalem (Johnston, 2008). This new community must observe three essential practices.

Primary Spheres of Incarnational Community

The three primary spheres of incarnational community are togetherness, oneness, and otherness (Halter & Smay, 2008). These principles are the foundation of community in the Body of Christ, and one cannot truly experience the benefits of community without having shared and participated in all three. Experience with all three of these practices concurrently is necessary to guarantee the maturation of disciples keen on drawing closer to God (Halter & Smay, 2008).

Practicing Togetherness: Community

Togetherness includes everything believers share as they construct their lives together in community (Halter & Smay, 2008). The idea that believers are supposed to be together is well established in Scripture (Ps. 133:1; Prov. 13:20; Eccles. 4:9-11; Matt. 18:20; Rom. 12:16); it is, therefore, inappropriate to pursue the Christian life in isolation (Morrow, 2008). It was never God's intention that man would be self-sufficient or exist outside of a broader community context; instead, God intended for believers to live in cooperation with other believers. In Pauline theology, believers are fellow citizens (Eph. 2:19), built together (Eph. 2:22) and joined together (Eph. 4:16). On God's behalf, these concepts depict a strong union and the clear intention that believers grow together. The importance of Paul's distinctive and repeated use of

the *syn*-prefix in his epistles demonstrated that the ideal way to use the resources that believers drew on is for activities to take place within the context of togetherness (Bock, 2008).

The corporate identity among all believers in community portrayed togetherness in every conceivable way. In this way, the called out (*ecclesia*) to the new birth were also called together for building up; this included the basic concept of sharing material resources (Hellerman, 2009a). 1 John 3:17 inquires, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" It seemed clear that the Apostle saw sharing resources as essential to demonstrating love for one another. That sharing, however, was only the start. The Scriptures confirm the definition of Halter and Smay and the conclusion of Hellerman because everyone was united and shared their resources (Acts 2:44). Within the context of a Christian community, sharing is the means through which material solidarity and compassion were made evident (Sheahan, 2004). In pursuing togetherness and sharing resources, the modern community is like the one that existed in the early church.

Practicing Oneness: Communion

Oneness included those aspects of the lives of believers that contributed to their relationship with one another and worship of God (Halter & Smay, 2008). The oneness created by community and experienced as people do life together under God's watchful eye also inspired worship. Acts 2:42 lists what worship should include minimally; these activities included teaching, fellowship, breaking bread (Lord's Supper), and prayer. Worship also made a fitting bookend to the list from Acts 2:42 (Gaebelein, 1971). All of these could occur without community, but the force of each is amplified dramatically in community.

Their vital connection to Christ, who serves as the Head of the body, is the glue that kept the members together and was the source of their unity (Saucy, 1978). The relational God

removed the option and drew all believers together into one cohesive unit under the sole leadership of Jesus Christ as the Head of the body. The requisite sense of oneness was inspired by, created, and sustained by God through willing hearts. The Father drew believers together to establish a new and redeemed community under the headship of Christ. It remains the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the many members of the church into a single body and ensure that the church continues to function as a unified community of believers (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

Practicing Otherness: Mission

Otherness included components of believers' shared lives with individuals who are not believers (Halter & Smay, 2008). The thrust of the missional church is to expand the Kingdom of God and draw others into the greater community of image-bearers. This thrust has always necessarily included forming relationships of mutual respect and service among people who live in conditions substantially different than many who participate in community. The Christian responsibility to extend the kindness of God and the Gospel message to strangers is well-rooted in Scripture (Gen. 18:1-10; Deut. 1:16, 10:18, 27:19; Lev. 19:33; Matt. 11:19, 25:35; Luke 15:2; Hebrews 13:2).

Any community not expanding into the margins of society is failing to serve "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40-45). They also fail at the command to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Work performed in the form of selfless service for the benefit of others, done out of love and compassion, rewards both the one doing the service and the person receiving it (Gaebelein, 1971). Selfless acts were all-encompassing and mandated by the Scriptures as a restoration of dignity to humanity, created in the image of God. Jesus sat at dinner with sinners (Mark 2:13-17), climbed into their boats, and taught them (Luke 5:1-5), touched and was touched by them (Matt. 8:3; Luke 7:39). Moreover, Jesus practiced hospitality, though He had no home (Matt.

8:20). As He encountered the poor and suffering, He was routinely moved with compassion (Matt. 9:36). And in responding to the needs of the larger society around it in the same way, the Christian community truly exemplified the ministry of the perfect human Jesus.

From Community to Family

Christian communities consisted of people who gathered in a single location, shared a single identity, undertook a single mission, and acted singularly as the united people of God (Johnston, 2008). However, that description falls short of the type of community Jesus created when He formed a new group to replace the family's most fundamental social unit (Hellerman, 2009b). The people who lived in the Mediterranean primarily organized themselves into Patrilineal Kinship Groups (PKG). PKGs, distinguished by having a common male blood ancestor, were essential to every individual's life (Lanker, 2010).

Religion was not a different system in the Mediterranean culture of the first century as it is in post-industrial nations; instead, it was ingrained in both the private and public arenas of life. This was the case in contrast to the situation in post-industrial countries (Guijarro, 2004). Not only did the family function as the basis for Israelite society, but it was also the primary setting in which individuals discovered who they were (Guijarro, 2004). Therefore, it should not be surprising that the primary locus of identification in the literature is the family and Christian community (Guijarro, 2004; Hellerman, 2009a; Hellerman, 2009b; Johnston, 2008; Karyakina, 2013; Plutarch, 1939).

The Latin *familia* refers to more than the nuclear family. This term encompasses every person and object under the legal authority of the male head of the family (Osiek & Balch, 1997). Jesus's surrogate family formed the core of the early Christian community (Acts 1:12–14). Those who followed Jesus as disciples are included in this PKG, as are the households that

were receptive to the message that the disciples brought and provided them with support and hospitality throughout Jesus' ministry. The disciples were a PKG of brothers who acknowledged God as their father. They lived close to Jesus and went on daily walks with Him. The households that took them in and supported them had reconciled themselves to the idea of applying the teachings that Jesus imparted to their day-to-day activities as a family (Guijarro, 2004).

Establishing a New Family

In calling twelve disciples "to be with Him," Jesus called these men to forsake their families and join a new family (Mark 3:14; Hellerman, 2009a). However, it seems that Jesus had more in mind than just asking these 12 men to be with Him; He considered this new family to be a substitute for His own biological PKG (Matt. 12:50; Luke 8:21). They were a surrogate family, a group of people who do not have an actual familial tie to each other but related to each other as if they did. A fictive kinship like this remained common in the traditional communities of the Mediterranean region; family formed such an essential part of the communities of those regions (Guijarro, 2004; Lee, 2018). As a direct result of this, many significant relationships tended to take on the structure of familial ties, like the new family Jesus established (Guijarro, 2004).

The accounts of the disciples tasked with spreading the Gospel of the kingdom from house to house are preserved in the canon of the Gospels (Mark 6:10; 10:5–7), as well as the tales that Jesus and His followers were welcomed into the homes of specific families (Mark 11:11; 14:3; etc.). This pro-family outlook is inferred from the fact that Jesus and His disciples observed the holiday of Passover together (John 2:13; 5: 1; 6:4; 11:55). This shared family observance of Passover is proof that those early Christians considered themselves within the context of a network of familial relationships. The Passover meal was a celebration of the beginning of spring and the beginning of a new year for the family (Guijarro, 2004).

A text essential to establishing a new family is Luke 8:21, which says, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." Jesus had replaced His nuclear PKG and given that great privilege to those who heard His words and did them (Ryle, 2015). Jesus's teaching had been interrupted by calls for Him to address the presence of His mother and brothers (Luke 8:19-20). However, at the moment that He spoke those words (18:21), Jesus was already surrounded by those who He considered His new family (e.g., the twelve disciples and the women); They had already heard His words and responded (Gadenz, 2018; Luke 8:1-3). After His ascension, the new family included Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (Acts 1:13-14), but at this point in the narrative, they had not yet responded to His words in faith. They were, therefore, excluded from the family Jesus was gathering unto Himself.

The prerequisites for joining Jesus's new family were described in the most extreme terms possible (Evans, 2011). Perhaps, the extremity existed because Jesus's new surrogate family model had an essential modification: the earthly father, the patriarchal symbol of authority, would have no place in the new family (Mark 3:31–35; 10:28–30; Matt. 23:9). In calling disciples, Jesus extended an invitation to join a family with no earthly parent at all. His Father would be the loving Heavenly Father of them all, who provided for all His offspring (Guijarro, 2004).

Jesus taught extensively about this new family that He was creating; He made clear that it was possible for a person's natural PKG-type relationships to become strained because of the demands of discipleship in his new family (Gadenz, 2018; Luke 12:51-53; 14:26; 21:16). But He also taught that those households who responded to the words of Jesus (Luke 8:21), were being formed into a new community whose locus was the family unit (Crawley, 2017). Moreover, He

also detailed the wealth of blessings that await those who, for the sake of the kingdom of God, would "forsake" their biological PKGs (Luke 18:29-30).

This new family existed before the cross and expanded dramatically after His death. The believers in both the pre-Calvary and post-Calvary eras considered themselves to be children of God by the blood of Christ. Their most intimate ties were now shared, and they were God's new PKG. The early Christians unquestionably believed that they received adoption because of the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf (Lanker, 2010).

The New Family After the Cross

After Jesus's death, this new family, comprised of the disciples and their supporters, carried on His work (Acts 1:1; 2:42-47). They spread the Gospel message because they were convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Guijarro, 2004; Matt. 28:5-6). In this way, the Christian family came to be rightly understood to be all the sons and daughters purchased with and sharing in the blood of Christ, united under the legal and spiritual Fatherhood of God.

The fundamental model Paul utilized for the organizational structure of the churches he planted was the Mediterranean culture's traditional emphasis on the nuclear family or PKG (Hellerman, 2009a). Therefore, his writings were filled with references to various family members, most notably the phrase "brothers" (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1; 3:2; 4:1; 5:1, 4, 12). Moreover, in time, the term "brothers" (Acts 2:29; 3 5:9; James 1:2; 2:1; 3:1) became common in numerous early Christian communities (Harland, 2005).

Paul aimed to cultivate and develop two social contexts, family, and friendship, among the people who became his converts. Specifically, he focused on the people who followed him after he became a Christian. In the 13 writings that make up Paul's contribution to the New

Testament, he used familial language to describe the relationships that should exist between believers who share experiences in community:

Table 1: Family Terminology in Paul's Letters

Greek Root	English Equivalent	Occurrences
adelph-	"brother(s)" / "sister(s)"	139
pater-	"F/father"	63
kleronom-	"inherit" / "inheritance" / "heir"	19
huio-	"sons" Note: the author only referenced plural forms of the Greek root *huios* to avoid usages referring to Jesus as the "Son of God"	17
tekn-	"child"	39
TOTAL		277

Hellerman, Joseph H. When the Church Was a Family (Hellerman, 2009a).

Most of Paul's statements using familial language addressed the church in terms of its role as a family (i.e., the surrogate family model). Mentions of the natural PKG are negligible throughout Paul's writings. Consequently, when he referenced the birth family, it is for very particular reasons (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1, etc.). If not intentional, Paul's frequent use of kinship terms is odd, because anthropologists discovered that this form of kinship language was utilized only infrequently in most societies (Hellerman, 2009a).

Consequently, using terms in everyday conversation that denote kinship is significantly less widespread than it once was. People are more likely to save the use of these expressions when they want to make a point, that is, when they wish to indicate to the hearer or reader that someone is breaking the rules of the familial connection. People are more likely to want to make a point when trying to communicate with someone they are related to. Because the workings of the relationship are clear to everyone involved, a parent, for example, would not point out to their child that they are the child's parent unless the child was misbehaving in some other way. The workings of the connection are well understood by all parties involved. A relevant example

of this would be the language Abram used when attempting to quell a conflict between his herders and the herdsmen of Lot. Abram reminds Lot, "we are brothers" (Gen. 13:8).

The early Christians centered their understanding of community on the concept of "brother," which they used as the primary picture for the term. In doing so, they drew from the vast array of social norms and moral precepts linked with sibling relationships in the PKGs in Mediterranean antiquity. These kinship groupings were prevalent throughout that period (Hellerman, 2009a).

The authors of the New Testament chose the concept of the family as the primary social metaphor to represent the type of interpersonal interactions that came to define those early Christian communities. They did this to highlight the importance of the family unit. These early Christian communities were famous for the tight-knit relationships that existed within their ranks (Hellerman, 2009a). In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul says –

> I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Here, Paul referred to the church as the household of God. Paul was wrapping up a specific section of his letter to Timothy, and before moving on to the next subject, he articulated how the church, as a family, under God, was expected to advance the truth (1 Tim. 3:1-16).

Paul was immediately concerned with sending this information in written form, lest there be a delay with his travel to deliver this news in person (3:14). But his purpose was clear, to ensure that Timothy, and the church, knew how it should conduct itself as the household of God. This familial language reminded the readers that even though they had their own homes, they were part of a larger household – God's living home (Spencer, 2014; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Gal. 3:26-

4:7). In the Old Testament, God dwelt in the Tabernacle, then the Temple, between the cherubim (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 13:6; Isa. 37:16).

A shift occurs when moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament. There was no single location, no tabernacle, and no building that served as God's dwelling place on earth. Instead, God established His dwelling place among His people (Platt et al., 2013). The believers themselves were collectively the residence of God (Ryken, 2007; Eph. 2:22; 2 Cor. 6:16). By using the phrase, "the household of God," Paul employed the patriarchal, multigenerational family system that was prevalent throughout the majority of ancient Near Eastern nations (Swindoll, 2014).

Timothy read this letter to the church of the living God (ekklēsia) assembled in Ephesus. Paul likely had the "assembly of the Lord" in mind when writing this letter, as he no doubt used this terminology about God's covenant people (Swindoll, 2014). And as this letter was read in the shadow of Diana's Temple – one of the Seven Ancient Wonders, the people were reminded that regardless of its grandeur, the Temple had no life. This Temple had 127 pillars that stood 60 feet tall and supported a roof with 95,625 square feet of space (Swindoll, 2014). Conversely, the Ephesians, as a family, were the living Temple of God (Ryken, 2007; Acts 17:24-28). Paul viewed the church as analogous to a family because it served as a trustee for the family's inheritance, the Gospel, and through the family, that Gospel message would be passed on to subsequent generations (Edwards, 2016). Moreover, this concept of the church as a family and household of God restated God's role as the patriarchal head of this new family (Weima & Baugh, 2016).

Key Familification Texts

There are four essential characteristics of Jesus's new family (1) Affective Solidarity, (2) Family Unity, (3) Material Solidarity, and (4) Family Loyalty (Hellerman, 2009a; Hellerman, 2009b). Together, these four form the basis of the theoretical framework for this research. Here, the researcher will examine some critical scriptural texts to establish a biblical foundation for their use in the study.

Affective Solidarity

Within the early Christian community surrounding Paul, emotional language was essential in the break with the previous group and the integration into the new group (Harland, 2005). For example, Paul made nine references to his fellow Christians in his letter to the Philippians, and each time he does so, he used the term "brother," which was the English translation of the Greek word adelphos. Six vocatives, "brothers and sisters" instances, addressed the individuals reading the chapter (Phil. 1:12; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8). Paul also made use of familial analogies when he referred to God as "father" and when he referred to the Philippians as "children of God." These references are found throughout the book of Philippians (1:2; 2:11, 15; 4:20). Paul unequivocally considered the Jesus community developed in Philippi to be a suitable replacement for a biological family there (Hellerman, 2009b).

In Philippians 2:25, Paul joyfully commended Epaphroditus to the Philippians and referred to him as his brother. This reference was not coincidental, as it was the first title on the list. The term brother was laced with love and warmth and connoted the affection shared from one believer to another (Hughes, 2007). Philippians 2:25-26 says –

> I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

There was no other place in Paul's writings where he used a stretch of five titles as he did with Epaphroditus. Paul called him (1) my brother, (2) fellow worker, (3) fellow soldier, (4) your messenger, and (5) your minister to my need (Phil. 2:25).

In Roman Philippi, individuals prized the various titles won in the military or civic *cursus honorum* (which translates to "race of honors") and publicly displayed those titles in inscriptions erected throughout the colony. This context provides a suitable explanation for what seems to be excessive commendation from Paul (Hellerman, 2015). Paul lavished praise upon and demanded recognition for a layman who pastored no flock, wrote no epistles, and was no traveling missionary. Epaphroditus did not even hold public office. His recorded claim to fame was delivering the church's offering to and briefly serving Paul before returning home earlier than expected because he was homesick (Phil.2:28). However, Paul worked the church into a feverish emotional reception for their brother as the completion of this service on their behalf was to be seen as the completion of his "race of honors" (Hughes, 2007). Thus, Epaphroditus was heartily commended to the Philippian church as their dear brother who faithfully served Paul and them.

Epaphroditus was also a surrogate brother of the persons to whom the letter was addressed. Considering this, Paul reminded the readers that they should "honor such men" (Phil. 2:29). Since Paul, Epaphroditus, and the Philippians were all brothers and sisters in Christ, they were required to honor one another before themselves rather than compete for honor. Philippi was known for interactions among families that were contentious and ambitious as each strove to win the "race of honors" (Plutarch, 1939). However, the way that Paul referred to Epaphroditus in verse 25 illustrates Paul exhibiting the honor that he was exhorting the church to share among themselves and for Epaphroditus (Hellerman, 2009b).

Another example of Affective Solidarity is 1 Thessalonians 2:17, which says, "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face." This verse is Paul's fifth reference to the familial bond between him and the church at Thessalonica. Paul continued the family narrative in his description of their separation by invoking the Greek *aporphanizo*, which could denote a child deprived of their parents or parents deprived of their child (Furnish, 2007).

Paul used the metaphor of bereavement to explain the series of events that led to the missionaries being obliged to abandon their work at Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–10). The gravity of these statements was seen in the invocation of such strong sentiment for what Paul described as a "short time." Although Paul reassures them that he is not absent from them in his "heart" (his most authentic self; 1 Thess. 2:4), his language demonstrates that he also yearns desperately to see them again in person (1 Thess.3:10).

The sincerity of Paul's concern was underscored by the fact that he continues by saying, "we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (1 Thess.2:4). Paul was trying to convey to his audience what he and the others feel for them. He was doing it by piling on words, each of which built upon the previous one (Williams, 1991). When he stated that he had "more than once" wanted to return (1 Thess.2:18), he briefly turned to the first person singular ("surely I, Paul") to emphasize and personalize the depth of his feelings (Furnish, 2007). Finally, Paul's statements were heightened by the use of the Greek word *epithymia,* commonly employed in the meaning of lust; nevertheless, in this context, it referred to ardent yearning for his brothers and sisters.

Family Unity

The households of those who responded to the words of Jesus (Luke 8:21) and shared a deep emotional attachment like Paul were formed into a community whose locus was the family unit (Crawley, 2017). One of the primary distinctives of the family unit was unity, best expressed through a practice of non-retaliation, which Hellerman characterized as Family Unity (Hellerman, 2009a). Like Hellerman, Paul was deeply concerned about the unity of the church and made several references to unity conceptually (Rom. 12:16-19; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-3, 13). However, practical unity was in direct opposition to the established laws of human government.

Human government was initially established after the flood to address the necessity of retaliation for murder (Davis, 1998). Genesis 9:6 says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." The governing concept outlined in the covenant that Noah made with God was intended to apply to the entire nation instead of just one extended family. The righteous taking of a life through the judicial system served as the foundation of the Noahic Covenant and was the highest manifestation of government. Because the death penalty was the ultimate form of justice, every other law that the government enacted must build up to that judicial decision to have any credibility. The death penalty was that law. In the same way, God chose to establish the institution of the family and the church; He also decided to develop the institution of human government (Towns, 1996).

The lex talionis or law of retaliation was observed from the establishment of human government and well beyond (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Num. 35:31; Deut. 19:19-21; Obad. 15). Lex talionis was a casuistic law that offered a normative guideline rather than attempting to cover every possible scenario that might have occured. There were two primary components: the first was retribution, which provided appropriately proportional

punishment when the behavior that led to an injury or death; the second was compensation, which was when the party who was injured received back (to the extent that it was possible) equivalent to what they might have lost (Paynter, 2018). Integral to an understanding of these laws was the concept of showing no pity (Deut. 19:21). The mandatory nature of lex talionis provided for no mercy regarding capital punishment ("life for life") and corporal punishment ("tooth for a tooth") in Israel's retaliation law (McKnight & Longman, 2013).

While lex talionis provided a context to address grievances among the entire nation, including familial relationships, among the new family that Jesus established, retaliation was forbidden (Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:17-19). This concept of non-retaliation set Jesus's new family apart from the Hebrew culture, for which God Himself sanctioned retaliation. Before His substitutionary death, which resolved the unresolved anger of God, Jesus disrupted the concept of commensurable punishment (McKnight & Longman, 2013). While commensurable punishment was necessary for the maintenance of social order, among the new family, the law of love preceded all (1 John 4:20).

An entire section of the Sermon on the Mount was devoted to this concept of non-retaliation. Matthew 5:38-42 says –

> You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

What Jesus taught in this passage provided insight into God's intent for His new family. This teaching offered a new framework for unity in the family of God. Here Jesus demanded grace, love, and forgiveness as the simple replacement for legally approved retaliation (McKnight & Longman, 2013). Because the hearers were conditioned to have a compulsory adverse reaction to

offense, they were first instructed to refrain from giving specific negative or rash responses to

excessive demands or opposition. Then they were commanded to take constructive actions to

love and enhance their relationships with their new family (Welch, 2009).

Paul advanced this concept by articulating unity in the Christian home, which ultimately

expressed the creation's destiny and unity in Christ (Crawley, 2017). In Romans 12:16-19, Paul

says –

> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.
> Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what
> is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably
> with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is
> written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Paul was aware that the devil routinely attempts to destroy the new family; he also understood

that the adversary must be overcome through non-retaliatory Christlike behaviors (McKnight &

Modica, 2019). This concept of non-retaliation required the believer to lay aside their right to

recompense and choose instead to exercise the grace, love, and forgiveness that Jesus demanded,

in the same way, God, in Christ, laid aside His claim to recompense (Rom. 5:8).

Material Solidarity

In Mark chapter 10, Jesus was engaged in conversation with a wealthy young man who

asked what he must do to obtain eternal life. Immediately following that discussion, Jesus

instructed His disciples about the dangers of riches, to which Peter replies, "See, we have left

everything and followed You" (Mark 10:28). The Matthean account appended a question to this

statement, "What then will we have?" (Matt. 19:27). Peter's query recalled the beginning of the

mission, when he and Andrew left their nets, to follow Jesus. Similarly, James and John left their

father and the other hired men, to follow Jesus (Bobertz, 2016; Mark 1:16, 20). These discourses,

precisely Peter's question, set up the first of the critical texts around sharing resources. Mark

10:29-30 says –

> Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

There are very few promises in the Bible that are more comprehensive than this one (Ryle,

2012).

In Mark 10:29-30, Jesus promised that those who joined His new family would receive a

hundredfold (manifold in some manuscripts of the Lukan and Matthean accounts) houses,

family, and land, in this present time. The list began with a house and ended with lands or fields.

Couched between those two are those who constitute a household (Donahue & Harrington,

2005). It was also essential to observe that among the new family to be received, Jesus omitted

the paternal personality. Although the omission may have been due to a scribal error, one could

argue that in the new family of Jesus, comprised of individuals who strive to obey God's will

(Mark 3:31–35), there was no place or need for a father other than God (Donahue, & Harrington,

2005; Mark 3:31-35; Matt. 23:9).

This concept of loss, leaving, abandoning, letting go, or giving up, was essential because

Jesus's claim on a person far outweighed the value of a home, relatives, or property (Healy &

Williamson, 2008). This perspective of loss was counterbalanced by two things, the promise of

material and emotional support in the present age and eternal life in the age to come. The

immediate material need was necessary because the disciples forsook and were sent out without

resources (Mark 6:8-10). They were, therefore, entirely dependent upon their new family for

support. These enumerated advantages (Mark 10:29-30) detail the aspects of the kingdom of God

that had already been inaugurated or are expected to be experienced by the Christian community soon (Donahue, & Harrington, 2005; Luke 8:3; Mark 6:8-10; Acts 2:42).

This practice of sharing homes, household members, and land continued after the cross and in the early church community of believers. Acts 2:44-45 says, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." The spiritual sharing, centered around the teaching of the apostles, communal life, breaking of bread, and prayers offered together (Acts 2:42-43), was the foundation for the material sharing of goods found in Acts 2:44-45 (Kurz, 2013). Together with solid bonds of brothers and sisterhood, characterized by taking care of one another's needs, sharing in one another's pleasures, and consoling one another in times of grief, sharing material resources joined the spiritual sharing that comprises the Christian witness to the world (1 Cor 12:25– 26; Gal 6:1– 2; Eph 5:18– 20; Phil 2:3– 4).

If group members were wholly devoted to one another and the cause that the group stood for, it would not be surprising to find that they shared common possessions (Dunn, 2016). This sharing of material resources fulfilled the promise Jesus made in Mark 10:29-30. As believers join this new family, they are provided with what they need to subsist. This provision was entirely voluntary; giving was based on brotherly love and compassion toward destitute people who needed assistance (Taushev, 2017).

The believers did not sell off their possessions and create a community fund. Instead, as a need arose, they pooled their resources to meet needs. The proverbial Greek expression bears repeating here, "the belongings of friends are held in common" (Conzelmann et al., 1987). The imminent expectation undergirded this spontaneous activity that Jesus would return and usher these believers into His Kingdom (Dunn, 2016).

This pattern was not immediately present in other communities founded by the apostles. The apostles exhorted Christians to be generous with alms and demonstrate brotherly love; they never demanded Christians share their possessions (Taushev, 2017). However, there was a direct parallel; The churches in wealthier regions would organize collections for poorer churches (Acts 11:29-30; 1 Cor. 16:1). This community of goods will come into existence much closer to its full potential the closer a church gets to its ideal state of perfection (Lightfoot, 2014).

Family Loyalty

In the world of the New Testament, the ideal relationships that produced the greatest feelings of loyalty and affection were those shared among a group of brothers and sisters. These were the relationships among a group of brothers and sisters who shared a deep affective connection and committed to unity through non-retaliation, material resources, and a deep sense of loyalty (Hellerman, 2009a). However, as previously discussed, Jesus established a new family to which every believer was required to demonstrate primary commitment.

An analysis of Luke 9:59-60 confirms Jesus's demand for loyalty among His new family. Luke 9:59-60 says –

> To another He said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

This exchange occurred on the heels of an eager aspirant declaring that he was prepared to follow Jesus anywhere and Jesus's cautionary warning that "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). Those who expected material blessings and stability from Jesus would be disappointed because He had nothing to offer them. He was lacking in something which even the wild animals and birds of the air have in their possession, a place to rest (Garland, 2011). At this time, the true King of Israel had no shelter in His land.

The would-be disciple of Luke 9:59 requested a deferment from the call to follow, and keep following, Jesus. He attempted to put off his discipleship with an excuse. His request to bury his father first seemed valid, given that the Jewish people considered the burial ritual of the dead to be an act of loving-kindness that attained a position of preeminence among all other acts of goodness (Garland, 2011; Mark 14:7-8). From antiquity, burying a parent was the primary responsibility of a faithful son (Gen. 46:4; 49:29; 50:1-5; Exod. 20:12), and that practice continued in Israel.

The rabbinic tradition came to view burying one's parents as an act of meritorious service (Evans, 2011). Moreover, because burial typically happened within days of death, his request for deferment was particularly urgent (Gadenz, 2018; Luke 23:53; Acts 5:5-10). However, the son in verse 59 mistook the call of Jesus as no more than the call of a Rabbi to follow them temporarily, for which a student could request deferment (Bovon, 2013; 1 Kings 19:19-21). That Jesus was calling for a permanent and lasting commitment was novel in the traditional discipleship arrangement (Luke 9:23; Matt. 16:24). Jesus was concerned with the care of the soul, which was considerably more critical than the care of the body. Consequently, anyone can bury the dead, but few can care for the souls of the living (Dales, 2017; Ryle, 2015).

Though seemingly harsh, Jesus's response, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead," preferred the decision to follow Him over keeping company with the dead and religious duty (Bovon, 2013). With great authority, Jesus shunned a practice rooted in Old Testament law (Green, 1997). This response demanded a reorganization of one's previous allegiances, which could result in one being required to engage in abnormal behavior compared to the norms and conventions of society, as was the case here (Green, 1997). The only explanation for Jesus's

startling command was that He envisioned those who were committed to Him and His kingdom movement as a new kind of family (Wright, 1999).

Through this demand, Jesus clarified the necessity of an intellectual and existential break with one's past, ancestors, roots, and tradition, which was exemplified by the figure of the father in the story and a deepened sense of loyalty to the new family (Bovon, 2013; Ryle 2015). Further, His response made three things immediately apparent: (a) joining Jesus's new family was more important than any other sacred duty, (b) every member of this new family must be willing to pay a high cost, (c) joining the new family required immediate and urgent decision (Bovon, 2013; Evans, 2011; Garland, 2011; Ryle 2015). The overarching theme of the larger narrative around and including verses 59-60 was that there are no acceptable reasons for missing out on the Kingdom of God (which consists of the new family), whether it be due to professional requirements, personal commitments, or pious family responsibilities (Garland, 2011).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The primary participants in Christian leadership should be credible people capable of meeting the leadership demands of various situations while also being well-established followers. These credible leaders have well-established relationships with the people they lead and the history of well-regarded decision making. Moreover, as humble leaders, they are adaptable, people-focused, and capable of providing supportive leadership to their followers. Additionally, they have a stable relationship characterized by dependency on the Spirit of God, and trust His leading, as followers.

Credible Leadership

Credible leadership is a common theme that reoccurs in many treatments of the subject of leadership and requires that leaders possess a certain level of credibility among their followers

(Breedt & Niemandt, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Malphurs, 2003). The broad themes that define credible leadership are honesty, competence, vision, and motivation (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). It is impossible for leaders to influence others without these traits and positive relationships with the people around them (Breedt & Niemandt, 2013). When a leader tries to exert influence over followers, those followers conduct both conscious and unconscious credibility assessments of the leader. They will only follow if they believe the leader to be credible (Malphurs, 2003). With this type of credibility, the leader can make valuable decisions.

During His earthly ministry, God deemed Jesus credible (Matt. 3:17). This affirmation at the start of His ministry lends credibility to His mission and leadership. The same declaration repeats in Luke 9:35 during the Transfiguration of Jesus. Nicodemus confirms the credibility of Jesus during their nighttime conversation (John 3:2). While spontaneously preaching on the Day of Pentecost, Peter affirms the credibility of Jesus (Acts 2:22). Every honest, competent, forward-looking, and inspiring leader should have clear evidence of the Spirit of God at work in their lives as a sign of credibility.

Credibility is the bedrock upon which leadership is built. Above all things, the populace needs to have faith in those in authority over them (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). This summary statement encapsulates the importance of this foundational principle; it is mandatory. Any person who attempts to lead others without establishing a sense of credibility is doomed to fail.

Followership

The interrelated concepts of Credible Leadership and Followership are best understood through Joshua's leadership, who shared fully in the credibility of Moses' leadership, both with God and the people (Josh. 1:5, 16-18). Followership is a process in which one or more persons accept other individuals' influence to achieve a common objective (Northouse, 2018). Every

believer is enjoined with that same commission that Jesus Christ repeatedly offered to follow

Him (Matt. 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21; 19:28; Mark 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:27;

9:23; 9:59; 18:22; John 10:27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19; 21:22). In this instance, discipleship would

be the common goal.

Followership conceptualizes what occurs when the following behaviors of an individual

or group interact with the leading behaviors of another (Northouse, 2018). In this give-and-take,

the believer or believers, through Followership, become partners with Christ to achieve the

desired result of formation. Within the context of the church, Followership occurs as individual

members of the body of Christ mature in their faith because of their shared relationship to Christ

and subsequent leading interactions with one another (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Leaders guide

followers to accomplish some objective that the followers might not have achieved if they had

not followed a leader that compelled, modeled, motivated, or guided them into doing so

(Sampson, 2011).

Humble Leadership

Previous research on humility mainly focused on the worlds of philosophy and religion,

where it was understood that humility consisted of having a truthful assessment of oneself and

recognizing that there is something that is more important than oneself (Diab & Walters, 2016).

Diab and Walters examined the relationships between among leader humility, psychological

safety, and employee engagement. Humble leaders have an accurate understanding of themselves

as a both leader and simultaneously as a follower of God (Malphurs, 2003). Diab and Walters

extend Malphurs to include the knowledge that someone or something is greater than the self

(Diab & Walters, 2016). In the corporate culture to which Diab and Walters wrote that

something more significant could be the mission itself, the people themselves, or even the

organization itself. As a Christian, someone higher is the God of creation, who inspires and instigates the mission toward which they work (Malphurs, 2003).

There is a simple translation from the corporate to the Christian leadership context as Humble Leadership has distinct and readily identifiable Christian overtones (Matt. 20:27). This Humble Leadership concept is foundational to the teachings of Jesus among His disciples and their commissioning for service. This concept of being "first" carries the connotation of preeminence. Whether corporate, Christian or a combination of the two, self-serving attitudes have no place in leadership, and every leader must address the issue of self-perception daily.

There has been an increase in the realization that humility among leaders is essential to the functioning of organizations (Wang, et al., 2018). These Humble Leaders openly acknowledge their shortcomings and blunders, but they also recognize that making mistakes is a natural and even necessary part of the maturing process (Wang, et al., 2018). It is imperative then, that leaders at all levels understand their limitations, acknowledge mistakes, and encourage others to make efforts, even if the result is a failure (Ps. 51:3).

Hellerman's Familification

This research was based on Hellerman's Familification, whose components of social coherence are (1) Affective Solidarity, (2) Family Unity, (3) Material Solidarity, and (4) Family Loyalty (Hellerman, 1998; 2009a; 2008B). One's family demanded the highest level of commitment – in terms of emotional connectedness, undivided allegiance, personal sacrifice, and relational solidarity – of any social unit in the strong-group Mediterranean society in which Jesus and Paul lived (Hellerman, 2009a). The people who lived in the ancient Mediterranean region considered themselves unique individuals who were a part of a strong group, with the family or

clan playing an important role (Crawley, 2017). The researcher will summarize each of

Hellerman's essential concepts of social cohesion exhibited in community.

Affective Solidarity

The early church was committed to remaining, suffering, and maturing with one another

as part of their lived experience together. Hellerman (2009a) defined Affective Solidarity as "the

emotional bond that Paul experienced among brothers and sisters in God's family" (p. 78). This

concept comes to the fore through the repeated uses of affective language in Paul's writings. For

example, Paul used the Greek root *adelph,* which was translated as brother(s)/sister(s) 139 times

in his writings (Hellerman, 2009a). Paul understandably invokes grave language when speaking

about being separated from his brothers and sisters (1 Thess. 2:17); the sense being that

separation from the person with whom you shared the most substantial emotional ties was

unsettling, was at work in Paul's writings (Hellerman, 2009a).

Much of Hellerman's treatment of Affective Solidarity revolves around the idea that

emotional attachment in marriage was a secondary consideration to the deep emotional bonds

between siblings that pre-existed and continued after marriage (Hellerman, 2009a). Indeed, in the

context of marriage, the contemporary idea of a family does not even have a direct analog in the

language used in ancient times (Neufeld & DeMaris, 2009). During the New Testament period, it

was common for a woman to enter a legal marriage where her father maintained legal and

economic authority over her, as opposed to transferring that authority to her husband (Neufeld &

DeMaris, 2009; Osiek, 1997). During this period of history, women were often not even properly

considered a part of their husband's family because they remained part of their father's family.

As such, marriage was more legal and contractual than emotional. It was more common for

siblings to look out for and be loyal to one another than for husbands and wives to do so (Osiek, 1997).

Though parent-child relationships were emotionally significant, there was a high mortality rate and a low life expectancy; most people lost their parents at a young age. Conversely, siblingship was a substantial aspect of the social structures of the time, and because it preceded marriage, it was the longest-lasting human relationship (Aasgaard, 2002). Moreover, the average duration of the sibling relationship was 40 to 50 years, and due to the limited movement of the population, siblings tended to retain lifelong contact. During the Pauline period, an adult sibling group consisted of two or three individuals, which increased the likelihood of sustaining tight relationships (Aasgaard, 2002).

In the early Christian churches, Paul and his fellow Christians experienced much brotherly affection in their connections. In the ancient world, emotional bonding was essential to family life. The church was also a family (Hellerman, 2009a). It was impossible to separate the passionate relationship Paul had with his Christian siblings from the excellent care that Paul had for the spiritual well-being of his brothers and sisters in the faith. The sibling connection was expected to be tight, trustworthy, emotionally intimate, and joyous. Siblings were commanded to love and tolerate one another (Aasgaard, 2002). In this way, blood superseded marital affection (Hellerman, 2009a). Paul's emotional relationship with his Christian siblings was indistinguishable from the intimacy that the Holy Spirit weaves into the hearts of brothers and sisters in Christ who share life and ministry (Hellerman, 2009a).

Several passages indicate that Paul and other members of his churches experienced a high level of attachment and emotional closeness with their fellow Christians. And Paul explicitly situated this emotive solidarity in his view that the church was a strong-group family of brothers

and sisters (Hellerman, 2009a). Paul and the author of 1 Peter referred to "brotherly/sisterly affection." These usages of the term are well-known. An example was Paul's admonition to the Christians of Rome to "Love one another with brotherly affection" (Rom. 12:10; compare 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; Heb. 13:1; 2 Pet. 1:7). Moreover, they describe the deep emotional relationships that should exist between the "siblings" of Christian congregations (Harland, 2005). The notion that this conceptual point of Familification exists and that believers are brothers and sisters in Christ was the primary point of departure for understanding God's social goal for His church; therefore, this characteristic of the Mediterranean family should significantly shape the conception of Christian community.

Family Unity

Hellerman (2009a) defined Family Unity as the "interpersonal harmony and absence of discord that Paul expected among brothers and sisters in God's family (pp. 78-79). These strong interpersonal connections could significantly influence the spiritual development of every individual in the community (Lanker, 2010). Because the family was the most important social unit for individuals in ancient times, it was not surprising that God's concept of Christian community included Family Unity (Hellerman, 2009a).

Family in the ancient world included the patrilineal kinship group. The patrilineal kinship group included those individuals from whom a person acquired blood (father), those individuals with whom a person shared blood (siblings), as well as those individuals to whom they transmitted their blood (children). God's social vision for the church was centered on the essentially shared identity of believers as a family; this includes those who have been washed in the blood of God. The family metaphor was used throughout the New Testament as the primary vehicle for expressing this social vision. The only way to recover Christianity's relational

integrity in the first century was to accept this metaphor as a guiding principle and the basis of unity among converts (Hellerman, 2009a).

The best possible relationships between siblings are characterized by acts of kindness and a sense of unity in both feeling and behavior. On the other hand, they emphasized the significance of identification and solidarity as the distinguishing features of healthy sibling relationships (Plutarch, 1939). One of the distinctive characteristics of Familification, in Hellerman, was the absence of retaliation. While siblingship included a deep emotional attachment that superseded marital bonds, a wealth of evidence suggests that the connection between siblings was fraught with tension and was frequently experienced as contentious, particularly the bond between brothers (Barclay, 2002). It was not uncommon for someone to have half-siblings, stepsiblings, or adoptive siblings, all of which added a layer of complexity to the situation. Therefore, in some ways, the ideal and the reality were at war with one another (Aasgaard, 2002). In Hellerman, these conflicts are not absent or ignored; they do not end in retaliation – even when the vengeance was legally justifiable.

Hellerman invoked 1 Corinthians chapter 6 as evidence that non-retaliation, in this case, before the courts, was expected to show loyalty among siblings (Hellerman, 2009a). Here the reader was confronted with one of the disputes that had arisen in the Christian community at Corinth; believers were bringing one another before secular courts of law. Paul believes this practice to be objectionable because it was a form of retaliation (e.g., lex talionis), and Paul rejects the approach outright (Aasgaard, 2002). Paul suggests that these siblings give up their rights and prefer mistreatment or loss (1 Cor. 6:7). The mere reference to siblings in the Christian community makes lawsuits among them an abhorrent practice; litigation between family members was inappropriate (Aasgaard, 2002).

Paul viewed the unity of the Christian church's siblings as a logical extension of his comprehension of the world in which he lived and the circumstances of his life. In the ancient world, if there was one area where a person might inherently assume a united front, it was in the family (Hellerman, 2009a). In the family of God, there was no room for mandatory retribution or compensation because the siblings, who shared a common Father, were united. Jesus had already resolved the unresolved anger of God and disrupted the concept of commensurable punishment (McKnight & Longman, 2013). As such, those who had been forgiven of their faults were duty-bound to forgive the shortcomings of their siblings, even if that meant suffering mistreatment or loss (1 Cor. 6:7).

Material Solidarity

The requirement of sharing one's possessions and money with other members of Jesus's new family was an essential component of participating in community. Hellerman (2009a) defined Material Solidarity as "the sharing of resources that Paul assumed would characterize relationships among brothers and sisters in God's family" (p. 79). Material Solidarity, which all members of the kin group share, was the most distinctive quality of the ties. This quality includes serving others and placing oneself in the last place (Guijarro, 2004). Through the distribution of shared material goods, Jesus's idea of the church as the family of God was brought into concrete existence (Hellerman, 2009a).

The Gospels provide sufficient detail about at least five of the disciples to discern that at least some of the disciples belonged to a higher social level. For example, James and John's grandfather was a boat owner who utilized the services of day workers (Matt. 4:21), and Levi, who, according to Luke 5:27-32 worked as a tax collector (Guijarro, 2002). Because the family was the basic unit of production, giving up such lucrative employment was a tangible

manifestation of the act of severing ties with the family and preferring to share considerably fewer resources with the new group (Guijarro, 2004). Their natural families provided them with safety, assistance, and an identity; However, stability and support were also offered in Jesus's new surrogate family as the women following Jesus "provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3).

For decades, throughout the Roman world, Jews and Gentiles conflicted. Sometimes that conflict included bloodshed, resulting from a shared hatred. However, when people converted to Christianity, the Gospel tore down the "dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14) between the two groups. It unified them into a family where there was "no Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28). Most of 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 are devoted to Paul's writings about a famine relief offering that brought together both former factions of that age-old conflict to share material resources. In total, Paul used the term "brother" 12 times in the book of 2 Corinthians. However, these two chapters (8-9) have an abnormally high concentration of kinship-related terminology compared to the rest of the letter's content. Paul employs familial terms six times in these two chapters alone, speaking of the relief offering (Hellerman, 2009a). The bulk of Hellerman's treatment of Material Solidarity revolves around the passages related to this relief effort.

For Paul, Material Solidarity was expected and experienced in community, even among those who were formerly sworn enemies (Hellerman, 2009a). This Material Solidarity included sharing food and clothing and providing shelter for others in the family of God. Paul longed to see this Mediterranean family value realized in his churches, and the offering gathered for the poor brothers and sisters in Judea (Acts 11:27-30) beautifully illustrates it in action (Hellerman, 2009a). In sharing their material resources, the believers are addressing the loss of resources, whether they are lost through disassociation with family because of conversion or some calamity. This giving

fulfills Jesus's statement that those who follow Him would be provided for in this time and the coming age (Mark 10:29-30).

Family Loyalty

Hellerman (2009a) defined Family Loyalty as "the undivided commitment to God's group that was to mark the value system of brothers and sisters in God's family" (p. 79). The ancient concept of family was based on the idea that everyone had a duty to provide unwavering devotion to their biological brothers and sisters. This fundamental principle was the cornerstone of the family unit Hellerman (2009a). Hellerman returns to the marital relationship to address the concept of loyalty. Specifically, to marriages where believers were married to unbelievers (1 Cor. 7:12-15).

Because they were also siblings to one another, along with all the other expectations that come along with sibling relationships, the two married believers did not have any conflicting loyalties. It was assumed that sharing, fidelity, mutual care, respect, non-retaliation, and other cooperative behaviors would be assumed. However, believers married to non-believers faced the challenge of having their allegiance torn in two different directions (Hellerman, 2009a). This conflict was especially true because ancient marriages were contractual and were structured to serve families rather than the individual interests of the individuals involved (Johnson, 2002).

Hellerman addresses the fight between "God's children" and "the Devil's offspring" (1 John 3:10) as the essential test of loyalty among unequally yoked believers. Namely, when two people from different "families" got married, there was sure to be friction in the relationship (Hellerman, 2009a). Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 7:12–16. He brought the "brother" language into his argument based on the strong-group ideal of loyalty between siblings. Paul reaffirmed that a person's commitment to their siblings was more important than loyalty to their

spouse. The family of God must take precedence (Hellerman, 2009a). This precedence was essential to the concept of family loyalty because Christians are more than just the offspring of God; they are siblings of one another, and according to Romans 8:17 and Galatians 3:29, heirs with the firstborn (Johnson, 2022).

The traditional family value of the Mediterranean region, which prioritizes fidelity to one's blood relations (particularly one's co-heirs) over commitment to one's spouse, was thus appropriated by Paul and subtly reinterpreted by him to refer to a Christian's loyalty to their brothers and sisters in the Christian faith (Hellerman, 2009a). This concept of loyalty to siblings, even above an unbelieving spouse, was one of the reasons that Jesus opted to utilize the model of the family. This overarching requirement for loyalty ensured His followers would exhibit this primary allegiance to one another as brothers and sisters in the faith (Hellerman, 2009a).

Beyond the marital context of loyalty, many of Paul's new followers wanted to pledge their devotion, first and foremost, not to the family of God, which the church represents, but rather to the paganism-based interest groups to which they had been devoted before their conversion to Christianity. The church in Corinth was torn apart by economic and social standing differences. The poor identified with the needy, whereas the rich identified with other rich people. The dividing line between Jew and Gentile in the eyes of Roman Christians was their respective racial or ethnic backgrounds (Hellerman, 2009a). However, in Pauline Familification, converts from the various patrilineal kinship groups renounced these old associations and distinctions and pledged allegiance to a new family of equals (Hellerman, 2009b).

Locating Hellerman in the Leadership Literature

These concepts, taken together, create a synchronic thread of leadership that encapsulates Hellerman's Familification. As the establishmentarian of the new family, Jesus, and later Paul,

embody the concepts of Credible Leadership (Matt. 3:17; Luke 9:35; John 3:2), that is also

committed to Followership (John 12:49; 14:10; Phil. 2:6-7), and Humble Leadership (Luke

14:11; Phil. 2:5, 8). First Jesus and later Paul were primary leaders of the new family. However,

Paul later required that the responsibility for birthing and building the new family transfer from

one primary leader to all believers in community (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; 12:28; 14:3, 2

Cor. 5:18; Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Thess. 5:11;). In community, every believer is surrounded by credible

followers of God who exercise true humility in their mutual upbuilding. Familification creates an

army of leaders who are fully capable of ensuring the creation of deep affective bonds (Phil.

2:25), refraining from retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42), sharing material resources (Acts 2:44-45), and

choosing the family of God above all others (Luke 9:59).

Related Literature

This section will provide a survey of literature related to the sub-themes of virtual

worship and separation from community. It will first offer Biblical support for physical presence

and then review the literature on separation from community. Finally, it will consider the impact

and implications of virtual worship as a medium for physically distanced communities.

Physical Presence in Community

Hebrews 10:24-25 presents physical presence and social interaction as a foundational

concept of Christian community between believers near one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says –

> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to
> meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as
> you see the Day drawing near.

The calls to persist are almost as urgent as these warnings. The author fears their readers may

abandon their faith and reject Christ (König et al., 2019). The fellowship of a group of believers

confers benefits that should never be disregarded. God typically gathers His children together

physically into congregations, where they can work and pray together (Pfeiffer, 1962).

Consistency in fellowship in exhortation was explicitly encouraged in verse 25.

While much of what occurs face-to-face can be replicated virtually (Lowe & Lowe, 2018), there was little research available to affirm that all aspects of community can be reproduced at a distance. The inability to experience a physical touch makes receiving a hug, the modern equivalent of a "holy kiss," especially tricky. While some churches utilize moderated platforms and have staff dedicated to managing online interactions, this still does not address how the distant party lends their voice to singing in worship or praying for their brother or sister standing alongside them.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, the Epistle writer to the Hebrews encourages believers to deliberate on how to stir up one another best to love and good works and encourage one another. The Hebrews 10:24-25 interactions between connected members promote mutual enlightenment or spiritual development (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Additionally, verse 24 demands that the believer consider how to instill in other Christians a spirit of love that goes hand in hand with good acts (Diggins, 2016). The researchers envision a community where reciprocal actions fulfill the "one another" statements of the New Testament without compulsion but out of a real sense of love and necessity (Diggins, 2016; Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Believers lose these reciprocal interactions and mutual support if they don't keep with 'the footsteps of the flock' (Song of Sol. 1:8). Each believer has a responsibility to watch over one another's state and to warn, if necessary when one begins to stray (Gen. 4:9; Prov. 24:11-12) (Anstey, 2019).

Mandatory Attendance

Verse 24 issues a call to consideration for others to stimulate or provoke desirable behavior (Attridge, 1989). Verse 25 creates a mandatory attendance narrative; it says, "not

neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some..." (Heb. 10:25). This prohibition against neglecting the assembly was not related to simple neglect or oversight but wrongful abandonment (Attridge, 1989). That abandonment became wrongful when through their defection, the absent party leaves their brothers and sisters in Christ without necessary support (Cockerill, 2012). Thus, there can be no reciprocal interactions when one was missing and could not positively fulfill their duty to provoke their brothers and sisters.

According to the Scriptures, the efforts to move community (and even worship) to virtual platforms create an optional attendance construct where believers are encouraged to participate in community in ways that require physical presence. There should not be a mentality that deserts or abandons brothers and sisters in Christ and leaves them to fend for themselves. Physical contact was the most effective way to stimulate one another (Diggins, 2016). Physical presence engenders that reciprocal relationship and allows believers to move beyond faceless interaction to actually "greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor. 16:20).

The inclusion of technology may transform community and formation while fostering deepened relationships but should not wholly replace physical engagement. Because it was just communal enough to deliver some of the easiest and most instantly rewarding components of community without the more challenging and demanding parts, the virtual church has a deforming effect (Hall, 2009). The Hebrew writer's worry was warranted because the behavior in question has developed into "the custom" of some congregation members to whom he spoke. Inconsistency and wrongful abandonment are solid signs that one's affections are diminishing. In most cases, it comes right before the individual completely withdraws from the gathering (Anstey, 2019).

Separation from Community

There is a universal need for community, an innate thirst ingrained into the genetic code of humanity (Johnston, 2008). However, sin severed the link to God's perfect fellowship in the garden, and all harmony, peace, and wholeness ceased to exist. In its place, humanity experienced spiritual alienation, divine hostility, and social disintegration (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The original sin (Gen. 3:6) also introduced the concept of separation from God, and this theme of alienation continues in community. The language of the Bible concerning separation seems to affirm the conclusion of Johnston.

Upon his expulsion from the original community, Adam's nuclear family, Cain laments, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). There is an authentic sense that separation from community is too great to bear. Moreover, Paul's description of Gentile separation from God was startling. Ephesians 2:12 says, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." The remedy to this condition was Christ's death, which brought the alienated and "the commonwealth of Israel" into community with Him and His people. Because they were created to be part of a larger body and intended to mature and encourage others, community disconnection was like a mortal wound to a believer. Several Pauline passages express positive separation perspectives, including affection and emotional bonding, among the early Christian community. Paul's language in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, Philippians 1:8, 2:26, and Galatians 4:15 speaks of the community's Affective Solidarity.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:17, Paul describes his physical separation as being orphaned or "torn away" from his brothers. The same depth of affection existed between Paul and the Philippian church. In Philippians 1:8, Paul says, "how I yearn for you all with the affection of

Christ Jesus." He used similar language in Philippians 2:26 to describe Epaphroditus's feelings, who, after his separation from the church due to illness, was "longing for you all." During his absence from Galatia, Paul asserts, "you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me" (Gal. 4:15). The myth that the Christian Gospel ignores or minimizes the affective and emotional side of human existence was demolished by Paul's description (Migliore, 2014). This affective solidarity, described by Paul, was significant because it demonstrates the depth of the relationship experienced and readily expressed. The fledgling community was heartbroken when the separation occurred. This New Testament picture brings Cain's lament into better focus; whether good or bad, separation from community creates veritable anguish.

The Impact and Implications of Virtual Worship

This section will survey the existence and value of virtual worship to extend community during times of physical distancing. This section will review the impact of technology, through which the faithful are forced to maintain a sense of connection to their local church and the larger Body of Christ. As a newfound virtual space, this technology often exists as a parallel space to physical congregations (Hudgins, 2009).

Considering the closure of churches, the liturgy's primary emblem is the congregation, which reflects grace. Symbols without bodies were impossible (Cones, 2020). Cones, an Episcopal rector, struggled with adapting the liturgy to an empty room because worshippers' presence is central to the act of worship. While COVID-19 severed the people from church buildings, they were present together in experience and time, though not in place (Bryson et al., 2020). For Cones, the use of Zoom flattened the hierarchical nature of the assembly (Cones, 2020). On Zoom, everyone is trapped in a small box, and based on the number of attendees, the screen only shows a few people at a time. Moreover, the clergyperson might not be readily seen.

The result was a shift of focus from a central figure to the congregated community itself (Cones, 2020).

Another outcome of the move to online engagement was a dramatic increase in engagement online. Members hastily sent chat messages, prayers, prayer requests, and greetings to each other (Cones, 2020; Lambert, 2020). There were more voices engaging each other online than during an in-person service, including some that are never actually heard audibly (Cones, 2020). Online community fundamentally undermines sacramental theology. Unquestionably. People also gather online. They create an online community (Hudgins, 2009).

In 2020, the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches took the historical step of suspending the Eucharist's public institution and shuttered their doors during Holy Week (Parish, 2020). These closures were consequential because both faiths believe in the continuity of worship, that is, the thought that worship has continued uninterrupted at a location for over a thousand years, even if this has been through the solitary private prayers of a single priest (Bryson et al., 2020). In England, priests celebrated the sacrament privately in church buildings. Ultimately the churches were closed to the priests in response to the global pandemic. The Eucharist could only be observed in the priest's home in a way that allowed the faithful to participate in a spiritual communion without being there (Parish, 2020). The Archbishop of Canterbury streamed an Easter service and preached from his kitchen. In these virtual churches, offices are sanctuaries and kitchen tables altars, forging new links between those intersacred locations. (Bryson et al., 2020).

As both Barna Group and Pew Research polls discovered an uptick in religiosity in America, others reported the same increase in other countries (Barna Group, 2020; Gecewicz, 2020). This upsurge must be interpreted as more than merely turning to God. This upsurge goes

beyond fear-induced religiosity. Instead, it creates a shifting understanding of the relationship between a community where relationships are established and the experience of an online virtual community. Further, it humanizes in a time of isolation but is buttressed by connections that may not be expressed in the physical world (Parish, 2020).

This convergence of church, communication, worship, and community is no longer defined in corporeal terms but is extended by technology. The net result is expanding community to more than those regularly affiliated and well-known among the group. This expansion only sometimes equates to an increased sense of community. Because of the fluid nature of online worship, people pop in and out. As a result, the leader must be careful about the expectation of participation at the same level as those gathered physically (Floberg, 2020).

Negatively, digital technologies offered new ways to engage, yet they were artificial and may damage human relationships. This position is like that of the architects of contiguous education, learning, or in this case, community only occurs when people are gathered physically. Online liturgical events could develop a global Christian community in a more positive light. (Parish, 2020). Parish also pondered whether this new virtual environment can genuinely mirror the institutional church's structures and parameters and about the problematic nature of the absence of a sense of belonging and connection typically provided by participation in a localized religious group (Parish, 2020).

The lockdown prevented these people from engaging in shared worship, pastoral care, and other congregational activities, disallowing their co-presence in the same place (Bryson et al., 2020). In the past, most pastoral care was delivered personally and close to the patient; however, due to increased social distance, this mode of delivery is no longer viable (Ganiel 2020). Transforming, with the use of webcams, the houses of worshipers into metaphysical

extensions of the nave, where anybody can congregate and enjoy a warm welcome resulted in a loss of connectedness (Bryson et al., 2020). The people gather, but there is no sense of welcome or closeness. The usage of avatars, the inability to see or hear the presence of other people, as well as the loss of one's sense of touch can all contribute to a diminished sense of fellowship (Parish, 2020). While reflecting on the potential for disconnection, Parish stops short of empirically examining the members' feelings related to a virtual community.

Physical contact reflects the existing affective connections while forming additional bonds and bringing all worshipping community participants into a tangible community under Christ (Parish, 2020). Conversely, the introduction of virtual church services is an alteration of those bonds between the individual and the broader fellowship of the congregation (Bryson et al., 2020).

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

Previous researchers have focused on community and family in various forms (Garland, 2011; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Halter & Smay, 2008; Gaebelein, 1971; Guijarro, 2004; Lanker, 2010; Karyakina, 2013; Gadenz, 2018; Ryken, 2007), but none have combined the four concepts of Hellerman's Pauline Familification and compared them to modern expressions of community. Further still, there are no known studies of these concepts, with the added nuance of COVID-19-related physical separation and the adoption of social media to extend and support community. Two studies were conducted in Poland (Sulkowski & Ignatowski, 2020) and Ireland (Ganiel, 2020) but were not focused primarily on Familification. Instead, they were restricted to the clergy's response to virtual media to extend community.

This study fills a gap in the literature because there is no available research on this subject. It should be noted that while the studies that have already been conducted do not align

with the present research, ongoing research may align with this current study in the future. Conducting this research during the COVID-19 pandemic means that the research was conducted in a changing social climate. What may be relevant to this study during its data collection may not still apply upon completion. However, the study will provide a needful analysis of Familification in a specific context.

Profile of the Current Study

This literature review examined the theological and theoretical concepts of Pauline Familification and provided the foundation for this research effort. It considered the primary spheres of incarnational community– togetherness, oneness, and otherness, and traced community development into a family in Jesus' ministry and the early church. The main concepts underpinning this research are Hellerman's (1) Affective Solidarity, (2) Family Unity, (3) Material Solidarity, and (4) Family Loyalty, as seen in Pauline theology. Finally, it reviewed related literature on a physical presence (e.g., mandatory attendance), separation from community, and virtual worship. Understanding these concepts in the Gospels first and then tracing their expansion in Pauline theology is essential to achieving the goal of this phenomenological study, which is to investigate whether Familification, as described by Hellerman, exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention.

The researcher was not able to find any published research that compares these combined concepts, in Hellerman, to the modern expression of community. This study is essential for an environment where churches in the target population are forced to separate physically. Closing the gap in the literature has the potential to provide needed insight and a gauge of how closely aligned modern community is with the lived experience of their first-century siblings.

This qualitative study was conducted by surveying adult church members of the Los Angeles District Association using the hermeneutical phenomenological methodology. The researcher posed five survey questions to solicit information about the lived experiences of the research participants within community in the research Setting. Moreover, the resultant data provided insight into their experiences with this phenomenon relative to the phenomena described in the Gospels and Pauline writings (Eberle, 2013). The data were analyzed, using thematic analysis, to determine whether Familification is present at all, to some limited degree, or in its fullest form. This information would later be used to develop the textural and structural descriptions necessary to answer the four research questions that guided this study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the methodology utilized to perform the research. This approach includes details about the research's environment, participants, and ethical implications. In addition, the chapter provides an overview of the data gathering techniques and instruments used to survey research participants. Finally, it will describe the data analysis procedure.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

There has been extensive research on Christian community (Bock, 2008; Halter and Smay, 2008; Johnston, 2008; Lowe and Lowe, 2018; Morrow, 2008; Samra, 2008). Additionally, several writers have exhaustively researched the Christian family motif (Harland, 2005; Karayakina, 2013; Osiek, 2002; Parsons, 2018; Seidel, 2008). The synthesis of these two concepts was the subject of this research. More specifically, there was limited research regarding the Familification experienced among Christian brothers and sisters in contemporary Christian communities.

There has not been any previous research that primarily focused on the emphasis of this study, which was to determine whether there existed any parallel between Pauline Familification in the church of the first century and the contemporary Christian community of churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention. This study investigated a theoretical foundation for Hellerman's thinking in a particular local setting in order to fill the void that existed in the existing research and make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. The researcher presents contemporary definitions, characteristics, and measuring methodologies for Contemporary Familification in Chapter 5.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community. This research built upon the work of Hellerman by investigating a theoretical foundation for his thinking in a specific local context.

Research Questions

This qualitative research was designed to obtain data from the experiences and perspectives of church members that would provide answers to the following questions:

RQ1. How does Hellerman define and describe Pauline Familification?

RQ2. How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention describe their experiences of Christian community?

RQ3. How do the descriptions found in RQ2 compare and contrast to historical descriptions of Christian community known as Pauline Familification?

RQ4. How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention describe the impact of social distancing on their experience of Christian Community?

Research Design and Methodology

When conducting investigations in the realm of the social sciences, qualitative research is an appropriate approach of inquiry to use. This approach of doing research endeavors to explain human feelings and behaviors within specific circumstances by describing and interpreting the social world (Creswell, 2017). The question of why is at the heart of qualitative research and its primary focus. When an investigation is looking into social processes, interactions, and systems, qualitative research design is the method that should be used (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). In

addition to this, the qualitative research approach offers a more in-depth comprehension of the ways in which the research population acts and reacts in the natural environment in which they are investigated.

The qualitative approach is the one that is used by the vast majority of researchers while conducting market research since it focuses on comprehending the sentiments, behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes of respondents (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). Because this method will help the researcher answer research questions connected to behavior, attitudes, and abstract values, the researcher decided to carry out a qualitative investigation rather than a quantitative study (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). Designs for qualitative research put more of an emphasis on the participants' views, feelings, and actions than they do on the extent, quantity, or breadth of the variables. In addition, the qualitative design approaches are explicative since they investigate the sentiments, perspectives, and ideas of the people who participated in the research (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). In conclusion, the qualitative research design necessitates a comprehensive examination and interpretation of the data in order to mold the final result.

The process of qualitative research is an investigation that analyzes the nature of the character of the subject matter, illuminating the nature and features of the study based on how others perceive it to be (Creswell, 2014). The focus of qualitative research is on investigating subjective experience rather than the collection or examination of objective evidence. This approach examines the many mental models that people use for arranging information (Creswell, 2014). As a result, a qualitative researcher might provide a detailed description of the location, including its outward appearance, an examination of the field's application over the course of history, participants' perceptions, and an investigation into the cultural and psychological significance of the topic.

Qualitative research is the best way to convey reality (Mohajan, 2018). Accepting the human perception of absolute weakness and concentrating on the ambiguities itself are two of the distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research's distinct conceptual approaches, which are used to achieve diverse types of aims (Creswell, 2014). Hence, the qualitative studies are open-ended and begin with research questions that do not predetermine the answers needed.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a descriptive research method that seeks to investigate, characterize, and comprehend the importance that individuals attach to a specific occurrence (Creswell, 2014; Eberle, 2013). In this particular instance, the phenomenon in question pertains to the sense of belonging and connectedness that may be found among members of Christian churches, as well as the manner in which these individuals have experienced the phenomenon in question. Using Heidegger's Hermeneutical phenomenology, this research explored what they have to say about the different ways in which they experienced Christian community. This approach will provide the methodological framework to investigate how individuals live the phenomenon of belonging to a Christian church and how they relate with others in the community.

Hermeneutical phenomenology is a method that enables the investigation of the lived experiences of a human being (Paley, 2016; Eberle, 2013). This research methodology also investigates the manner in which humans see the world around them (Suddick, et al., 2020). A dichotomy that cannot be resolved is formed by the people, their views, and the values they hold (Heidegger, 2010). This research, therefore, focuses figuratively on people's perceptions of the world; It is interested in the social, economic, and cultural laces that bind believers to Christian community. As such, this research seeks to describe the common meanings accorded to relationships within that community.

Therefore, hermeneutical phenomenology is the method that was decided to use for this research project, which aims to investigate the lived experiences of the adult Christian church members affiliated with the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. In addition, as an essential component of these experiences, the researcher intends to investigate the members of the Christian community's perspectives regarding the influence that geographical distance has on contemporary Christian communities. The phenomena were investigated with the help of a survey that consisted of five questions (Eberle, 2013). In this survey, the lived experiences of church members were explored, and the aims of the churches were appropriately interpreted.

Setting

The researcher surveyed adult church members of the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. All constituent churches in the Los Angeles District Association are independent and autonomous local assemblies with voluntary membership on a state (Western Baptist) and national convention (National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.). These churches are self-governing and have the right to establish their own procedures, to include their individual and corporate responses to the research problem.

The Western Baptist State Convention is led by a President, who is assisted by vice presidents and a cabinet of auxiliary officers. There are five different geographical jurisdictions within the state that are referred to as districts. These districts are auxiliary units of the state convention, and they are governed by Moderators, who are aided by Vice Moderators and a cabinet of auxiliary officers. Moderators are elected to their positions within the district. For this investigation, the Los Angeles District Association, a group of 13 local churches was chosen to serve as part of the sample. The researcher gathered basic information about the participants who

took part in the research while maintaining their secrecy and anonymity regarding their names, roles, and any other specific information that could lead to their identification. The same kind of ethical thought was given to the names of the churches, which were simplified to prevent identification. Only broad, non-identifying demographic information on the study's participants and the churches to which they belonged is included in the published report.

Participants

Adult churchgoers who were part of the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention were asked to fill out a survey by the researcher. Participants were enrolled in this study and surveyed without regard to their age or gender because of the descriptive nature of this research. The following are the requirements for potential volunteers to meet to take part in the study: (1) All of the participants have at some point in the past, been a part of the body of believers that makes up the Christian church, be it in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, gathering, or fellowship. (2) It was essential to participate in both in-person (before to COVID) and physically distant (during COVID) communities to get an accurate picture of how feelings and behaviors shifted as a result of the intrinsic alterations that were triggered by the need for physical distancing.

As soon as the researcher had obtained approval from the IRB, he began the process of recruiting study subjects to take part in the research. The researcher was unable to do any recruitment during the regular quarterly District meeting because the approval from the IRB came a week after the meeting had already taken place. Despite this, the researcher did have conversations about possible participation options with a few of the pastors who were there. The majority of the pastors expressed their approval of the research endeavor, and many of them agreed to lend a hand in disseminating information and urging members of their congregations to

take part in the study, provided that they met the requirements for eligibility. After obtaining approval from the IRB the previous week, the researcher started scheduling visits to local churches the next week to deliver announcements personally. Before commencing the actual research, the researcher made plans to meet with the dissertation supervisor to pray together before getting started on the project.

The researcher sent out invitations to participate in the study through email to more than 400 participants, using templates that had been approved by the Institutional Review Board. Appendix 1 has the email solicitation. This email distribution list was made up of individuals who are known to be members of congregations that are affiliated with the Los Angeles District Association. Confirmation of that affiliation was obtained using self-registration criteria from the Western Baptist Christian Leadership School. In addition, emails were sent to each of the administrative offices of the individual churches affiliated with the Los Angeles District Association.

Role of the Researcher

The fundamental function of the researcher is to serve as the investigation's principal human subject or instrument. The researcher made use of a variety of professional criteria to guarantee the success of the study (Pagram & Gray, 2017). The researcher is an auxiliary leader of the Western Baptist State Convention, the parent body of the Los Angeles District Association. As a result of this, the procedure that was used to recruit people of the church to take part in the research will receive a special amount of focus and consideration. In order to mitigate the risk of undue influence being exerted from above on the participants of the study, the researcher strictly excluded any and all members of the congregation who reported directly to them from taking part in the research.

Inquirers are required to openly and reflexively identify their own biases, attitudes, and personal backgrounds, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic position (SEP), which influence the interpretations they create during a study (Creswell, 2017). The researcher made a concerted effort to avoid reading the data via any lens (previous experiences, back yarding, etc.), as well as avoiding being influenced by other people who could potentially introduce bias or otherwise taint the outcomes of the study (Creswell, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher drafted a research proposal and sent it to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University to receive approval. The proposal had a sample of an informed consent form attached to it. In addition to this, the proposal outlined the process by which the research would be carried out and outlined the objectives of the study. Before beginning the data collection process, the researcher made sure to get approval from the IRB. In the beginning, there needed to be more recruitment. The participants were working through the prequalification survey, but they needed help returning the signed Informed Consent form to the researcher.

After enquiring about the reasons for the delays, the researcher came across a widespread issue, which was that the majority of respondents lacked access to a scanner, which was required to scan the signed paper. The researcher was unable to use this method to collect signatures since electronic signatures were not permitted by the IRB. Despite the fact that several persons attempted to sign and return the form electronically, the researcher was unable to do so. The researcher consulted with the Dissertation Supervisor for some direction and then developed a workflow that would allow respondents to take a picture of the signed form using their phones and then send it back to the researcher via email in order to address the issues that arose with

obtaining the signed forms. Appendix 2 contains the finalized version of the document titled "Informed Consent."

There was a concerted attempt made to protect the privacy of each respondent, and the surveys were carried out without recording any names or other information that may be used to identify the participants. There is no record of the identities or ages of the participants anywhere that has been published, and the people who took part in the research were offered the option to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, the researcher concealed their identity by using pseudonyms when referring to specific local churches by name. The informed consent forms, written responses to surveys, and any other data linked to research are all encrypted and stored safely within an enterprise instance of Qualtrics Experience Management (XM) that complies with HIPAA regulations.

As a result, the information provided by participants is protected with the same high level of security as the protected health information. In addition, the compiled research findings are saved within the online storage service Dropbox. Data stored within Dropbox is protected by a sophisticated encryption standard of 256-bits. In addition, Dropbox generates a secure tunnel for all the data that is in motion, using an advanced encryption standard of 128-bits or higher, and accessing a user's account requires multi-factor authentication. A level of security that is equivalent to that of protected health information is achieved for the storage of aggregated research data thanks to these security procedures.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Collection Methods

Surveys served as the primary method for gathering information in this investigation. Participants first completed a prequalification survey and signed the informed consent form

before they were given an anonymous link to the final research survey. The data collection was conducted using an online survey built in Qualtrics XM. The participants were given the opportunity to respond at their own leisure, utilizing whichever method of computing was the one with which they felt most comfortable (e.g., cellphones, tablets, laptops, or computers). Definitions of community and Pauline Affective Solidarity were provided by the survey.

Because of these definitions, it was guaranteed that everybody had an identical fundamental comprehension of these ideas. In addition, before continuing with the survey, respondents were requested to indicate that they had read and comprehended the definitions. After completing the prequalification survey and informed consent form, the participants were provided with a link to the final research survey. The online survey conducted through XM achieved the data compilation goals for this research study.

Instruments and Protocols

In qualitative research, in addition to conducting interviews, one of the other ways to acquire responses from participants is through the use of surveys (Jain, 2021; Braun et al., 2021). Completely qualitative surveys, which put an emphasis on the values of qualitative research and make use of the full potential of qualitative data, have a lot to offer qualitative researchers (Braun et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the same authors indicated that those surveys have been underutilized out of fear that surveys would not be able to generate replies that were sufficiently rich and substantial (Braun et al., 2021). Using surveys allows participants to respond to the questions whenever and whenever they chose. They can therefore be more effective than interviews, which may be time consuming and expensive; surveys are adaptable and low-cost Jain, 2021).

It is acceptable to utilize surveys in the research since they allow the study to directly contact the participants, hence reducing the percentage of respondents who do not provide a response (Harris & Brown, 2010). A further reason why surveys were used in this qualitative research was that they gave participants the opportunity to freely respond without the sensation of being pressed in any way, given that they could do so whenever and wherever was most convenient for them. It was determined that surveys would be the most effective approach to collect replies from participants because they were not all present at the same local church, and several of the questions in the survey concerned sensitive matters. In addition, the questions that were included in the survey were formulated in a way that was intended to encourage participants to freely provide open comments, provide their ideas, and offer their own points of view.

Church members of the Los Angeles District Association completed surveys online. The purpose of this survey was to discern whether Pauline Familification, as exhibited in the first century church, exists in contemporary Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community. The researcher posed five survey questions:

SQ1. How would you describe your experience in Christian community? Consider emotional bonds, non-natural family relationships, companionship, and supportive relationships.

SQ2. Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to another person in Christian community because they had a material need.

SQ3. Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty, among the members in community, in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident.

SQ4. Read the following passage: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica?

SQ5. How would you describe the impact of social distancing on your experience of Christian Community? Consider how the lack of physical presence made you feel, alterations you made to interact with others, and learning new technology.

The survey included questions that assessed the attitudes and perceptions of the participants. Open-ended questions were utilized to address the study's research questions. To minimize ordering effects, the survey's first questions were general ones, while the following questions tackled more specific aspects of the phenomenon to be explored.

In order to boost the reliability of this study, the researcher communicated with the participants via email to provide them with a summary of the primary interpretation gleaned from the data analysis. The purpose of the summary is to provide evidence in support of the primary interpretations offered by the researcher, thus increasing the reliability of the present investigation (Dikko, 2016). The researcher took into consideration the comments and explanations provided by the participants in order to refine, change, or otherwise adjust their interpretation of these lived experiences.

For this study, the data obtained from the surveys were analyzed using the method of thematic analysis, which is compatible with phenomenology. As participants reported the various factors surrounding their actual experiences as members of Christian churches, recurring themes emerged from the study. These themes constituted the primary characteristics of the phenomena. When trying to comprehend events, thoughts, or behaviors that are prevalent throughout a data set, thematic analysis is an effective way of analysis to employ. In contrast to simple summaries or categorizations of codes, themes are intentionally generated patterns (or meanings) formed

from a data collection that address a research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Themes are also known as overarching concepts (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Procedures

The data was collected and analyzed using Kiger and Varpio's (2020) six stages of thematic analysis: (1) become familiar with the transcripts' content by making reiterative readings of the data; (2) codification process where the first codes emerge; (3) creation of sub-themes; (4) grouping of sub-themes around main themes; (5) reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes; and (6) writing the description of the researcher's interpretation of data. This process constituted a methodical organization and synthesis of the information obtained through the research (Harris & Brown, 2010; Devers & Frankel, 2000). The description of the themes composing the research findings is presented in Chapter Four.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

</div>

The researcher employed the Qualtrics XM online survey tool to collect and obtain the data from the research participants. From the beginning until the end of the study, the responses of the participants were taken into consideration, and comparisons were made between the individuals' answers to the same question in order to look for recurring themes in the participants' experiences.

Analysis Methods

The analysis of the data was carried out in accordance with the stages of the thematic analysis, and the researcher utilized NVivo 12 as a qualitative data analysis software, which supported the researcher in correctly organizing the data. The most crucial purpose of using NVivo is to take advantage of the benefits provided by this software in order to properly store, organize, and manage the data in order to generate the codes, their definitions, as well as the sub-

themes and themes that make up the findings at the end of the research project. It is important to note that as the analysis of the data progressed, new codes, sub-themes, and the definitions and names of the themes emerged. To put it another way, the researcher, and not the program, chose the final titles for the codes, sub-themes, and themes that were extracted from the data.

The researcher began by following the steps of thematic analysis by listening to the material that was collected. This was an activity that helped the researcher to transcribe the data, while internalizing the feeling of the participant's comments. In addition, the researcher confirmed that the information saved on the computer is vitally important in terms of its integrity and credibility. This process continued in a way that enabled the researcher to enumerate the issues with the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the logical coherence that can be used to evaluate the usefulness of qualitative research (Sikola et al., 2013). Trustworthiness confirms that the study and its findings can be relied upon (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher confirmed the methodological approaches' soundness, practical improvements, and clarity of the data analysis. This effort will enable any future researcher to audit, and subsequently follow the steps of the data analysis and verify that the codes, sub-themes, and themes, as well as their names and definitions, are suitable to explain the aspect of the phenomenon that they are addressing.

The study embraced analytical skills and a systematic mind to address all the research details. Applying these two elements helped the researcher to collect valid information and support his strategic thinking process (Creswell, 2014). The researcher maintained a strategic and focused mindset throughout all the stages of the research, including data collecting,

communications, the selection of methodology, data analysis, and the presentation of findings. Last but not least, the researcher ensured that the study possessed all four qualities necessary to be considered trustworthy: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

When it comes down to it, determining whether or not something is credible comes down to choosing how exactly the data collected reflects the many aspects of the phenomenon in question (Sikola et al., 2013). Because it incorporates the perspectives and opinions of participants in the community, as well as their emotions and other features that describe their lived experiences as members of that community, the data that is collected in this research is credible. Actually, the credibility of this research was established thanks to the survey sample that was employed and the methodical manner in which the data was analyzed (Gentles et al., 2015; Byrne, 2001). On the one hand, those who took part in this research are individuals who have been a part of a Christian community for a considerable amount of time. They are called "members," which means they are those who regularly participate in community.

On the other hand, the credibility of the study is ensured due to the clear presentation of the process of data analysis. This means that it is possible to carry out an audit trail along the entire process of data collection, data analysis, the codification process, and the creation of sub-themes and themes. This contributes to the overall credibility of the study. As part of this research, both the raw data and the findings that resulted from the coding will be published. Because of this, it will be much simpler for other researchers to duplicate the method of theme analysis that was used in this study.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of findings over a period of time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This trustworthiness concept of dependability provides confirmation that the data represents the changing conditions of the phenomenon under study (e.g., consistency). Moreover, this consistency persists across time, new researchers, and differing analysis techniques (Sikola et al., 2013). Dependability is the trustworthiness attribute that demonstrates that the research results are reliable despite being replicated and when compared with the findings of other researchers (Gasson, 2004; Dikko, 2016). By developing a procedure that can be carried out repeatedly, the reliability of the conclusions of the research can be improved (Gasson, 2004; Dikko, 2016). Because the raw data, coding, and resultant findings will all be published as part of this research, other researchers can readily recreate the thematic analysis method employed in this study.

Confirmability

Establishing that the data and interpretations of the findings are clearly obtained from the data is the primary focus of the confirmability phase of the scientific method (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This aspect of trustworthiness ensures that the conclusions reached are the result of participants' perceptions as well as from the conditions of the study and not from the researcher themselves (Gasson, 2004). This implies that the researchers' biases, preconceptions, and beliefs have been minimized by returning to the participants to demand their agreement in relation to the researcher's interpretations. Together, dependability and confirmability require an audit trail that provides a transparent description of the steps done, starting at the beginning of the research and continuing all the way through the creation and reporting of the findings

(Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Even if all the data is not published in the findings chapter, the data will be recorded and made available to other researchers upon request.

Transferability

In most cases, qualitative research cannot be generalized since it is delimited to a particular setting; yet the findings may be applicable to other contexts. The concept of transferability relates to the reliability of research since it affects the extent to which results or conclusions can be applied to different settings (Gasson, 2004). For example, this research is delimited to church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. The findings of this study could be applied to another district in the same region because there are several other districts in the same geographic area that have the same leadership organization and polity. In a similar vein, the findings of this research might be applicable to other district associations that are not part of the state convention, provided that all of the other characteristics remain the same.

The possible lessons that can be learned could have a tremendous impact on how churches cultivate community and the emotional impact that community has on the people of the church. Transferability is supported by thick description, which refers to the process of describing behaviors, experiences, and the context in which they took place in such detail that the knowledge can be helpful to another researcher who is attempting to transfer findings to a different setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, transferability requires crystal clear descriptions of the research, the varied viewpoints and experiences of the participants, the methodology used, the interpretation of the results, and the contributions from the participants' peers who served as debriefers (Sikola et al., 2013). Finally, while the trustworthiness idea that lies at the heart of credibility is known as internal validity,

transferability addresses the issue of the research's external validity (Sikola et al., 2013).

Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a summary of the approach that the researcher utilized to carry out their work. This approach contained details regarding the environment and people who took part in the study, in addition to the ethical implications of the research. In addition, the chapter offered a review of the procedures and tools for data collecting that were applied to the people who participated in the study. In addition to this, the chapter provided an in-depth methodology for analyzing the data. In conclusion, it reaffirmed the trustworthiness of the study by demonstrating that it is credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferrable.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of that contemporary community. This chapter is committed to reporting the study's findings. To accomplish this, the researcher will summarize how the data was compiled and measured and provide details about the demographics and sampling. Moreover, the chapter will offer textural and structural descriptions, including answers to the research questions and their associated themes. Finally, the researcher will evaluate the research design.

Compilation Protocols and Measures

This research project used a phenomenological design to examine how participants' lived experiences relate to their actions in Christian community. This chapter shows the phenomenological results from a survey with five questions that 25 people completed. These research findings are organized around the four research questions that guided this study:

RQ1. How does Hellerman define and describe Pauline Familification?

RQ2. How do members of churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention describe their experiences of Christian community?

RQ3. How do the descriptions found in RQ2 compare and contrast to historical descriptions of Christian community known as Pauline Familification?

RQ4. How do members of churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention describe the impact of social distancing on their experience of Christian Community?

The findings will be presented in two sections: 1) the textual description, which will demonstrate what the participants understand about community, and 2) the structural description, which will display the common aspects that represent the construction of the participants' views regarding how they live the practices of that community. The quotes provided from the survey responses contain spelling and grammatical errors but are left as is to remove any bias on the researcher's part in editing their responses.

Demographic and Sample Data

A total of four hundred individuals were invited by email to participate in the research project. Out of the 400 individuals who participated in the prequalification survey and completed it, there were a total of 43 respondents. The prequalification survey received responses from roughly ten percent of those who were eligible to do it. Based on the responses received from the 43 individuals who participated in the prequalification survey, six potential participants were disqualified from further participation. At the same time, the remaining 37 were invited to continue the process and submit the Informed Consent Form.

The criteria for participation in the study were laid out in Chapter 3. The individuals who were selected to take part in it had to meet all of those criteria: (1) they had, at some point in the past, been a part of the body of believers that makes up the Christian church, be it in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, gathering, or fellowship and (2) they had participated in both in-person (before to COVID) and physically distant (during COVID) communities to get an accurate picture of how feelings and behaviors shifted as a result of the intrinsic alterations that were triggered by the need for physical distancing.

There were 25 female and 12 male participants in the pool of 37 potential candidates. Thirty-four prequalified people gave their permission to engage in the research, and 26 of those

surveyed completed the survey. According to the researcher's personal observation, roughly 65% of adult church attendees in the Los Angeles District Association are women and 35% are men. As such, the response ratio for this research study was generally characteristic of normal participation levels by sex. The 26 research participants far exceed the suggested sample size of 6-10 participants for phenomenological research (Durdella, 2019; Marshall et al., 2013).

As the researcher coded the data, it became evident that the responses provided by the participants were sufficiently detailed to draw meaning from the information that was collected (Mason, 2010). Though saturation can be difficult to prove (Marshall et al., 2013), as the data was coded the researcher was unable to find new emerging data (Lichtman, 2014). The responses were therefore deemed appropriate for saturation because the responses reached a point of repetition (Bowen 2008). Moreover, the responses were sufficient to answer the research questions posed by the study.

After the start of the global pandemic and the required church closures imposed by local government agencies in March 2020, the number of registered district churches dropped from an average of 35 to 13. This decrease marked a significant fall from the previous year. Moreover, this reduction amounted to roughly 63% of the people who may have participated in the research. The people who took part in the study were recruited from nine of the thirteen churches in the district that were already registered in February 2022, when the survey itself was carried out. Because of this, the sample population of this study accounts for close to 70 percent of the total number of churches that are now registered.

Data Analysis and Findings

Reading the surveys multiple times allowed the researcher to become familiar with the responses and thoughts provided by the participants. After that, each participant's response was

carefully examined to look for relevant statements to the research questions. The codes were organized into descriptive categories or sub-themes; these categories and sub-themes were exhaustively defined based on the words of the participants, and each definition was presented before the corresponding description of the sub-theme.

To develop the overarching themes associated with the phenomenon, the observable patterns found between the various responses were analyzed. Repeatedly used words and phrases generated codes reflective of developing themes (Smith et al., 2022; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Finally, a narrative description was written that included both textual and structural descriptions of the themes. This description was written with the assistance of verbatim extracts from the participants' surveys (Smith & Osborn, 2004).

The Textural and Structural Descriptions

In Phenomenological research, it is essential to have both a textural and a structural description (Conklin, 2007). The textural description allows easier access to a personified understanding of the respondents and how they interact with their communities, particularly during the pandemic. The structural description can be understood as a process of constant data comparison to identify the consistent structures from the participants' transcripts. The structural description results from an understanding and appreciation of the experience's identified structural themes, the bedrock on which the textural elements rest (Conklin, 2007). Together these descriptions enable readers to develop more embodied understandings of both the texture and structure of each of the phenomena and illustrate the use of the composite account as a way for researchers to understand better and convey the wholeness of the experience of any phenomenon that is the subject of an investigation (Wertz et al., 2011).

The Textural Description

A sensitive narration that emphasizes the characteristics shared by respondents is represented by a textual description (Conklin, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This insightful narration makes it possible to enter the phenomenological involvements of the participants by drawing attention to the meanings and levels of consciousness that the participants accorded to the fact that they were members of a Christian community. When attempting to collect a particular instance of the phenomenon, it is essential to consider the relationship between the observed object and the observer (Conklin, 2007). Therefore, textural descriptions are accurate individual narrations describing each participant's particular point of view regarding the activities they participate in their respective community.

The combined first-person narratives presented below capture the essence of the significance that the participants accord to being members of a Christian community (Wertz et al., 2011; Conklin, 2007). It also conveys what they know about their membership and how involved they are in the church's day-to-day operations.

> *As a member of a Christian community, I believe that the church's members are my extended family. In some cases, they are like my brother and sister because they are always willing to help and support me in any circumstance of my life. In the same way, I am there to support and help my brothers and sisters and participate with them and the pastor in the worship ceremony.*
>
> *These ceremonies in which I participate, as well as other community activities, are expressions of my loyalty to the Christian Church. Through them, I manifest my wish to comply with the Lord's mandates. I help each other when difficulties arrive, and I am always well inclined to fulfill their material or spiritual needs. In this way, I manifest the feeling of closeness that is always present in the community.*
>
> *When the pandemic arrived, and health authorities imposed social distance, I had a hard time because I was used to sharing with my brothers and sisters in person. I had to learn how to use the Internet and other devices and software? to be able to attend online ceremonies. Although I cannot feel the same during these online encounters, it is almost good to know about each other in our community and their health and lives. However, I always prefer the in-person services because of the degree of nearness and connection with others, which is a feeling that I miss.*

The Structural Description

This section presents the structural description detailing how the participants lived their individual experiences as part of Christian communities throughout a global pandemic. These experiences took place during the time of the study. An analysis of the replies supplied by the research participants is presented below as part of the structural description. This analysis is organized around the research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on the concept of Familification. RQ1 was "How does Hellerman define and describe Pauline Familification?" Because RQ1 was foundational to understanding the idea that underlies the research, there were no survey questions related to RQ1. Hellerman defines Familification through four essential characteristics of Jesus's new family (1) Affective Solidarity, (2) Family Unity, (3) Material Solidarity, and (4) Family Loyalty (Hellerman, 2009a; Hellerman 2009b). Hellerman's treatment of Pauline Familification formed the Theoretical Framework for this study.

Affective Solidarity

The concept of Affective Solidarity extends into the family of God and the profound emotional relationships that naturally exist between biological siblings. Paul employs tremendous emotive language to describe physical separation from the church. Epaphroditus was said to be "longing for" the church at Philippi (Phil. 2:25). Likewise, Paul felt "orphaned" because of his separation from the PKG (i.e., the primary organizational structure of families distinguished by having a common male blood ancestor), at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:17). For Paul, separation from his PKG was likened to bereavement, even when that separation was expected to be temporary.

Hellerman compares the depth of emotional connection experienced between spouses of that period with the bond between siblings. Many marriages were legal arrangements that lacked emotional attachment during the New Testament period (Neufeld & DeMaris, 2009). In many cases, the wife remained a part of her father's household (Neufeld & DeMaris, 2009; Osiek, 1997). Parents often died at a young age, leaving a longer-lasting, more enduring relationship between siblings. These sibling relationships usually lasted 40-50 years (Aasgaard, 2002). Because of the legal nature of marital relationships and the abbreviated parent-child relationship, sibling relationships often had both longevity and depth. The historical examples provided by Hellerman included conflict between spouses or families; in every case, the conflicted spouse chose their sibling over their mate (Hellerman, 2009a).

Family Unity

Hellerman (2009a) defined Family Unity as the "interpersonal harmony and absence of discord that Paul expected among brothers and sisters in God's family" (pp. 78-79). In Hellerman, Family Unity rejects discord among and retaliation towards siblings in the PKG (Barclay, 2002). The unity of the family is paramount and takes priority over all rightful claims to redress (Barclay, 2002). As such, sibling interactions were characterized by routine acts of kindness and behavioral unity. Siblingship included certain behavioral expectations, chief among them was unity; they were expected to act like siblings and refused to participate in actions that disrupted unity among the family unit (Aasgaard, 2002).

In the larger Biblical context, Family Unity was a direct renunciation of the law of retaliation. This casuistic law provided retribution against offending parties and compensation to the offended. However, both Jesus and Paul rejected these ideas in favor of an active commitment to non-retaliation among siblings (Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:17-19). There was no

commensurable punishment among members of the PKG, they were commanded to avoid taking each other to civil courts, and there was no compensation for the offended. Paul went beyond simple unity by requiring Family Unity, even if preserving that unity required suffering mistreatment or personal loss (1 Cor. 6:7).

Material Solidarity

Hellerman (2009a) defined Material Solidarity as "the sharing of resources that Paul assumed would characterize relationships among brothers and sisters in God's family" (p. 79). In response to Peter's declaration that the disciples had left everything to follow Jesus, Jesus replied that those who rejected material resources in favor of discipleship would receive houses, a new family, and land (Mark 10:29-30). The list begins with a house and ends with lands or fields. These new resources and relationships would become key among His new PKG because as believers left their natural families, they often surrendered significant material wealth (Bobertz, 2016; Mark 1:16, 20). Moreover, wealth was typically represented in the land and the produce during this period (Garland, 2011).

Material Solidarity required members of the PKG to serve others and place themselves last place (Guijarro, 2004). There is an unselfish quality to Material Solidarity that sets it apart from the other concepts. In Family Unity, as an act of non-retaliation, the believer must give up retribution and compensation for an offense committed against them. However, in Material Solidarity, believers are required to sacrifice their personal wealth, and at times, the wealth of their natural families, for the benefit of unknown strangers. At times, these strangers were in other countries, and there was little likelihood they would ever meet (2 Cor. 8-9).

Research Question 2

How the people who participated in the study thought and talked about their community

involvement is the subject of the second research question. RQ2 was "How do members of

Churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention

describe their experiences of Christian community?" The following survey questions were

related to RQ2:

> **SQ1.** How would you describe your experience in Christian community? Consider
> emotional bonds, non-natural family relationships, companionship, and supportive
> relationships.
>
> **SQ2.** Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to
> another person in Christian community because they had a material need.
>
> **SQ3.** Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty, among the members in
> community, in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated
> in a situation when loyalty was evident.

Through an analysis of the responses to SQ1, SQ2, and SQ3, four themes emerged: 1)

Perceptions about the Christian Community, 2) Loyalty at the Christian Community, 3) Christian

Community as a Support System, and 4) Togetherness. A description of each of these themes

follows.

Theme #1: Perceptions about Christian Community

Perceptions about Christian Community was mapped to SQ1. "How would you describe

your experience in Christian community? Consider emotional bonds, non-natural family

relationships, companionship, and supportive relationships." Additionally, Theme #1:

Perceptions about Christian Community, provided direct responses to RQ2. "How do members

of Churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention

describe their experiences of Christian community?" Theme #1: Perceptions about Christian

Community addresses the participants' viewpoints regarding their experiences in community.

Table 2 details Theme #1: Perceptions about Christian Community, its associated sub-themes, and codes.

Table 2: Theme #1 - Perceptions about Christian Community

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme #1: Perceptions about the Christian Community (coded 12 times)	Sub-Theme #1.1: Christian Community as a Family (coded 9 times) Sub-Theme #1.2: Christian Community's Environment (coded 3 times)	extended family (coded 2 times) learning family (coded 4 times) supportive family (coded 3 times) fellowship environment (coded 1 time) tolerance environment (coded 2 times)

This primary theme is broken down into two subthemes, each focusing on one of two aspects defining participants' perspectives.

Sub-Theme #1.1: Christian Community as a Family

Sub-Theme #1.1: Christian Community as a Family refers to the statements made by participants that relate to the community functioning as if it were a large family looking out for its members. Indeed, some participants expressed the view that the Christian church functions for them similarly to their extended family. P16, for example, was crystal clear about what they envisioned for the community:

"I experience my Christian community similar to the way I relate to my family…" (P16)

Other participants uncover a vision of the Christian community as a learning place that can guide them throughout the entirety of their lives:

"My experience in the Christian community has been the most impactful experience of my entire life. My thoughts, actions, and deeds have been foundational built by my above listed bonds and relationships." (P11)

"There are more outlets to receive the word of God and learn about biblical teachings and how to re-apply it in my life." (P20)

Lastly, the support that the Christian community can provide in the lives of some individuals makes the Christian community an essential part of their lives:

> "I feel a special relationship with my church family. I believe they are especially supportive." (P18)

The researcher wonders about the motivations that drove participants to reveal these points of view. What sorts of things are occurring within the community that gives rise to such impressions? This researcher believes that the atmosphere that has developed around the figure of the pastor and the other members of the Christian community contributes to the perception of the Christian community as a trustworthy group of individuals.

Sub-Theme #1.2: Christian Community's Environment

Since Sub-Theme #1.2: Christian Community's Environment refers to the aspects of the atmosphere that can be found in Christian communities, the researcher believes that it is also revealing the reasons that led participants to think that the church community is comparable to a trustworthy extended family. In particular, the sub-theme emphasizes the margin of tolerance and fellowship that can be discovered within the church context. Tolerance and a lack of judgment are communicated throughout the community thanks to the spirit that prevails there.

> "The reality of things is that we all have weaknesses and insecurities about something and in our dealings with people and in particular in the church, it stands out…the church is more tolerant of strange behavior and insecure people than anywhere else I could remember going..." (P8)

> "…I have the support from my Pastor. He has created a environment that is non-judgmental..." (P22)

Local churches are physical locations for participants in community to meet and congregate:

> "I feel more connected with individuals at my church and have developed a stronger sense of fellowship in the Christian community." (P20)

In a nutshell, understanding that the Christian church and its community are seen as a space that enables its members to share their faith, learn, and obtain advice and support was emphasized by the first theme. Because of the tolerant and nonjudgmental atmosphere that prevails in these communities, members of these communities can hold these perspectives. Because of this, members of these communities do not need to hide from one another but rather consider one another in their entirety, including their strengths and weaknesses.

Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community

Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community was mapped to SQ3. "Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty, among the members in community, in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident." Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community helped the researcher understand the meaning that participants associate with being loyal to the Christian community. From their statements, it was deduced that more than a concrete definition of loyalty, these participants, as community members, have developed different manners to manifest their commitment to the Christian community. Table 3 details Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community, its associated sub-theme, and codes.

Table 3: Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community (coded 24 times)	Sub-Theme #2.1: Ways to be Loyal to the Church (coded 24 times)	attendance at church services (coded 7 times) compassion and assistance for fellow human beings (coded 14 times) support in conflictive situations (coded 3 times)

Sub-Theme #2.1: Ways to be Loyal to the Church

This subtheme focused on the various ways in which a person can demonstrate their loyalty to a cause or an organization. For example, a few participants asserted that they are devoted members of their church because they go to the vast majority of the gatherings that are held there.

"Personally, I would try to attend anything the church or the Bishop was involved in and if I wasn't able to attend I would make sure my daughter would go. I try my best to be loyal to my church." (P1)

Another participant agrees with the prior statement and says:

"I see loyalty every Sunday when the musicians & Pastors show up to serve. There is loyalty in a few members that come because of loyalty in their hearts to God & community. Every SUNDAY." (P3)

The familiar tradition of going to the same church that one's ancestors, parents, and grandparents went to is another factor that contributes to loyalty.

"…I feel that individuals' longevity at churches is tied to their loyalty at that specific church. I am very loyal to my local church. It is the church of my mother and grandparents..." (P14)

According to the comments made by two participants, P9 and P6, a sense of loyalty can also be demonstrated when challenging circumstances arise:

"…About five years ago my pastor went through a divorce and some of the members had a few negative things to say and left. The majority of members stayed and prayed and the church has been thriving ever since." (P9)

"…I witnessed someone being wrongly accused in the church and saw how members stood with the accused, stood on loyalty to God and self. In the end the accused was cleared, and God received all the glory." (P6)

Compassion, as was emphasized by several participants, is shown to emerge in precisely these kinds of circumstances:

"A general sense of loyalty is applicable to everything listed in SQ2. Additionally, there are visitations to grieving church members with follow-up phones calls. Moreover, seniors receive in-home computer maintenance and those present in worship receive monitoring about their family and self-well-being." (P7)

"Loyalty is big in our community…We have an ministry where some of the members go out and feed the homeless. There are members who are excited about donating food and clothes..." (P23)

As can be seen, one of the ways that individuals can demonstrate their loyalty to one another is by aiding others who are in need. Despite this, this writer thinks that one of the most privileged ways to prove loyalty is through the compassion and care between community members, even when those members are not necessarily going through a time of need.

There is an innate sense of concern and consideration that permeates the entire community, as it was brought to light by a few of the participants in the discussion:

"In the community our neighbors watch our backs and homes. In church my circle has loyalty written on their foreheads. I go back to my circle in the community and church. I choose wisely. We care for each other's parents and trust is an important issue. We can depend on each other to be there not just when there is a death, but when secrets have to be kept, we can that it won't go any further." (P16)

The second theme demonstrated that, for the research participants, the concept of loyalty is more operational than abstract. The members of this community believe that the best way to show their allegiance to the Christian church and the Christian legacy is to be actively involved in community and to participate in events and activities that provide benefits and significant assistance to those in need. The researcher believes there is a correlation between the significance and meaning that participants accord to their membership in the church and the degree to which they are loyal.

Theme #3: Christian Community as a Support System

Theme #3: Christian Community as a Support System was mapped to SQ2. "Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to another person in

Christian community because they had a material need." Theme #3: Christian Community as a

Support System focuses on the qualities and structures that Christian communities have built up

over time to serve as the backbone of the support network that helps the Christian Churches

achieve their goals. Table 4 provides details about Theme #3: Christian Community as a Support

System, its associated sub-themes, and codes.

Table 4: Theme #3: Christian Community as a Support System

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme #3: Christian Community as a Support System (coded 56 times)	Sub-Theme #3.1: Building Durable Laces (coded 11 times)	expanding supportive relationships (coded 11 times).
	Sub-Theme #3.2: Types of Support (coded 45 times)	Employment (coded 3 times) financial support (coded 12 times) food and health support (coded 14 times) material/immaterial needs (coded 16 times)

Sub-Theme #3.1: Building Durable Laces

Sub-Theme #3.1: Building Durable Laces refers to the opportunities to form connections

based on mutual trust and confidence due to a shared commitment to Christian principles. These

occasions are made available because Christian communities share the same principles. Members

of Christian communities have access to a seemingly endless supply of chances to forge solid

bonds with others in their social circles. What repercussions does this have for those who took

part? A comprehensive understanding of the influences exerted by the church community paints

a picture of individuals who are helping, supporting, and caring for one another. This, in turn,

indicates that these individuals have constructed a robust web of connections among themselves.

The local church can serve as a safe gathering spot for community members, allowing

them to broaden their social networks:

"…My circle is very supportive, encouraging and holds me accountable. In times that I really need someone it's been my church family that helped me get through wharever trials." (P15)

"Members that I've engaged with over the years have turned into nothing short of relatives. We experience new things together both in and outside of the church walls. We contact each other on various days of the week to check on one another..." (P4)

"…There are some people that I know will have my back in good times and bad. These relationships are truly valued and there would a major defect in my life if these relationships weren't present." (P13)

It can be inferred from these statements that the relationships between community members extend beyond the physical space of the church to extend their influence over the course of the week through the personal attention paid to the needs and care of other community members. This solidarity and compassionate behavior can be understood through the declaration of P6, who described their experience as "A bond that is held together by our love for God and love for one another."

Sub-Theme #3.2. Types of Support

Sub-Theme #3.2. Types of Support focuses on the various forms of assistance that participants offer and receive from members of their respective communities. The community members provide a wide range of service, including job opportunities, help with food and health concerns, and financial support.

"I have been a recipient of personally receiving several valuable gifts, jobs, and advice from my church." (P10)

For instance, assistance when some community members needed food or health care was mentioned as an example of a common form of assistance provided by Christian churches. This assistance was cited as a manifestation of the Christian church's support:

"Buying of groceries for a family that the mother had lost her job due to sickness. The groceries were purchased through Instacart and delivered to the house, and I mean groceries." (P7)

"A member and spouse were ill, and the deacon and his wife went grocery shopping after getting the list and paid the bill." (P23)

The provision of monetary assistance is a typical method of demonstrating community support. This support can take many forms, ranging from the seemingly insignificant act of furnishing the cash necessary to make it to the end of the month or as elaborate as assisting with the required resources to paint a whole house:

"One of the families (a mother, father and two very young children), needled money to make ends meet, and we collected a special offering to meet their needs." (P16)

"paining a whole house, I've seen a lot of great examples of God's richest blessings." (P3)

Immaterial needs are also part of community work. For instance, the occasion of asking for some advice:

"Time and money were given at the same time and much need at the time. Sometimes a listening ear is of much valuable for someone..." (P5)

Nonetheless, material items like clothes, appliances, or school supplies are routinely offered to those in need by those in community:

"Also, I've witnessed the children being given support with school supplies as well as monetary gifts for college." (P17)

"major home appliance gifts." (P6)

A valuable item like a car was also offered to a community member in need:

"I can list several times a person in need received something of value from the church. One lady was gifted a car, because she got a new job and did not have reliable transportation to get across town to the job." (P3)

In addition, because of their commitment to both the church and the community, members of the church were able to give a car to a member of the community who had expressed a need for transportation:

"I have witnessed a young single mother given a car by a church member…The member had just gotten another car and didn't need the older one. And that car was given to the mother." (P13)

Sub-Theme #3.2. Types of Support sheds light on one of the primary functions that Christian churches serve. These institutions function as a powerful support system that reaches out to community members who are struggling and demonstrates its solidarity in various forms, ranging from the tangible to the intangible, such as by providing time and attention to those in need. The preceding statements are evidence of the brotherhood that is an ever-present sentiment among the members of the community, who strive to offer their selfless assistance and be present in every circumstance of need that arises within the community.

Theme #4: Togetherness

Theme #4: Togetherness was mapped to SQ4.

Read the following passage: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica?

The concept of Togetherness emphasizes the cohesion and companionship shared by the community members. Theme #4: Togetherness educates us on the importance of membership and reciprocity. It is a two-way theme in which the participants and the church felt a sense of being linked or affiliated to the same principles, which led to the conclusion that community members develop a "sense of belonging" to their church. Table 5 provides details about Theme #4: Togetherness, its associated sub-theme, and codes.

Table 5: Theme #4: Togetherness

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme #4: Togetherness (coded 5 times)	Sub-Theme #4.1: Sharing Emotions and Activities (coded 5 times)	shared sentiments/activities (coded 5 times)

The most crucial aspect of Theme #4: Togetherness is the concept of sharing, which refers not only to the exchange of thoughts and feelings among community members but also to the participation in shared pursuits that serve to strengthen the ties that bind them to one another and to the local churches.

Sub-Theme #4.1: Sharing Emotions and Activities

The participants share a general sense of being closer to one another. They had a strong sense of community with one another, and the church served as the institution to which they all belonged:

> "A community where we share life, and experience together. A community where we love, support, share and encourage one another in the word of God." (P6)

> "Christian community has been the backbone to entire life. It's where I've grown the most. More than actually in my own household. It is where i was adopted as family & adopted family." (P3)

The act of participating in worship as a whole increased the sense of community among the participants and shed light on the strength of the ties that bind them to the Christian church, which is where they all have a place of membership:

> "My experience in Christian community has been very rewarding. Worship is a huge part of my life; I enjoy being a part of the music ministry at my local church." (P4)

These responses demonstrate that the respondents share a sense of belonging; more specifically, they share a sense of being a part of a spiritual mission shared by the community. This sense of belonging is the value they take away from their fellowship; more specifically, it is a worthy significance that directs the course of their lives.

Family Loyalty

Hellerman (2009a) defined Family Loyalty as "the undivided commitment to God's group that was to mark the value system of brothers and sisters in God's family" (p. 79). This

commitment was expected to supersede any prior social, emotional, marital, or religious duty (Luke 9:59-60). Joining Jesus' new PKG necessitated an intellectual and philosophical break with ancestors, heritage, and religious practice, as well as a deepened loyalty to the new family (Bovon, 2013; Ryle, 2015). No professional requirements, personal commitments, or pious family responsibilities take precedence over allegiance to God's PKG (Hellerman, 2009a; Garland, 2011).

In Hellerman, Family Loyalty is expressed as a war between the children of light and darkness (Hellerman, 2009a). Hellerman imagined loyalty as a contest between believing spouses and their unbelieving spouses. Using 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 as a backdrop, Hellerman explored the outcomes of decision-making when the believer must choose between loyalty to God's family and their unbelieving spouse (1 John 3:10). Because believing spouses were also "siblings," married believers did not have conflicting loyalties. Paul uses the traditional family value of the Mediterranean region, which is that fidelity to one's family is more important than commitment to one's spouse, to talk about a Christian's loyalty to their brothers and sisters in the Christian faith (Hellerman, 2009a). For Hellerman, Family Loyalty was all-encompassing, absolute, and non-negotiable.

Research Question 3

The third research question investigated the extent to which the experiences that respondents recounted were comparable to or dissimilar from the descriptions of Pauline Familification that were supplied. RQ3 was "How do the descriptions found in RQ2 compare and contrast to historical descriptions of Christian community known as Pauline Familification?" As will be demonstrated below, there were significant ways in which community, separated by a few thousand years, remained unchanged and other ways in which the two diverged.

Strong Affective Family Language

Paul's 13 attributable writings contain 277 references to various family members, most notably the phrase "brothers" (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1; 3:2; 4:1; 5:1, 4, 12). Paul repeatedly uses this terminology to address the church's role as a family. This repeated invocation of the surrogate family model that Jesus established was consistent in Paul and is seen in modern community through the use of similar terms by the respondents. Among the 26 research participants, 64 comments included what the researcher has contextually determined to be family terminology (e.g., family, father, mother, child, brother, sister, etc.). That means that across all survey questions, a little more than 49% of all responses included some familial term. The respondents provided strong familial language like:

> "My experience with my church family has been nothing short of supportive, healthy, informative and necessary. I consider each and every one of my church members to be as close to me as my blood family." (P11)

> "I experience my Christain community simmilar to the way I relate to my family. I view My pastor (and wife when applicable) in the patental role, and my fellow members as brothers and sisters. Commited members take on various responsibilities, and we love, encourage and support each other spiritually, emotionally and financially." (P17)

> "I feel more connected with individuals at my church and have developed a stronger sense of fellowship in the Christian community…" (P21)

These strong familial terms also confirm the position of Hellerman, namely, that the Christian family should have strong emotional bonds that replace the natural family connection and are akin to the Affective Solidarity that Paul demonstrated. The use of adoption (Rom. 8:15; 9:26; Gal. 3:26), the necessity of participation (1 Cor. 12-14; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13), and parallelism between natural and spiritual families (Phil. 1:2; 2:11, 15; 4:20; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1; 3:2; 4:1; 5:1, 4, 12) is indicative of the way Paul described the spiritual family in his epistles.

In contrast, others expressed a low opinion of community as a family or lacked any real concern for the type of spiritual separation anxiety that Paul invoked (1 Thess. 2:17):

> "There are available relationships where I can discuss superficial personal concerns and receive supportive helps like discussing religious issues or concerns regarding my well-being. I would not consider them as strong healthy attachments since the emotional bonds are not strong." (P7)

> "…To be honest, I loved the lack of physical presence. I attended church and bible more often while enjoying my one day off from work. I no longer had the pressure of finding appropriate clothing for the family and the difficulty process of getting my children ready..." (P18)

While there is evidence of strong affective language among the survey responses, there are also those who failed to make deep enough emotional attachments to move beyond a superficial conversation or even be emotionally impacted by physical distance.

A Mixed Sense of Family Unity

Hellerman's concept of Family Unity is primarily built on the ideas of (1) interpersonal unity and (2) non-retaliation. These concepts are default behaviors that should characterize the relationships among brothers and sisters in community. As previously mentioned, there is an overwhelming amount of affective and familial terminology among the responses of the research participants. However, at this juncture, the research is concerned with more than expressed emotion; the researcher must now determine whether this community has an abiding sense of unity. And after seeking to understand the significance of unity, the researcher must determine how this community handles conflict.

Concerning unity, the researcher must again turn to language that demonstrates strong bonds and supportive relationships. The respondents shared:

"A bond that is held together by our love for God and love for one another. A community where we share life, and experience together. A community where we love, support ,share and encourage one another in the word of God. In Christian community supporting one another, and building strong relationships is what helps to keep us growing spiritual and moving forward on this journey." (P6)

"In the christian community my experience is more like supportive relationships." (P18)

For another respondent, the relationships found in community were more profound than

just a bond (e.g., unity). There was also a sense of replacement for family members who died

before they were born:

"…I am most closest with members in the older generation. I consider them as surrogate grandparents, as the majority of my grandparents passed before I was born. I can look to them for guidance and advice and also overall support..." (P14)

And yet another described their experience as having been adopted into a new family:

"It is where i was adopted as family & adopted family." (P3)

As a natural outgrowth of the expressed experiences about community, the researcher had hoped

to find more explicit language that demonstrated interpersonal unity and an absence of conflict.

However, the unifying language was not direct, and as will be seen below, there was

undoubtedly some conflict at work in community.

No direct references to non-retaliation were mentioned in the responses. However, the

researcher deems this to be the result of a failed opportunity to ask a more direct question in the

survey. The respondents did raise some concerns about conflict:

"My father left a church where he was a sitting pastor, because the musician there had too much control. A vote was called to keep him or let him go. The church voted to keep the musician and my father decided he would be better off leaving himself." (P4)

"About five years ago my pastor went through a divorce and some of the members had a few negative things to say and left. The majority of members stayed and prayed and the church has been thriving every since." (P9)

While these responses reflect varying degrees of conflict, no information is provided to discern whether these conflicts were resolved in ways that honor the methods outlined by Jesus and Paul (Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:17-19).

Overwhelming Material Solidarity

Material Solidarity is the third of Hellerman's notions; it was the mechanism by which believers shared resources with others in the family of God. Sharing one's food, clothing, and even their home with other Christian family members was expected as an everyday practice. Material Solidarity was essential to Paul's understanding of what it meant to be brothers and sisters in the communities he led. In Familification, believers received more than a replacement family. They accepted, within that replacement family, the material support each needed to live.

Several respondents observed spontaneous food sharing with individual members as needs arose as well as ongoing and coordinated food distribution that reached more than the specific church members but were more mission-focused:

> "The only thing that I can remember is food give always when I was younger…it felt so good knowing I helped someone in need." (P1)

> "Food distribution within the Christian community is a common experience I have witnessed..." (P12)

> "…large amounts of food are given away..." (P18)

In addition to food, several other items of significant value were given away. These included cars:

> "I saw it my creative arts group & church all the time back home. Pastor Spencer 1 Sunday gave a couple of cars away to single mothers." (P3)

> "…One lady was gifted a car, because she got a new job and did not have reliable transportation to get across town to the job." (P4)

> I have witnessed a car being given to someone because they do not have a car to get their children to and from school and work." (P13)

Others witnessed assistance with housing and housing-related expenses:

> "Pastor Spencer…gave away about $25000 to help people housing & paying their bills..." (P3)

> "appliances, to furniture, to assistance with moving, to paining a whole house, I've seen a lot of great examples of God's richest blessings." (P4)

> "A person needed money to pay their rent and another person got a cashiers check to pay the rent." (P22)

Finally, some respondents provided insight into more abstract, though no-less meaningful shared resources, like a listening ear, advice, and a tape recorder:

> "I have been a recipient of personally receiving several valuable gifts, jobs, and advice from my church." (P11)

> "When I needed to remember instructions before my surgery, I was provided a tape recorder to record instructions from the Dr. & medical professionals." (P19)

Taken together, these responses depict a sense of community that confirms the presence of the type of Material Solidarity present in the first-century church. As previously observed, in Material Solidarity, people serve others and place themselves last place (Guijarro, 2004). This unselfish quality of giving considers and meets the needs of others, at the personal expense of the rest of the community (Acts 2:44). There is, therefore, no perceptible contrast between Material Solidarity in the first century and modern community.

A Nonconforming Sense of Family Loyalty

Jesus required commitment to His new family above all else (Luke 9:59-60). This overarching sense of loyalty to Christ and His family is what Hellerman had in mind when he established Family Loyalty as the last of his Familification concepts. The research participants reported an interesting type of Family Loyalty at work in their community:

> "In the community our neighbors watch our backs and homes. In church my cicrle has loyalty written on their foreheads..." (P16)

"There is a great sense loyalty amongst the members in community. My particular church the majority of the members are related by birth or by marriage so the loyalty is evident." (P18)

In addition to this general language, some responses seem to interpret loyalty as a sense

of responsibility to be present in community or to serve one another:

"Yes. Regardless of personal opinions, people respond to fulfilling the needs of others." (P5)

"One of the members was trying to obtain employment and another member helped her with her resume in the wording and format of it. She got the dream job she had gone back to school to obtain her degree in." (P8)

Unfortunately, many responses failed to meet the high threshold that Jesus demanded, loyalty to

Himself and His universal body (Luke 9:59-60). The respondents seemed focused on attendance,

which is not consistent with Hellerman's loyalty concept.

In addition to this limited view of Family Loyalty, the participants failed to respond to the

second part of the related SQ, which asked the participant to "describe an example of when you

saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident." The lack of response to the second

part of the SQ made it challenging to discern how the respondent interpreted the question and,

therefore, how appropriate the answer was to the RQ. The researcher therefore wonders how the

concept of Family Loyalty has changed over time and whether it matters.

Comparing Two Communities

In Hellerman, the communities that existed under the leadership of the Apostle Paul were

part of a new family under the fatherhood of God and characterized by (1) Affective Solidarity,

(2) Family Unity, (3) Material Solidarity, and (4) Family Loyalty. These concepts are well

established in Hellerman, but the comparison to modern community among adult church

members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention is

problematic.

Both communities are distinguished by their use of highly developed affective family language. Paul employs this powerful family language on multiple occasions and encourages people to do the same in their interactions. The research findings demonstrate that the people who participated in the study also employ equivalent forceful expressions that hint at a community of loving families. People in the modern community believe that their involvement in the community is the central pillar of their existence.

To illustrate Affective Solidarity, Paul frequently uses forceful metaphors, such as comparing being separated from the church to being "orphaned" (1 Thess. 2:17; see also Phil. 2:25-26). Similarly, some members of the modern community have replaced deceased grandparents with new grandparents in the new family. Others consider community to be a bond held together by believers' love for God and one another. Concerning the topic of Affective Solidarity, the two communities appear to share a substantial amount of common ground.

The Pauline community was distinguished by (1) interpersonal unity and (2) non-retaliation. The survey responses provided no proof that non-retaliation is practiced in the modern community, even though there is evidence of interpersonal unity in contemporary community. Participants in the study reported conflict ambiguously. Those mentions, however, needed to provide more information to discern how the engaged people reacted, and they stopped short of sharing that information. There needs to be more information to conclude with any degree of certainty that the results were Christ-centered. Because of this, the researcher can only report a partial parity regarding Family Unity between the two communities.

Regarding the matter of Material Solidarity, the two communities are nearly unanimous in their agreement. During the time of Paul, the church shared its material resources (Acts 2:44). Participants in the study indicated a substantial amount of activity in modern communities

involving food sharing. This exercise was carried out in two distinct ways, catering to two different groups of people. The members of community who were in need were met with an immediate and unprompted response. In addition to this, however, a concerted attempt was made for sharing food with the greater secular culture outside the community. Identically, Paul's congregations gave both internally and internationally; nevertheless, even though the money given externally was given to other Christian communities, it was still considered outside of their local context.

In addition to providing food, the modern community shared many additional resources. For example, they gave away automobiles, paid for rent or mortgages, rebuilt and furnished homes destroyed by fire, and even hired other believers to ensure their monetary needs were met. Finally, there were a few intangible gifts like a listening ear or advice. One participant even reported that their church gave them a recorder to record the detailed instructions they expected to receive from their doctor at an upcoming appointment.

Communities headed by Paul were devoted to a loyalty that prioritized their Christian siblings over all other parties. This preference was shown via their treatment of one another. The research participants did indicate a general sense of loyalty. Still, none of their responses rose to the level of dedication reflected in the teachings of Jesus (Luke 9:59-60) or Paul (1 Cor. 7:12-15). As previously mentioned, it appears that the participants developed behaviors to demonstrate their loyalty (e.g., being present and serving one another). The concepts of physical presence and service in community are part of the mandatory attendance concepts derived from Hebrews 10:24-25. There is not, however, a direct parallel to the church of the first century that can be drawn from the responses because they do not directly correlate to the actual concept of Family Loyalty as articulated by Hellerman.

Research Question 4

The final research question considers how the global pandemic and associated social distancing have impacted Christian community. RQ4 was "How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention describe the impact of social distancing on their experience of Christian Community?" The following survey questions were related to this research question:

> **SQ4.** Read the following passage: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica.

> **SQ5.** "How would you describe the impact of social distancing on your experience of Christian Community? Consider how the lack of physical presence made you feel, alterations you made to interact with others, and learning new technology."

One additional theme emerged through analyzing the responses to these survey questions:

Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community

Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community illustrates how participants responded to the absence of a physical presence, how they responded to the challenge of overcoming this obstacle, and how new technologies assisted participants in reshaping their Christian community. Table 6 provides details about Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on The Christian Community, its associated sub-themes, and codes.

Table 6: Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community (coded 78 times)	Sub-Theme #5.1: The Lack of Physical Presence (coded 21 times)	the explanations to the Thessalonians passage (coded 5 times) the emotional interpretations of the Thessalonians passage (coded 16 times)
	Sub-Theme #5.2: Reshaping Christian Community (coded 57 times)	COVID 19. The nowadays separation (coded 6 times) reactions to the lack of contact (coded 10 times) feelings about the lack of physical presence (coded 27 times) learning to use new technologies (coded 4 times) new ways to communicate (coded 10 times)

Sub-Theme #5.1: The lack of Physical Presence

Sub-Theme #5.1: The lack of Physical Presence corresponds to the emotional interpretations that the participants provided from reading 1 Thessalonians 2:17, which says, "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face." It is indisputable that the participants associated the passage with the recent social distance imposition that affected, to a greater or lesser extent, all the members of the Christian communities. Sub-Theme #1: The lack of Physical Presence also corresponds to the emotional interpretations that the participants provided about the reading that they made of 1 Thessalonians 2:17 (SQ. 4). Participants displayed a wide range of emotions, including melancholy and a sense of alienation from the rest of the group:

"Grief, isolation, hope, anticipation, love, joy, excitement." (P9)

"Sad, necessary." (P23)

"Missing your church family." (P22)

"Distant, alone yeah, disconnected." (P13)

Nevertheless, other participants construed the passage positively, enhancing the nature of

fellowships and the anticipation of getting together once more. For instance:

"The people were in his heart, and it was painful to be away from them. Yet he gave the message of hope that they will one day meet again." (P8)

"I see great Passion to commune with family. It expresses deep love & tenacity that one day they may see you each other again. A longing, a great hope. Feeling like a child and mother being tien apart. There has been such deep connection of community that not even distance can remove the love." (P3)

Similarly, other participants interpreted the passage from Thessalonians and connected it to the

social distance that exists between members of their communities:

"Even though we may be physically separated from one another, we still conduct our lives as being and remaining one body in Christ." (P11)

"Although we are not together in person. We are still together in heart and on one accord worshipping together. Praising together, to the same father, looking forward to worshipping face to face." (P20)

The participant's responses to the reading of the Thessalonian passage demonstrated that

they could experience a strengthening of their faith despite the physical distance that kept them

from attending the in-person gatherings. It is interesting to note that the following subtheme

demonstrates to the researcher how the participants responded to the imposition of social

distance and the inconvenience of attending in-person practices. To keep their faith alive, the

participants and their pastors successfully redesigned the gatherings and ensured that the activity

kept the participants united.

Sub-Theme #5.2: Reshaping Christian Community

Sub-Theme #5.2: Reshaping Christian Community is defined by a) the participants'

feelings of being separated because of the pandemic, b) the participants' reaction to overcome

the compulsory social distance, c) the new ways to re-encounter with other fellow community

members, and d) the great effort to learn how to achieve technology mastering behaviors and

keep near the church community.

Many participants associated the Thessalonian reading with the global COVID-19

pandemic:

"The recent (and still active) COVID pandemic comes to mind after reading the passage of scripture from 1 Thessalonians 2:17. Many church families were forced to be physically separated during the high of this pandemic." (P12)

"Pandemic, COVID-19, Corona Virus, isolation, prison, virtual, Zoom, online, streaming, media, opportunity, shift, innovation, change, and growth are all words that come to mind when I think about Thessalonians 2:17 and compare it to church as we have come to know it today." (P4)

Meanwhile, others showed the effects that the pandemic and social distance had on them

directly:

"The saving grace for me was being able to still go in to church and be around some community even if it was at a distance. That saved my life. I believe social distancing is still forged a wedge for the Christian community. But in some way we've got to regain that." (P3)

"The impact of social distancing brought with it confusion, fear, and uncertainty. Being told not to touch and embrace those you love and want to embrace is difficult." (P2)

"We are social beings therefore not being able to hug, kiss, touch or see one another affects every part of one being." (P6)

"Distanced, fearful, separated and sometimes feelings of hopelessness at the inability to change the current situation." (P9)

From the previous statements, the researcher determined that the geographical separation

had a significant impact on many parishioners, who have reported feeling abandoned, lonely, and

unable to carry out their religious practices as they were accustomed to doing so. However, other

participants took the initiative and responded to the inability to attend in-person gatherings by

reshaping the structure and elements of those gatherings to accommodate the distance:

"On one hand, a small group of us went to church to complete a live stream, so that others at home could enjoy Sunday morning worship." (P4)

"However once church regularly resumed in service social distancing did not really have an impact on me because of the magnificent emotional support congregation provides lack of physically interaction only partially impaired significance." (P21)

During the pandemic, new methods of communication emerged. Although it required participants to learn or acquire new skills, a significant number of individuals committed themselves to the endeavor of taking part in the gatherings that were held online:

"It was also a little difficult in the beginning to learn how to zoom but after a while got the hang of it…When we first started and was using zoom it was a little better because we got to see one another for church and Bible study and after we were done with both services we would hang out kind of chitchat with each other but when it went to basically on Facebook only it was a little more closed off didn't feel connected anymore." (P1)

"It really made the churches communicate in a different way by requiring the church and the peoples to upgrade and learn new technology in order to communicate the word in a different form. I personally love coming to the house of the Lord and could wait to return physically." (P20)

Curiously, some of the participants chose to continue attending worship services from the comfort of their own homes. Their voluntary separation could have been because they feared becoming ill or they found it more convenient:

"On the other hand, people we say weekly were no longer there. We eventually found ways to stay connected outside of the church, however when it was time to go back to in person worship, many decided that they liked staying home." (P4)

Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community demonstrates that social distance during the pandemic significantly impacted the respondents; their deeply held beliefs regarding community and how it should behave were shaken by distance. However, the desire to maintain the integrity of their beliefs compelled them to embrace new technologies and even educate themselves on how to use them to participate in the gatherings held online, continue learning about one another, and maintain the conviction that they are all part of the same faith.

Though a peripheral issue that did not arise out of the survey responses, it bears mentioning that the number of registered district churches decreased from an average of 35 to 13 after the start of the global pandemic and mandatory church closures imposed by local government agencies in March 2020. This change amounted to a nearly 63% reduction in potential research participants from the time the research design began through the collection of survey responses. As such, participants in the study are drawn from nine of the thirteen district churches registered in February 2022, when the prequalification process began. As a result, the population of this study represents nearly 70% of the total number of currently registered churches.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The research effort had significant challenges in certain key areas. The researcher switched data collection methods, adjusted the process by which the data was coded and memoed, and changed from a Constant Comparative Method to Thematic Analysis after the data was collected. These changes were fraught with challenges described, alongside the positive outcomes, as applicable, below. Finally, this section will provide a brief evaluation of the survey questions.

Evaluation of the Survey Instrument

The main instrument used to collect data was a survey. The surveys themselves proved helpful because they enabled the research participants to respond at their leisure. The participants were able to begin, stop, and return to complete the survey later, which, based on the duration of the surveys, many participants did. The participants were also able to utilize whichever method of computing was one with which they felt most comfortable (e.g., cellphones, tablets, laptops,

or computers). Additionally, through the surveys, the researcher obtained extensive responses that were later used to establish multiple clear themes.

Conversely, using surveys instead of interviews created a potential weakness in the research design. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of interviews with observation was rejected in favor of surveys. However, the researcher believes, in retrospect, that observation could have provided a meaningful filter through which to interpret the survey responses better. Additionally, the use of interviews could have provided additional opportunities for follow-up questions that might have provided further context to the survey responses. Using interviews instead of surveys would have also resolved another problem during the data collection process. Conducting the research in the form of interviews could have enabled more direct communication to work through the challenges mentioned above with securing wet signatures for informed consent. Ultimately, the researcher opted for the more practical, and safer approach, which was using surveys to collect the data.

Finally, the fact that the researcher relied on questionnaires rather than conducting interviews made it more challenging to pinpoint an exact point of saturation. Typically, as each interview closes, the researcher can code and memo the information obtained from that session. Moreover, researchers conducting interviews generally are required to continually recruit research subjects and continue to code and memo until the data set can be considered complete through replication (Bowen, 2008). Because of this, the researcher can identify with more excellent reliability whether a particular idea reached a saturation point. Conversely, in this study, the responses to the survey were all given in close proximity to one another. The data certainly generated themes with largely recurrent codes; nevertheless, it was more challenging to determine whether the data had reached saturation in the conventional sense.

Evaluation of the Software Tools

The researcher efficiently used the Qualtrics XM tool to build the research survey. However, using the built-in TextIQ functionality as a method to code and memo proved problematic. The user interface could have been more intuitive, was cumbersome, and presented a great deal of information that needed to be more helpful for coding and memoing. Moreover, TextIQ did not allow the researcher to provide practical perceptive analysis. Further, the researcher lost a significant amount of time trying to learn how to use the program by watching videos on YouTube, meeting with professional subject matter experts, and reading the assistance guides provided by the software provider. Ultimately, the researcher analyzed the data using the NVivo 12 program.

NVivo allowed the researcher to effectively store, organize, and manage the data to develop the codes, their definitions, and the sub-themes and themes that make up the findings at the end of the research project. TextIQ provided suggested themes to the researcher, but NVivo was more functional and enabled more meaningful thematic analysis, where the researcher "listened" to the collected data. The researcher identified the new codes, sub-themes, and the definitions and names of the themes that evolved as the continuous analysis advanced.

Evaluation of the Research Methodology

In its original form, the study adopted a qualitative design initially placed in a grounded-theory stream of thinking, intending to use the Constant Comparative Method of data analysis. Although qualitative research was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to investigate what meaning people apply to concepts (Creswell, 2014; Denny & Weckesser, 2019), the use of a grounded-theory methodological design proved problematic as the researcher worked to refine the research purpose. As the research questions were narrowed, it became evident that a

phenomenological approach with thematic analysis was the more appropriate method. To be more specific, the switch to Hermeneutic Phenomenology enabled the researcher to conduct a more in-depth investigation of how the research participants interpreted the experiences they had in the community. Consequently, it was much simpler to ascertain whether or not Pauline Familification was present in the selected setting.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology enabled a direct comparison of the terms and ideas used in the first-century church with the uses in contemporary communities within a specific ministry setting. In addition, it offered direct proof of the parallels mentioned above. Although there are particular distinctions between community in the first century and community today, the research approach enabled the researcher to look at, pinpoint, and understand these changes. Using profound and meaningful survey replies, which described how the research participants understand their roles and interrelationships in the family of God, Hermeneutic Phenomenology further enabled the researcher to offer rich and detailed responses to the research questions.

Evaluation of the Survey Questions

The actual value of the survey questions is seen after the research. At the finish line, the researcher has the benefit of hindsight to depict whether they asked the right questions, should have asked different questions altogether, or could have better refined the questions. The survey questions posed to the research participants for this study were, in some cases, overly broad and others too narrow.

SQ1. was mapped to Hellerman's Affective Solidarity and Family Unity and asked, "How would you describe your experience in Christian community? Consider emotional bonds, non-natural family relationships, companionship, and supportive relationships." This question provides critical indicators that led the respondent to the deeper meaning, that is, whether the

experience in community should be considered "familial." Additionally, the use of the phrase "non-natural family relationships" in the SQ may have influenced the responses provided by the participants. Though the question was intended to determine whether the respondents felt like family, it did not address the absence of discord or non-retaliation that Hellerman described. Moreover, though implied, the survey responses that discussed the concept of peace among brothers and sisters are not explicitly stated. SQ1 was overly broad and should have been more narrowly tailored to address the absence of discord. SQ1 would likely have been more effective if split into two separate questions.

SQ2. was mapped to Hellerman's Material Solidarity and asked, "Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to another person in Christian community because they had a material need." The question wrongly narrowed its scope to seek responses concerning "something of value" being given away to a person in need. Many material resources are not necessarily valuable to the person giving them out, and ascribing value is highly subjective. As such, SQ2. was too narrow and should have left room for material giving that is impactful, even if not highly valuable.

SQ3. was mapped to Hellerman's Family Loyalty and asked, "Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty among the community members in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident." Because the respondents primarily described loyalty as attendance at gatherings, it might have been helpful to have gauged the maturity level of the respondents. The question was overly broad and did not explicitly address the concept of non-retaliation. As such, SQ3. was too broad and should have specified that (1) a person was injured and forfeited their right to satisfaction, or (2) had to make a difficult choice between their natural family and the family of God, as a form of loyalty.

SQ4. was mapped to Hellerman's Affective Solidarity and asked –

> Read the following passage: 'But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face' (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica?

This question was neither narrow nor broad; the question contained the correct balance of information (i.e., Scripture) and inquiry (e.g., "what words come to mind") to bring the respondent to a meaningful response that addresses Hellerman's theme.

SQ5. was mapped precisely to RQ4. and asked, "How would you describe the impact of social distancing on your experience of Christian Community? Consider how the lack of physical presence made you feel, alterations you made to interact with others, and learning new technology." This question solicits descriptions and feelings and provides sufficient context to the respondent to personalize the response. As such, the question was neither too narrow nor overly broad.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This chapter provides a synopsis of the research findings that may be derived from the information gathered on Pauline Familification. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the potential ramifications of the research, as well as to synthesize the precedent literature reviewed in Chapter 2 with the data presented in Chapter 4. In addition, the researcher will apply those conclusions to contemporary community. In the final part of the chapter, an assessment of the limits of the research and some ideas for further research will be presented.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community.

Research Questions

This qualitative research was designed to obtain data from the experiences and perspectives of members that will provide answers to the following questions:

RQ1. How does Hellerman define and describe Pauline Familification?

RQ2. How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention describe their experiences of Christian community?

RQ3. How do the descriptions found in RQ2 compare and contrast to historical descriptions of Christian community known as Pauline Familification?

RQ4. How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention describe the impact of social distancing on their experience of Christian Community?

Background & Contextualization of the Research

The primary literature source for this research was *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* by Dr. Joseph H. Hellerman. Professor Emeritus Joe Hellerman of the Talbot School of Theology specializes in the language and literature of the New Testament. Hellerman's vision for the church to function as a family has been tested partly at Oceanside Christian Fellowship in El Segundo, California, where he works as a team pastor. Hellerman has a Ph.D. in the History of Christianity from UCLA and an M.Div. and Th.M. in Theology from Talbot.

The secondary literature source for this research was *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay. Hugh Halter plants churches, is a pastor, works as a consultant, and serves as the U.S. Director of FORGE America, training missionaries. Matt Smay is a co-director of Missio, which is a ministry team that trains, develops, and apprentices church leaders. Both authors live in Denver, Colorado. Like Hellerman, Halter, and Smay, the researcher is a bi-vocational pastor and church planter who believes in incarnational community. He earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Webster University and lives in Long Beach, California.

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

The researcher surveyed the various conclusions derived from a synthesis of the literature review and the data derived from the research. The researcher then reviewed the findings developed from the research questions. In this chapter, the researcher suggests some implications and practical applications that can grow from the research findings.

Conclusion: Partial Practice of Community

The literature makes clear that God intended for all believers who have experienced the new birth to also participate fully in community (Garland, 2011; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Halter & Smay, 2008; Gaebelein, 1971; Guijarro, 2004; Lanker, 2010; Karyakina, 2013; Gadenz, 2018; Ryken, 2007). Through their responses to RQ2, the research participants also make clear that they view community as an essential part of their Christian experience. Moreover, they have embodied some, though not all, of the three spheres of incarnational community put forward by Halter and Smay (2008).

Practicing Togetherness

The research participants are thoroughly convinced that their community participation necessitates Togetherness (Ps. 133:1; Prov. 13:20; Eccles. 4:9-11; Matt. 18:20; Rom. 12:16). With one exception, all the research responses conveyed a deep sense of togetherness, where believers joyfully participate in reciprocal interactions that produce mutual growth and maturity (Diggins, 2016; Lowe & Lowe, 2018). This cooperative engagement is seen through their expressions of selfless Material Solidarity and a shared sense of Family Unity. In practicing Togetherness through Material Solidarity and Family Unity, the modern community is very much like the one that existed in the early church.

Pursuing Oneness

Confirming Oneness in modern community is fraught with a great deal of difficulty. Oneness is most effectively understood as an amalgamation of Family Unity and Family Loyalty. Believers must experience interpersonal peace, the absence of dispute, non-retaliation, and a decided preference for God and each other over all others, following these coupled ideals of unity and loyalty. God's goal for the church was for all its members to be firmly united into a

single body, with Christ serving as its head (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Saucy, 1978; Eph. 1:23, 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). The people who took part in the study did not fulfill all the conditions necessary to be legitimately deemed to be practicing Oneness.

Oneness is a goal that must be sought and further developed because it has yet to be realized. Family Unity, as expressed through non-retaliation, is a natural outgrowth of staying and working through difficulty that occurs in community (Hellerman, 2009a). As believers address conflict together, they deepen their sense of Family Unity. For example, one participant observed that their pastor went through a divorce and observed that "some of the members had a few negative things to say and left" (P9). There is little evidence in their response that efforts were made to address the conflict that led to their departure.

Another participant mentioned a conflict between a pastor and a musician that led to the pastor and several members departing the local church where they all served together. The respondent observed, "The church voted to keep the musician and my father decided he would be better off leaving himself" (P4). Again, there is no mention of attempted resolution, but in both cases, several parties opted to run from the conflict that could have deepened their Family Unity. Furthermore, in both instances, the departing groups failed to display Family Loyalty by remaining and nurturing the restorative bonds God provided for their spiritual development (Hellerman, 2009a).

Practicing Otherness

The concept of Otherness considers how well believers share their lives with those outside of Christian community (Halter & Smay, 2008). The missional church is expected to expand the Kingdom of God and seek the salvation of others, who will later be drawn into community. Scripture lays a strong foundation for the obligation that falls on Christians to share

the love of God and the good news of the gospel with those who they do not know (Gen. 18:1-10; Deut. 1:16, 10:18, 27:19; Lev. 19:33; Matt. 11:19, 25:35; Luke 15:2; Heb. 13:2). And in Material Solidarity, the research shows an ongoing and coordinated food distribution that was mission-focused (e.g., directed toward "others"). In this way, modern community demonstrated a deep concern for the welfare of "the least of these" (Matt. 25:31-46).

While the participants essentially confirmed the three spheres of incarnational community (Halter & Smay, 2008) as being present, they needed to provide sufficient evidence that all the methods were sufficiently implemented. Namely, the failure to address the non-retaliation aspect of Family Unity and the lack of adequate responses around Family Loyalty was concerning. As a result, the researcher cannot fully confirm these practices as fully implemented. However, there is room for additional growth in these areas.

Table 7: Partial Practice of Community

Concept	Conclusion	Gaps Observed
Practicing Togetherness	All the research responses conveyed a deep sense of Togetherness, where believers joyfully participated in reciprocal interactions that produce mutual growth and maturity.	None
Pursuing Oneness	For community that parallels the first-century experience to exist, believers must experience interpersonal peace, the absence of dispute, and non-retaliation (Family Unity). They must also have a decided preference for God and each other over all others (Family Loyalty).	The concepts necessary to achieve Oneness (i.e., Family Unity and Family Loyalty) were not present.
Practicing Otherness	The research shows an ongoing and coordinated food distribution that was mission-focused (Material Solidarity).	None

Conclusion: Research Question 1

This research was based on Hellerman's Familification, which included (1) Affective Solidarity, (2) Family Unity, (3) Material Solidarity, and (4) Family Loyalty (Hellerman, 1998; 2009a; 2008B). Hellerman's concepts were supported by the scriptures and the body of research as accurate depictions of the more prominent family construct that existed in a societal and external way (Garland, 2011; Johnston, 2008; Morrow, 2008; Eph. 2:19, 22; 4:16). The social construct also supported his concepts within Christian community in the first century. RQ1 was "How does Hellerman define and describe Pauline Familification?"

Affective Solidarity

Paul uses especially grave language when describing being separated from his brothers and sisters in Christ. The separation that Paul experienced from his Christian siblings was equated to the emotional devastation of being orphaned (1 Thess. 2:17). Truly, in Hellerman and Paul, there were few more distressing things than being separated from the closest earthly relationship, a Christian sibling (Hellerman, 2009a). This deep level of affective relationship characterizes and underpins all of Hellerman's other concepts. A deep emotional attachment underlies the compulsion to forego legal compensation for injury, share resources at personal expense, and preference for the will of God above all other concerns.

Family Unity

Family Unity provides a shared sense of identity (Plutarch, 1939) and is characterized by an absence of discord (Hellerman, 2009a). Siblings were expected to demonstrate kindness to each other and behave unitedly. An abundance of evidence suggests that the connection between siblings was fraught with tension and was frequently experienced as contentious, particularly the bond between brothers. Even though siblingship included a profound emotional attachment that

superseded marital bonds, this connection was frequently experienced as antagonistic (Barclay, 2002). This contention brought the legal imperative to seek retaliation (McKnight & Longman, 2013). However, in Hellerman (2009a), the Gospels (Matt. 5:38-42), and the Pauline writings (Rom. 12:17-19), believers were restricted from exercising retaliation.

Material Solidarity

In Hellerman (2009a) and Paul (Acts 2:44; 2 Cor. 8-9), believers shared their material resources with other believers who had a material need. The concept of the church that Jesus had envisioned as the family of God became a real and tangible entity when it was implemented through the distribution of shared material possessions (Hellerman, 2009a). This sharing was necessary because, at times, converts gave up their nuclear families and their claims to the wealth of their families (Hellerman, 2009a). Sharing resources fulfilled Jesus's statement that those who follow Him would be provided for in this time and the coming age (Mark 10:29-30).

Family Loyalty

As previously seen, Paul envisioned a family bound together profoundly emotionally, living in peace and sharing resources freely. The final piece to Paul's vision was a family that shared an undivided commitment (Hellerman, 2009a). Whether among siblings or spouses, the group came first. In Paul, there were no conflicting loyalties, as every believer was duty-bound to show dedication to the Christian family first (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Family Loyalty was required because of the fight between "God's children" and "the Devil's offspring" (1 John 3:10) and the conflict that existed between unequally yoked believers (Hellerman, 2009a).

Conclusion: Research Question 2

The second research question sought to investigate how individuals who participated in the study thought and talked about their community involvement. RQ2 was "How do members

of Churches in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention describe their experiences of Christian community?" RQ2 was mapped to three survey questions, and the responses to those questions generated several themes.

Theme #1

Theme #1: Perceptions about the Christian Community was coded 12 times. Theme #1 was mapped to SQ1. "How would you describe your experience in Christian community? Consider emotional bonds, non-natural family relationships, companionship, and supportive relationships." The first theme was broken down into two subthemes: Sub-Theme #1.1: Christian Community as a Family (coded nine times) and Sub-Theme #1.2: Christian Community's Environment (coded three times).

In Sub-Theme #1.1: Christian Community as a Family, the church was a large extended family that invested itself in looking out for its members. In Sub-Theme #1.2: Christian Community's Environment, the respondents expressed tolerance and lack of judgment through a prevailing spirit of unity. While the first subtheme is present mainly in the literature, the second subtheme is absent altogether. The researcher could find no mention of tolerance or lack of judgment (against other believers) as a concept of Familification in the literature. Because this was not part of the research focus, the researcher cannot say whether this is a reflection of current American culture, more central to the ethos of California culture, or part of a more significant issue that exists within the Christian church.

Theme #2

Theme #2: Loyalty at the Christian Community was mapped to SQ3. "Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty, among the members in community, in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident."

The second theme was coded 24 times and had one subtheme: Sub-Theme #2.1: Ways to be Loyal to the Church, which was coded 24 times.

In Sub-Theme #2.1: Ways to be Loyal to the Church, the respondents primarily described loyalty as attendance at gatherings and serving one another. The members of this community believe that the best way to demonstrate their allegiance to the Christian church and the Christian legacy is to be actively involved in the community and to participate in events and activities that provide benefits and significant assistance to those in need. They believe this is the best way to demonstrate their allegiance to the Christian church and its legacy. There was no mention of the concepts of Family Loyalty that Hellerman described. As such, it is difficult to say whether there was any proper understanding of the loyalty found in Hellerman or Paul.

Theme #3

Theme #3: Christian Community as a Support System was mapped to SQ2. "Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to another person in Christian community because they had a material need." The third theme was coded 56 times and had two subthemes: Sub-Theme #3.1: Building Durable Laces, which was coded 11 times, and Sub-Theme #3.2: Types of Support which was coded 45 times.

Sub-Theme #3.1: Building Durable Laces depicts the opportunities for connection building that are made available within Christian communities due to the high levels of confidence and trust between members of these communities due to their shared commitment to Christian principles. Because Christian communities adhere to the same values, people in these communities have access to these opportunities. Sub-Theme #3.2: Types of Support was coded more than any other subtheme and focused on the myriad ways respondents witnessed or

received support. These types of support included job opportunities, assistance with food and

health concerns, housing, cars, and financial support.

Theme #4

Theme #4: Togetherness placed a focus on the cohesiveness and friendship that the

respondents have with one another. The fourth theme is mapped to SQ4 –

> Read the following passage: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short
> time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see
> you face to face" (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read
> Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica?

The fourth theme was coded five times and had one subtheme: Sub-Theme #4.1: Sharing

Emotions and Activities, which was coded five times. There was a common feeling among the

participants that, in some organic way, they were routinely getting closer to one another (Lowe

& Lowe, 2018). They felt a deep bond among themselves and viewed the church as the focal

point of community. This view conforms with the previously mentioned concept of Togetherness

present in the literature (Halter & Smay, 2008; see also Diggins, 2016; Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

A Fully Formed Family

It is not sufficient to establish that the research participants agreed with the literature

concerning the requirement of participation in the community. Even though previous research

has focused on the replacement of the traditional nuclear family with a new Christian family

(Guijarro, 2004; Hellerman, 2009a; Hellerman, 2009b; Johnston, 2008; Karyakina, 2013;

Plutarch, 1939), the primary focus of this study is on a much more specific aspect of this topic.

The question that lies at the heart of this investigation is whether or not the participants viewed

themselves in the same way as Christians in the first century did, as members of a whole new

family.

To answer that question, the researcher must turn to the familial language Paul employed and determine whether it is present in the participants' responses. Hellerman (2009a) observed a decrease in the use of kinship terms in everyday conversation. However, among the 26 research participants, 64 remarks contained family terms (e.g., family, father, mother, child, brother, sister, etc.). Considering this, it may be deduced that nearly 50 percent of all responses across all five survey questions utilized some familial terminology.

The study's findings demonstrated, through the use of familial language by over fifty percent of the respondents, that in community, the people who took part in the research also experienced a sense of belonging to a family. Moreover, this overwhelming use of familial language validated the study's findings (Guijarro, 2004; Hellerman, 2009a; Hellerman, 2009b; Johnston, 2008; Karyakina, 2013; Plutarch, 1939). This outcome is also consistent with the precepts that are outlined in the Bible (Mark 3:14; Matt. 12:50; Luke 8:21; John 2:13; 5: 1; 6:4; 11:55).

Conclusion: Research Question 3

The third research question explored the degree to which the events that respondents described were comparable to or dissimilar from the descriptions of Pauline Familification that were provided. RQ3 was "How do the descriptions found in RQ2 compare and contrast to historical descriptions of Christian community known as Pauline Familification?" There were fundamental ways in which community remained the same despite the space of a few thousand years. There were other ways in which the two communities deviated from one another.

Similarities

Using strong affective language, both Pauline and modern community expressed a deep sense of Affective Solidarity. Nearly 50 percent of all survey responses employed some familial

language across all survey questions. The research findings present powerful bonding language that are one-to-one parallels to the Affective Solidarity shown in Scripture. These strong familial connotations also validate Hellerman's position that the Christian family ought to have strong emotional links that should replace the natural family connection and are analogous to the Affective Solidarity that Paul exhibited in the first century (Hellerman, 2009a).

Likewise, both communities were deeply concerned with and exhibited Material Solidarity among all believers. Ensuring the practice of Material Solidarity was essential to Paul's leadership of community (Guijarro, 2004; Hellerman, 2009a). Material Solidarity is also evident in the responses of the research participants. Several respondents observed spontaneous food sharing, ongoing and coordinated missional food distribution, and more costly giving (e.g., cars, housing, etc.).

While these similarities are only concerned with two of Hellerman's four concepts, it is essential to note that there are other striking similarities from the literature. Hellerman's Family Unity is partially present in the survey responses; however, the responses lack any mention of the non-retaliation concept (Barclay, 2002; Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:17-19). The lack of mention could be related to the tolerance or lack of judgment (against other believers) concept from Sub-Theme #1.2: Christian Community's Environment. The responses do satisfy the interpersonal harmony concept found in Family Unity. Additionally, more than two-thirds of the three spheres of incarnational community (Halter & Smay, 2008) are also present in modern community. Modern community fully satisfied the Togetherness and Otherness incarnational spheres of community while partially meeting the requirements of Oneness (Halter & Smay, 2008).

Differences

In the first-century world of the Mediterranean, families were organized around Patrilineal Kinship Groups (PKG) that were distinct because they shared a male common blood ancestor. However, modern families are more relaxed to the mandatory nature of tracing family through male ancestry. As a result, the two disparate definitions of the family create diverging paths that could impact the research results. The contemporary idea of a family does not even have a direct analog in the language used in ancient times (Neufeld & DeMaris, 2009). This fundamental concept is likely the root of the differences observed between community in the two time periods.

The same concepts of Family Unity (partial) and Family Loyalty that fell short of satisfying the Oneness practice of community (Halter & Smay, 2008) represent the most considerable divergence between the two communities. There is no mention of non-retaliation in the survey responses tied to Family Unity. Moreover, the respondents did indicate a concept of loyalty not covered in the literature. None of their responses rose to the commitment to God's group reflected in the New Testament Church (Bovon, 2013; Ryle, 2015; Luke 9:59-60; 1 Cor. 7:12-15). These differences are significant because they comprise a sizeable amount of the research that cannot be validated through the responses to the survey.

Table 8: Similarities and Differences

Concept	Similarities	Differences
Affective Solidarity	Both Pauline and modern community expressed a deep sense of Affective Solidarity. The research findings present powerful bonding language that are one-to-one parallels to the Affective Solidarity shown in Scripture.	Modern families are not as strictly bound to the mandatory nature of tracing family through male ancestry. As a result, the two disparate definitions of the family create diverging paths that could impact the research results.
Family Unity	Family Unity is partially present in the survey responses; they satisfied the interpersonal harmony concept.	The survey responses lack any mention of the non-retaliation concept (Barclay, 2002; Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:17-19). The responses do satisfy the interpersonal harmony concept found in Family Unity.
Material Solidarity	Both communities were deeply concerned with and exhibited Material Solidarity among all believers. Several respondents observed spontaneous food sharing, ongoing and coordinated missional food distribution, and more costly giving (e.g., cars, housing, etc.).	N/A
Family Loyalty	N/A	None of the survey responses rose to the commitment to God's group reflected in the New Testament Church (Bovon, 2013; Ryle, 2015; Luke 9:59-60; 1 Cor. 7:12-15).

Conclusion: Research Question 4

The final research question investigates the effects of the widespread pandemic and the accompanying social alienation on the Christian community. This research question was directly tied to the concepts of physical presence in community (Attridge, 1989; König et al., 2019; Pfeiffer, 1962; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Hebrews 10:24-25). The research sought to understand how physical distancing impacted the ability of respondents to form and grow community. RQ4 was

"How do members of Churches in the Los Angeles District of the Western Baptist State Convention describe the impact of social distancing on their experience of Christian Community?" RQ4 was mapped to two survey questions, and the responses to those questions generated Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community.

Theme #5

The fifth theme illustrates how participants responded to the absence of a physical presence, how they overcame this obstacle, and how new technologies assisted participants in reshaping their Christian community. Specifically, this theme focuses on how participants responded to the challenge of overcoming this obstacle. Theme #5: Effects of Social Distancing on Christian Community was coded 78 times and generated two subthemes: Sub-Theme #5.1: The Lack of Physical Presence, coded 21 times, and Sub-Theme #5.2: Reshaping Christian Community, which was coded 57 times.

Sub-Theme #5.1: The Lack of Physical Presence corresponds to Paul's use of strong affective language at his separation from his siblings in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, which says, "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face." The participants connected the passage with the imposition of social distance that impacted every member of the modern community to a greater or lesser extent. Sub-Theme #5.2: Reshaping Christian Community is defined by a) the participants' feelings of being separated because of the pandemic, b) the participants' reaction to overcome the compulsory social distance, c) the new ways to re-encounter with other fellow community members, and d) the great effort to learn how to achieve technology mastering behaviors and keep near the church community.

The Impact of Distance

Research participants were profoundly affected by the global pandemic, much as Paul was (1 Thessalonians 2:17). They did not view the separation as an act of desertion, though (Attridge, 1989). In fact, several people said they came up with creative ways to help their siblings even when they were physically separated by great distances (Cockerill, 2012). Now and then, religious institutions will offer their congregations ready-to-eat meals. To compensate for the absence of physical presence, several groups have increased the number of their online activities relative to their traditionally held ones—almost all the people who took part in the study associated physical distance with unpleasant feelings. However, there were some who enjoyed the distance.

Table 9: Best Practices in Community

Concept	Best Practices
Affective Solidarity	Keep an open mind about the possibility of developing closer ties with others in commuity. A strong sense of emotional attachment and bonding will develop among you as you mature together.
Family Unity	Give up your right to restitution when offenses occur. As a straightforward alternative to sanctioned retaliation, Jesus urged grace, love, and forgiveness (Matt. 5:38-42). Be willing to suffer loss to maintain unity (1 Cor. 6:7).
Material Solidarity	You will encounter people without basic material resources. Be willing to share with those who have less because sharing material resources is part of your Christian witness to the world (1 Cor 12:25–26; Gal 6:1– 2; Eph 5:18– 20; Phil 2:3– 4).
Family Loyalty	Jesus requires you to restructure your loyalties in ways that could go against the grain of conventional wisdom (Luke 9:59; 1 Cor. 7:12-15). Devotion to God and His people is more important than anything.

Research Implications

The body of research lacks literature comparing the first century and modern community using Hellerman's concepts. This effort is essential because it provides a framework for future research on the subject, especially considering the physical separation experienced because of

COVID-19-related church closures. Also, the lack of Family Unity and Family Loyalty creates an environment within the community that challenges all other aspects of Familification. If believers cannot resolve conflict in Christian ways, their affective bonds will be challenged, as will their willingness to share material resources. Leaders within modern community must be deeply concerned with teaching and demonstrating the necessity of non-retaliation and complete commitment to the Christian family.

Empirical Implication

This researcher could not find any empirical research that sought to determine whether the first-century concepts of family are present in modern community. There are certainly none available that sought to frame Hellerman, specifically, Hellerman's Affective Solidarity and separation aspects, within the context of COVID-19-related physical distancing. However, Theme #5 of this research provides targeted data on this subject. The participant's responses to the reading of the Thessalonian passage demonstrate that they can experience a strengthening of their faith despite the physical distance that prevents them from attending in-person gatherings.

More than any other emergent subtheme, the respondents see COVID-19 as having reshaped Christian community. This reshaping was defined by a) the participants' feelings of being separated because of the pandemic, b) the participants' reaction to overcoming the compulsory social distance, c) the new ways to re-encounter with other fellow community members, and d) the great effort to learn how to achieve technology mastering behaviors and keep near the church community. Many participants felt abandoned, lonely, and unable to follow their faith in the same ways they had before the pandemic. Other participants took the initiative and reshaped in-person events to accommodate distance. However, an overwhelming majority of

the respondents embraced new technologies and educated themselves on how to use them to participate in online gatherings, continue learning about one another, and maintain their faith.

Theoretical Implication

As previously identified in the research conclusions, there was a lack of Family Unity (partially) and Family Loyalty (entirely), as described by Hellerman, present in modern community. The lack of these attributes in modern community provides a significant opportunity for leaders who can synthesize Credible Leadership (Breedt & Niemandt, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Malphurs, 2003), Humble Leadership with accompanying Psychological Safety (Diab & Walters, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), and Followership (Northouse, 2018; Josh. 1:5, 16-18). Honesty, competence, vision, and motivation are the overarching concepts that comprise the definition of Credible Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Whoever tries to lead others without first developing a sense of credibility for themselves is condemned to fail in their endeavors (Malphurs, 2003).

A Humble Leader can readily remind people of the "something" more important than themselves (Diab & Walters, 2016). In this case, the something more critical is the Family Unity and Family Loyalty that, according to Hellerman, should characterize all Christian relationships and interactions. Moreover, Humble Leaders recognize that making mistakes is a natural and necessary part of maturing (Wang et al., 2018). Because of this lived reality, they can readily remind any believer who offends another that offense is a normal part of life (James 3:2). They can also more easily reconcile the two parties by reminding them to consider themselves and the likelihood that they might also cause injury to someone else (Gal. 6:1).

The combined concepts of Credible Leadership and Humble Leadership (with Psychological Safety) provide a framework for building Family Unity and Family Loyalty. They

also offer a leadership context for resolving conflict that helps the offending party and the believing community understand that making mistakes is normal and does not cause undue alarm. When coupled with Followership, the community as a whole is commissioned to the task of leadership, as believing people are drawn into conflict resolution (Matt. 18:15-17). As believers participate in the discipline of the church, they are drawn into the mutual task of leadership that requires Followership. As the primary leader exercises Credible Leadership and Humble Leadership (with Psychological Safety), they are helped tremendously by the Holy Spirit, who from the inside equips and empowers believers to do what is pleasing in God's sight (Heb. 13:21).

As Family Unity grows, under the watchful eye of Credible Leadership and Humble Leadership (with Psychological Safety), believers learn to give up their rights and prefer mistreatment or loss (1 Cor. 6:7). The leaders are constantly reminding the believing community of the "something bigger," which in this case, is the reality that Jesus had already resolved the unresolved anger of God and disrupted the concept of commensurable punishment (McKnight & Longman, 2013). If God, in Christ, has forgiven their sins, each believer should also disregard the offenses and injuries levied within community. Likewise, as Family Loyalty grows, the believers learn to prefer each other more than themselves (Phil. 2:3) and choose the new family over all others (1 Cor. 7:12–16).

Research Applications

If believers and Christian leaders want to build a community that honors God and goes deeper than superficial ties, they could learn much from this study. In addition to being useful in the broader Christian church context, this study has direct applicability to the research setting, the Los Angeles District Association. Jesus founded a new family, and the Bible encourages

Christians to be active members of that new family, a faith community. Christian family, however, includes more than just biological ties. For it to work, its members need to act a certain way toward one another. Hellerman defined those behaviors as Affective Solidarity, Family Unity, Material Solidarity, and Family Loyalty.

Application for Believers

Every believer should be committed to developing and exercising Hellerman's four concepts for the mutual benefit of the body of Christ (Hellerman, 2009a; Hellerman, 2009b). Through Affective Solidarity, emotional needs are met through mutual bonds of affection (Rom. 12:10-20). Through Family Unity, believers enjoy meaningful relationships that provide a routine opportunity to forgive and be forgiven. This revolving process of forgiveness reminds every believer that God has forgiven them (Matt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32). In Material Solidarity, believers receive the promise of Jesus that their material needs will be provided for in this life and in the age to come (Mark 10:29-30). Finally, through Family Loyalty, believers are assured that they are surrounded by others who are fully committed to the betterment of the group (1 Cor. 7:12-15).

Application for Church Leaders

It is essential for Christian leaders responsible for the oversight and development of community to embody the leadership traits previously explored. Namely, Credible Leadership (Breedt & Niemandt, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Malphurs, 2003), Humble Leadership with accompanying Psychological Safety (Diab & Walters, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), and Followership (Northouse, 2018; Josh. 1:5, 16-18). With this toolkit, leaders can help believers to develop Hellerman's four concepts. Christian leaders should always be pointing believers to the

"something bigger," which, in the context of this study, is the larger community around the individual.

Application for the District Association

Local church associations can help their member congregations by offering resources and training to help them create authentic expressions of community. The training should also include targeted teaching on the nature of the New Testament family and Jesus's vision for His new family. Appointing a Director of Community Development (or any equivalent) may help achieve this goal. To help churches strengthen their mutually beneficial relationships, the Association could conduct research into the presence or absence of Hellerman's four concepts and design strategies to equip local leaders with the resources they need to create an ecological community that provides its members with everything they need to grow closer and deeper in their faith (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). By conducting the research at a church level, the Director could tailor specific feedback to the leaders in each local church to aid in the growth and development of community in that particular context.

Table 10: Research Applications

Applicability	Recommendation	Impact
Believers	A commitment to develop and exercise Hellerman's four concepts for the mutual benefit of the body of Christ.	1. Emotional needs met through mutual bonds of affection (Rom. 12:10-20). 2. Enjoy meaningful relationships that provide a routine opportunity to forgive and be forgiven (Matt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32). 3. Receive provision of material needs (Mark 10:29-30). 4. Assurance that they are surrounded by others who are fully committed to the betterment of the group (1 Cor. 7:12-15).
Church Leaders	An embodiment of Credible Leadership, Humble Leadership with accompanying Psychological Safety, and Followership.	1. Helping others to develop Hellerman's four concepts. 2. Pointing believers to "something bigger" than themselves.
District Association	Appointing a Director of Community Development (or any equivalent) to offer resources and training to their member congregations to aid in creating authentic expressions of community.	1. Targeted teaching on the NT family and Jesus's vision for His new family. 2. Strengthen mutually beneficial relationships. 3. Equip local leaders with resources to create an ecological community.

Final Thoughts on Application

Correctly applying Hellerman's four concepts enables believers to rightly relate to their

Christian siblings in ways that demonstrate appropriate types of healthy emotional attachment,

immediate resolution for offense, shared resources so that none are in lack, and an unwavering

commitment to each other (Aasgaard, 2002; Barclay, 2002; Garland, 2011; Guijarro, 2004;

Osiek, 1997; Hellerman, 2009a). These concepts enable the Christian family to replicate the

principles that were characteristic of first-century relationships between natural families in Mediterranean society. The potential environments for application are manifold (e.g., Christian Universities, Parachurch organizations, Non-Profit Organizations, etc.).

Research Limitations

This section will review the Research Limitations (i.e., potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled). There was a limitation related to the lack of literature about the focus of this research. Additionally, there were limitations tied to the research setting and the impact of COVID-19-related church closures on the pool of available churches; these closures were a potential cause of the reduction of available research participants. There was a limitation associated with the self-selection of the research participants and the overwhelmingly positive responses. Finally, the researcher viewed the lack of deeper demographic data as a limitation that could have significantly impacted the research results.

Lack of Literature

The researcher found no published work that draws parallels between Hellerman's concepts and the contemporary notion of community. Numerous works have been written about various aspects of community throughout history and the present day. Each of Hellerman's ideas has been the subject of academic investigation. But there seems to be nothing in the published literature that attempts to compare first-century community to contemporary community.

Research Setting

The study was carried out at various churches that are a part of the Los Angeles District Association in the state of California. Because of the specific location of the study, the researcher is unable to determine whether the data mirror any other community. In addition, there are

aspects of the data that could be more fundamental to the way of life in the state of California or could be a component of a more significant problem that is present inside the Christian church.

Reduction in Pool of Participants

The number of registered district churches dropped from an average of 35 to 13 at the start of the global pandemic and mandatory church closures imposed by local government agencies in March 2020. Since the original research design was developed and surveys were distributed, the number of people who could have participated in the study dropped by roughly 63% due to this adjustment. Therefore, only nine of the thirteen registered churches in the district as of the prequalification start in February 2022 are included in the study's sample. While the sample population in this study accounts for roughly 70% of all affiliated churches at present, most churches that typically participate are absent. The consequence of this reduction is that a much smaller aggregate sample was available for consideration. The research could have significantly different results if the more extensive group maintained their membership and participated more fully.

Self-Selection

Because of the nature of self-selection, it is not feasible to know how the study results would have changed if the participants had been chosen differently. For instance, it comes to reason that adult churchgoers who are actively involved in their churches are more likely to participate in the study. This is because of the nature of their involvement. People who are just marginally involved in community would be more likely to provide negative feedback or criticism. Additionally, they are less likely to volunteer for the research project. As a result, the findings may paint a more optimistic picture than is typical of the population that is being investigated.

Lack of Demographics

The researcher did not collect demographic information (e.g., personal backgrounds, gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic position) that might have helped better understand the research results. These pieces of information are essential because they can influence the interpretations created during a study (Creswell, 2017). For example, if the researcher had collected information about the perceived maturity of the respondents, it might have been easier to understand how the participants limited their concept of Family Loyalty to mere attendance at church services. The researcher wonders where the respondents were on their faith journey to have set such a low bar for the concept of loyalty. Moreover, the researcher wonders how age, time in community, etc., might have impacted the research results.

Portability

The research is not readily portable outside of ministry contexts that were ordered to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In States where there were no mandatory closures or in churches that defied local orders, attendance and participation remained optional. As such, the research does not readily suit those environments. All the churches in this Research Setting and the Participants were forced to engage community at a distance.

<div align="center">Further Research</div>

With consideration of the findings of this study, the researcher proposes changes to the research approach and potential subjects for further research.

Changes

The researcher recommends changing from surveys to interviews. Using interviews will provide more direct communication and enable the researcher to ask follow-up questions and probe deeper where the responses lacked applicability to the interview questions. Similarly,

observation can provide a meaningful filter through which to interpret the answers better. Finally, conducting interviews will allow the researcher to more readily code and memo until the data set can be considered complete through replication (Bowen, 2008). Because of this, the researcher can identify with more excellent reliability whether a particular idea has reached a saturation point.

The Los Angeles District Association churches are comprised of predominantly African American members and are led by African American clergy. The churches are in South Los Angeles; this area has a median household income of $47,585 and 27.8% of residents live below the poverty line. In this geographical area, 53.9% of residents have attained a high school diploma or higher, and 8.1% have a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Reporter, 2021). The average attendance is between 50 and 150 members. The researcher recommends collecting more demographic information to enable deeper contextualization of the research results. For example, understanding the personal backgrounds, gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic position of the theorist, researcher, and participants will provide a better understanding of variation in the data.

Familification

Considering the potential depth of each of Hellerman's four concepts, the researcher believes that the field of research might benefit significantly from a narrower examination of the concepts individually. For example, suppose the researcher confined their analysis to Affective Solidarity alone. In that case, there might be more direct opportunities to discern whether it is present in a specific setting and, if not, how to grow it. Breaking down the concepts into individual studies would also provide more space to determine which leadership type or skill is required to build or further develop each unique concept.

Additionally, the researcher suggests conducting the same or a similar study with various age groups to determine if mature adults' experiences differ significantly from those of younger adults. There is an excellent opportunity to apply Hellerman to the reported lack of Millennial engagement in community. If researchers can determine which, if any, of the Hellerman concepts are lacking, they might be able to understand better how to increase Millennial engagement in the Christian experience through relational community.

Tolerance in Community

One of the themes arising from the research was tolerance (i.e., the lack of judgment) as a concept of Familification. Hellerman does not enumerate this concept among his four, but the research participants promoted it as present and essential through their responses. Acceptance (Rom. 15:7) and tolerance (Eph. 4:2) are certainly among the Pauline "one another" statements. However, they do not fit neatly into the Hellerman framework and should be the subject of additional research. This could be a modern American concept or local culture in California leaking into the study, but its presence among the Pauline writings necessitates a more profound examination.

<div align="center">

Summary

</div>

This study confirmed that something like the Pauline Familification exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. The data shows a partial divergence in the concept of Family Unity and significant variation in the idea of Family Loyalty. However, it is unknown whether, through deeper questioning, the respondents could confirm the entire presence of the former or a more profound reality of the latter. The research provides a significant opportunity for leaders at all levels to further develop Family Unity and

Family Loyalty within their modern communities. This development can be accomplished through a combined leadership skillset of Credible Leadership, Humble Leadership (with Psychological Safety), and Followership.

REFERENCES

Aasgaard, R. (2002). 'Role ethics' in Paul: The significance of the sibling role for Paul's ethical thinking. *New Testament Studies, 48*(4), 513-530. https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/scholarly-journals/role-ethics-paul-significance-sibling-pauls/docview/197139705/se-2.

Anstey, B. (2019). *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The new and living way of approach to God in worship in Christianity*. Christian Truth Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Attridge, H. W. (1989). Transitional Paraenesis. In H. Koester (Ed.), *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (pp. 283–291). 1517 Media. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb936gs.32.

Barclay, J. (2002). The family as bearer of religion in Judaism and early Christianity. In Halvor Moxnes (Ed.), *Constructing early Christian families* (pp. 66-80). Taylor and Francis.

Barna Group. (2020, July 8). *One in three practicing Christians has stopped attending church during COVID-19*. https://www.barna.com/research/new-Sunday-morning-part-2/.

Basias, N., & Pollalis, Y. (2018). Quantitative and qualitative research in business & technology: Justifying a suitable research methodology. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, *7*(1). 15-46 https://sibresearch.org/uploads/3/4/0/9/34097180/riber_7-s1_sp_h17-083_91-105.pdf.

Bobertz, C. A. (2016). *The gospel of Mark: A liturgical reading*. Baker Academic.

Bock, D. (2008). New Testament community and spiritual formation. In Paul Pettit (Ed.), *Foundations of spiritual formation: A community approach to becoming like Christ* (pp. 103-117). Kregel.

Bovon, F., & Deer, D. S. (2013). Following Jesus in One's Life (9:57-62). In H. Koester (Ed.), *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27* (pp. 9–18). 1517 Media. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb9370g.7.

Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 137-152.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *24*(6), 641-654.

Breedt, J., & Niemandt, C. (2013). Relational leadership and the missional church. *Verbum et Ecclesia, 34*(1), 9 pages. doi:https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.819.

Bryson, J. R., Andres, L., & Davies, A. (2020). COVID-19, virtual church services and a new temporary geography of home. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 111(3), 360-372. https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12436.

Byrne, M. (2001). Sampling for qualitative research. *AORN Journal, 73*(2), 494-8. https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/scholarly-journals/sampling-qualitative-research/docview/70585687/se-2.

Census Reporter. (2021). *Census profile: Los Angeles County (South Central)--LA City (South Central/Watts) PUMA, CA*. https://censusreporter.org/profiles/79500US0603751-los-angeles-county-south-central-la-city-south-centralwatts-puma-ca/.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. (2019). *Coronavirus Disease 2019*. U.S Department of Health & Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html.

Cockerill, G. L. (2012). *The epistle to the Hebrews*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Cones, B. (2020, August 26). How do we gather now? What we've lost--and gained--through virtual worship. *The Christian Century, 137*(18), 22+. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634721383/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=7826449b.

Conklin, T. A. (2007). Method or madness: Phenomenology as knowledge creator. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 16*(3), 275–287. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/1056492607306023.

Conzelmann, H., Limburg, J., Kraabel, A. T., & Juel, D. H. (1987). Summary: The unity of the earliest community. In E. J. Epp & C. R. Matthews (Eds.), *Acts of the Apostles* (pp. 23–24). 1517 Media. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb9367d.16.

Crawley, S. D. (2017). *Moving towards definitional consensus in contemporary family ministry: A delphi study*. (Order No. 10680963). [Doctoral dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary]. http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fmoving-towards-definitional-consensus%2Fdocview%2F2029172783%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative & mixed methods approach* (4th ed.). Sage. 24-39.

Creswell J. W., & Creswell J. D. (2017). *Research design*. [Liberty University Online Bookshelf]. Retrieved from https://libertyonline.vitalsource.com/#/books/9781506386690/.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation. The Counseling Psychologist, 35(2), 236–264. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390.

Crossway Bibles. (2007). ESV: Study Bible: *English standard version*. Crossway Bibles.

Dales, D. (2017). *Divine Remaking: St Bonaventure and the Gospel of Luke* (1st ed.). The Lutterworth Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvz0hbfv.

Davis, J. J. (1998). *Paradise to prison: Studies in Genesis*. Sheffield Publishing.

Denny, E. & Weckesser, A. (2019), Qualitative research: What it is and what it is not. *BJOG: Int J Obstet Gy, 126*: 369-369. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/1471-0528.15198.

Devers, K., & Frankel, R. (2000). Study Design in Qualitative Research—2: Sampling and Data Collection Strategies. *Education for Health, 13*(2), 263-271. http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fstudy-design-qualitative-research-2-sampling-data%2Fdocview%2F2258175866%2Fse-2.

Diab, D. L., Walters, K. (2016). Humble leadership: Implications for psychological safety and follower engagement. *Journal of Leadership Studies*., 10(2), 7–18. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21434.

Diggins, G. (2016). *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Xlibris AU. Kindle Edition.

Dikko, M. (2016). *Establishing Construct Validity and Reliability: Pilot Testing of a Qualitative Survey for Research in Takaful (Islamic Insurance)*. NSUWorks.33-68 https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss3/6/.

Dixon, R., & Australian Episcopal Conference. Pastoral Projects Office. (2007). *Research project on Catholics who have stopped attending Mass: Final report February 2007*. Fitzroy, Vic: Pastoral Projects Office, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. https://www.catholic.org.au/organisation-documents/pastoral-research-office-1/197-disconnected-catholics-report-april-2007-1/file.

Donahue, J. R., & Harrington, D. J. (2005). *Sacra pagina: The gospel of Mark*. Liturgical Press.

Dunn, J. D. G. (2016). *The acts of the apostles*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Durdella, N. (2019). *Qualitative dissertation methodology: A guide for research design and methods*. Sage Publications.

Eberle, T. S. (2013). Methodological implications of the phenomenological life-world analysis. *Contributions to Phenomenology*, *68*, 9–32 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6034-9_2.

Edwards, M. R. (2016). *Under one roof: Authentic leadership as a way of retaining G2 leaders in an intergenerational church*. [Doctoral dissertation, George Fox Evangelical Seminary] https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/147.

Evans, C. (2011). *Luke*. Baker Publishing Group.

Floberg, J. (2020). The challenges of online in Indian country and rural America. In Heidi A. Campbell (Ed.), *Religion in quarantine: The future of religion in a post-pandemic world*. (pp. 17-18). Faculty Publications. https://doi.org/10.21423/religioninquarantine.

Furnish, V. P. (2007). *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians*. Abingdon Press.

Gadenz, P. T. (2018). *The gospel of Luke*. Baker Academic.

Gaebelein, F. (1979). Other means of grace. In Carl Henry (Ed.), *Basic Christian doctrines*. Baker Book House.

Ganiel, G. (2020). *People still need us: A report on a survey of faith leaders on the island of Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting. https://www.irishchurches.org/cmsfiles/resources/People-Still-Need-Us-May-2020.pdf.

Garland, D. E. (2011). *Luke*. HarperCollins Christian Publishing.

Gecewicz, C. (2020, August 11). *Few Americans say their house of worship is open, but a quarter say their faith has grown amid pandemic*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/30/few-americans-say-their-house-of-worship-is-open-but-a-quarter-say-their-religious-faith-has-grown-amid-pandemic/.

Gentles, S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbon, K. A. (2015). Sampling in qualitative research: Insights from an overview of the methods literature. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(11), 1772-1789. http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fsampling-qualitative-research-insights-overview%2Fdocview%2F1750038029%2Fse-2.

Green, J. B. (1997). *The gospel of Luke*. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Guijarro, S. (2004). The family in the Jesus movement. *Biblical Theology Bulletin, 34*(3), 114–121. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461079040340030401.

Guijarro, S. (2002). The family in first century Galilee. In Halvor Moxnes (Ed.), *Constructing early Christian families* (pp. 42-65). Taylor and Francis.

Hall, C. (2009). *Church...virtually: why internet campuses are making us reconsider our assumptions about ministry*. Leadership Journal, 30(4), 46+. Retrieved from https://link-galegroup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A210847979/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=1f545bf1.

Halter, H., & Smay, M. (2008). *The tangible kingdom: Creating incarnational community: The posture and practices of ancient church now*. Jossey-Bass.

Harland, P. A. (2005). Familial dimensions of group identity: "Brothers" (ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙ) in associations of the Greek east. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *124*(3), 491–513. https://doi.org/10.2307/30041036.

Harris, L. R., & Brown, G. T. L. (2010). Mixing survey and questionnaire methods: Practical problems in aligning data. *Practical Assessment Research & Evaluation*, *15*(1), 1–19 https://repository.eduhk.hk/en/publications/mixing-survey-and-questionnaire-methods-practical-problems-in--5.

Healy, M., & Williamson, P. S. (2008). *The gospel of Mark*. Baker Academic.

Heidegger, M. (2010). *The phenomenology of religious life*. Indiana University Press.

Hellerman, J. H. (2015). *Philippians*. B&H Publishing Group.

Hellerman, J. H. (2009a). *When the church was a family: Recapturing Jesus vision for authentic Christian community*. B & H Academic.

Hellerman, J. H. (2009b). Brothers and friends in Philippi: Family honor in the Roman world and in Paul's letter to the Philippians. *Biblical Theology Bulletin, 39*(1), 15–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107908100113.

Hellerman, J. H. (1998). *The church as a family: Early Christian communities as surrogate kin groups* (Order No. 9906071). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304426473).

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The active survey*. Sage.

Hudgins, T. (2009). Burdened by someone else's theology: Approaches to inherited space. *Liturgy, 25*(1), 13-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/04580630903209777.

Hughes, R. K. (2007). *Philippians: The fellowship of the gospel*. Crossway.

Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2012). *1-2 Timothy and Titus (ESV edition): To guard the deposit*. Crossway.

Issler, K. (2008). The soul and spiritual formation. In Paul Pettit (Ed.), *Foundations of spiritual formation: A community approach to becoming like Christ* (pp. 217-141). Kregel.

Jain, N. (2021). Survey versus interviews: Comparing data collection tools for exploratory research. *The Qualitative Report, 26*(2), 541-554.

Johnson, E. E. (2002). Apocalyptic family values: A Journal of Bible and Theology. *Interpretation, 56*(1), 34-44. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/apocalyptic-family-values/docview/202739155/se-2.

Johnston, G. (2008). Old Testament community. In Paul Pettit (Ed.), *Foundations of spiritual formation: A community approach to becoming like Christ* (pp. 71-101). Kregel.

Karyakina, M. (2013). *Social values of heavenly society: The concepts of honor and identity in Paul's letter to Philippians* (Order No. 3716352). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1711150351).

Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide no. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030.

König, A., Bartholomew, C. G., & Beldman, D. (2019). *Christ above all the book of Hebrews*. Lexham Press.

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 120-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092.

Kouzes, J. M., Posner, B. Z. (2017). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations*. [Liberty University Online Bookshelf]. Retrieved from https://libertyonline.vitalsource.com/#/books/9781119278979/.

Kurz, W. S. (2013). *Acts*. Baker Academic.

Lambert, Z. W. (2020). Facilitating deep friendships digitally when analog acquaintances are gone. In Heidi A. Campbell (Ed.), The distanced church: Reflections on doing church online. (pp. 19-20). Faculty Publications. https://doi.org/10.21423/distancedchurch.

Lanker, J. (2010). The family of faith: The place of natural mentoring in the church's Christian formation of adolescents. *Christian Education Journal, 7*(2), 267-280. http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/073989131000700202.

Lee, D. A. (2018). Fictive kinship and its symbolism in the literary structures of 1 John. In *Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond*. Brill. doi: https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1163/9789004373501_025.

Lichtman, M. (2014). *Qualitative research for the social sciences*. Sage Publications.

Lightfoot, J. B. (2014). *The acts of the apostles: A newly discovered commentary*. InterVarsity Press.

Lowe, S. D., & Lowe, M. E. (2018). *Ecologies of faith in a digital age: Spiritual growth through online education*. InterVarsity Press.

McKnight, S., & Longman, T. I. (2013). *Sermon on the mount*. Zondervan.

McKnight, S. & Modica, J. B. (2019). *Preaching Romans: four perspectives* (S. McKnight & J. B. Modica, Eds.). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Malphurs, A. (2003). *Being leaders: The nature of authentic Christian leadership*. Baker Books.

Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research? A review of qualitative interviews in IS research. *The Journal of Computer Information Systems, 54*(1), 11-22.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum, Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3).

Migliore, D. L. (2014). *Philippians and Philemon: Belief: A theological commentary on the Bible.* Westminster John Knox Press.

Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment, and People*, *7*(1), 23–48. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=640546.

Morrow, J. (2008). Introducing spiritual formation. In Paul Pettit (Ed.), *Foundations of spiritual formation: A community approach to becoming like Christ* (pp. 31-50). Kregel.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Neufeld, D., & DeMaris, R. E. (2009). *Understanding the social world of the New Testament*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Osiek, C. (1997). Jesus and cultural values: Family life as an example. *HTS Theological Studies*, *53*(3), 800–814.

Osiek, C. (2002). The ancient church as family. Joseph H. Hellerman. *The Journal of Religion*, *82*(4), 625–626. https://doi.org/10.1086/491180.

Osiek, C., & Balch, D. L. (1997). *Families in the New Testament world households and house churches* (First edition.). Westminster John Knox Press.

Pagram, J., & Gray, J. (2017). *Education*. ECU University Press.13-43.

Paley, J. (2016). Phenomenology as Qualitative Research: A Critical Analysis of Meaning Attribution (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4324/9781315623979.

Paynter, H. (2018). Revenge for my two eyes: Talion and mimesis in the Samson narrative, *Biblical Interpretation*, *26*(2), 133-157. doi: https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1163/15685152-00262P01.

Parish, H. (2020). The absence of presence and the presence of absence: Social distancing, sacraments, and the virtual religious community during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Religions, 11*(6), 276. MDPI AG. http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel11060276.

Parsons, M. C. (2018). Fictive kinship and its symbolism in the literary structures of 1 John. In *Anatomies of the Gospels and beyond essays in honor of R. Alan Culpepper /* (Vol. 164, pp. 386–404). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004373501_025.

Pfeiffer, C. (1962). *Hebrews-everyman's bible commentary*. Moody Publishers.

Platt, D., Akin, D. L., & Merida, T. (2013). *Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*. B&H Publishing Group.

Rai, R. (2006). *Qualitative and quantitative sequential sampling* (Order No. 3294418). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304979597). https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/dissertations-theses/qualitative-quantitative-sequential-sampling/docview/304979597/se-2.

Roman Catholic Church. (2020, March 25). *Decree of the congregation for divine worship and the discipline of the sacraments* [Press release]. Retrieved from http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/25/200325d.html.

Rossman, G. & Rallis, S. (2017). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Ryle, J. C. (2012). *Bible commentary - the gospel of Mark*. Grupo Oxigênio Ltda-ME.

Ryle, J. C. (2015). *Bible commentary - the gospel of Luke*. Grupo Oxigênio Ltda-ME.

Ryken, P. G. (2007). *1 Timothy*. P & R Publishing.

Sampson, S. J. (2011). *Leaders without Titles*. Human Resource Development Press.

Samra, J. G. (2008). *Being conformed to Christ in community: A study of maturity, maturation and the local church in the undisputed Pauline epistles*. T & T Clark.

Saucy, R. L. (1978). *The church in God's program*. Moody Press.

Seidel, G. (2008). Life story and spiritual formation. In Paul Pettit (Ed.), *Foundations of spiritual formation: A community approach to becoming like Christ* (pp. 217-244). Kregel.

Sheahan, P. J. (2006). *Building community through friendship at Sheldon Jackson College: Ministry theory and practice that defines koinonia, informed by Acts 2:44–47, as a means of fostering the shape of Christian fellowship for college students* (Order No. 3210088). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304910975). https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/dissertations-theses/building-community-through-friendship-at-sheldon/docview/304910975/se-2.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2004). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In G. M. Breakwell (Ed.), *Doing social psychology research* (pp. 229–254). British Psychological Society; Blackwell Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776278.

Spencer, A. B. (2014). *1 Timothy: A new covenant commentary*. The Lutterworth Press.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*. Sage Publications.

Suddick, K. M., Cross, V., Vuoskoski, P., Galvin, K. T., & Stew, G. (2020). The work of hermeneutic phenomenology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920947600.

Sulkowski, & Ignatowski, G. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Organization of Religious Behaviour in Different Christian Denominations in Poland. *Religions, 11*(254). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050254.

Swindoll, C. (2014). *Swindoll's living insights: New Testament commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus.* Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Taushev, A. (2017). *The acts of the apostles*. Holy Trinity Publications.

Thumma, S., & Bird, W. (2008). *Changes in American megachurches: Tracing eight years of growth and innovation in the nation's largest-attendance congregations*. Hartford Institute for Religion Research. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/mega2008_summaryreport.html.

Tobi, H., & Kampen, J. K. (2018). Research design: the methodology for interdisciplinary research framework. *Quality and Quantity, 52*(3), 1209-1225. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0513-8.

Towns, E. L. (1996). A journey through the Old Testament: the story of how God developed his people in the Old Testament. Harcourt Brace.

Um, S. T. (2015). *1 Corinthians: The word of the cross*. Crossway.

Valerio, M. A., Rodriguez, N., Winkler, P., Lopez, J., Dennison, M., Liang, Y., & Turner, B. J. (2016). Comparing two sampling methods to engage hard-to-reach communities in research priority setting. *BMC medical research methodology*, *16*(1), 146. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-016-0242-z.

Welch, J. W. (2009). *The sermon on the mount in the light of the temple*. Routledge.

Weima, J. A. D., & Baugh, S. M. (2016). *1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. Zondervan Academic.

Wertz, M. S., Nosek, M., McNiesh, S., & Marlow, E. (2011). The composite first person narrative: Texture, structure, and meaning in writing phenomenological descriptions. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, *6*(2), https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v6i2.5882.

Williams, D. J. (1991). *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Baker Books.

Wong, K. M. (2008). Christians outside the church: An ecclesiological critique of virtual church. *The Heythrop Journal, 49*(5), 822-840. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2008.00401.x.

Wright, N. T. (1999). *Jesus and the victory of God*. Fortress Press.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 24, 2022

Michael Jenkins
George Hege

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-338 A GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS OF AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE LOS ANGELES DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

Dear Michael Jenkins, George Hege,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: A Grounded Theory Analysis of Affective Solidarity in Christian Community in the Los Angeles District Association

Principal Investigator: Michael Vincent Jenkins (MBA) is a student in the Doctor of Education Christian Leadership program at Liberty University's School of Divinity. Michael is nationally certified as an Academic Dean by the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Moreover, he serves as the Academic Dean of the Western Baptist State Convention Christian Leadership School. He is also 2nd Vice Moderator of the Los Angeles District Association, an auxiliary of the State Convention, and Lead Pastor of Abundant Grace Bible Church of Compton, California.

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and a member of a church within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. Participants must have previously participated in community in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, meeting, or fellowship. Moreover, participants must have engaged in both in-person (before COVID related closures) and online via new media (during COVID related closures), so that they have sufficient context to gauge the changes in feelings and behaviors based on the inherent changes brought on by physical distancing requirements. Additionally, their church must have provided opportunities for them to participate in community using Internet or other digital technologies. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Affective Solidarity exhibited in the first-century church exists in the Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a short 30-minute online interview via Qualtrics. All respondents will be able to review your responses before final submission.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a determination about whether contemporary Christian community can accurately be described as operating in agreement with the effective solidarity characteristics of the community in the first century.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- The list linking pseudonyms to participant identities will be secured within the Dropbox cloud, but in a separate folder to which only the researcher will have access.
- The informed consent forms, written interview responses, and any other research-related data will be archived within the Dropbox cloud, which is secured with 256-bit advanced encryption standard for data at rest. Moreover, Dropbox creates a secure tunnel with a 128-bit or higher advanced encryption standard for all data in motion and requires multi-factor authentication for access. With these security controls, the data storage is secured to a level comparable to Protected Health Information.
- Data will be retained for three years upon completion of the study. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Michael Vincent Jenkins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ▓▓▓▓▓▓ o ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. George Hege, at ▓▓▓▓▓▓

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researchers will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix C: Social Media Recruitment Post

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Affective Solidarity exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and be a member of a church within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. Participants must have previously participated in community in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, meeting, or fellowship. Moreover, participants must have engaged in both in-person (pre-COVID) and online via new media (during-COVID) so that they have sufficient context to gauge the changes in feelings and behaviors based on the inherent changes brought on by physical distancing requirements. Additionally, their church must have provided opportunities for them to participate in community using Internet or other digital technologies. Participants, if willing, will be asked to share their experiences in a short, 30-minute, online interview via Qualtrics. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click here to complete the screening survey. A consent document will be emailed to you to review and sign prior to participation in the study.

Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

[Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to investigate whether something similar to the Pauline Affective Solidarity exhibited in the first-century church exists in Christian community among adult church members within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and the perceived impact of physical distancing on the growth and development of contemporary community, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and a member of a church within the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention. Participants must have previously participated in community in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, meeting, or fellowship. Moreover, participants must have engaged in both in-person (pre-COVID) and online via new media (during-COVID) so that they have sufficient context to gauge the changes in feelings and behaviors based on the inherent changes brought on by physical distancing requirements. Additionally, their church must have provided opportunities for them to participate in community using Internet or other digital technologies. Participants, if willing, will be asked to share their experiences in a short, 30-minute, online interview via Qualtrics. All respondents will be able to review their responses before final submission. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click here and complete the screening survey.

A consent document is attached to this letter and contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate and are found to be eligible, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email at ████████████ prior to the online interview.

Sincerely,

Michael Vincent Jenkins
Principal Investigator
████████████

Appendix E: Pre-Qualification Survey Questions

Definitions

Community: Those who possess a shared identity, undertake a shared mission, and gather in one location to act in concert as the united people of God (Johnston, 2008, p. 78-79).

Pauline Affective Solidarity: The intense emotional bond, sense of companionship, and support that the Apostle Paul experienced among brothers and sisters in God's family during the first century (Hellerman, 2009, p. 78-79).

Qualifying Questions

Q1. I have read and understand the definitions above.
Yes/No

Q2. Are you 18 years of age of older?
Yes/No

Q3. Have you previously participated in community in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, meeting, or fellowship?
Yes/No

Q4. Have you participated in community in the form of a Bible study, Sunday school, small group, meeting, or fellowship both in-person (before COVID related closures) and online via new media (during COVID related closures)?
Yes/No

Q5. Are you a member of a church in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention?
Yes/No

Q6. Did your church provide opportunities for you to participate in community using Internet or other digital technologies?
Yes/No

Appendix F: Survey Questions

SQ1. How would you describe your experience in Christian community? Consider emotional bonds, non-natural family relationships, companionship, and supportive relationships.

SQ2. Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to another person in Christian community because they had a material need.

SQ3. Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty, among the members in community, in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident.

SQ4. Read the following passage: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica?

SQ5. How would you describe the impact of social distancing on your experience of Christian Community? Consider how the lack of physical presence made you feel, alterations you made to interact with others, and learning new technology.

Appendix G: All Survey Responses

SQ1. How would you describe your experience in Christian community? Consider emotional bonds, non-natural family relationships, companionship, and supportive relationships.

P1	I feel I am a good Christian and very supportive to all but I feel if it wasn't for my bad heath I could be better.
P2	My experience in Christian community means so much to me. Knowing that I have a community of people who l can love and be loved, who l can share and who can share with me, who can encourage me and who l can encourage is everything to me.
P3	Christian community has been the backbone to entire life. It's where I've grown the most. More than actually in my own household. It is where i was adopted as family & adopted family. It has been a safe place but also the most vulnerable place. Community is one of the biggest parts of the journey because they help guide you & keep you accountable for your Kingdom mission.
P4	My experience in Christian community has been very rewarding. Worship is a huge part of my life; I enjoy being a part of the music ministry at my local church. Members that I've engaged with over the years have turned into nothing short of relatives. We experience new things together both in and outside of the church walls. We contact each other on various days of the week to check on one another. We find ways to stay connected beyond a traditional worship service until we meet again.
P5	It has been a wholesome & redemptive experience.
P6	A bond that is held together by our love for God and love for one another. A community where we share life, and experience together. A community where we love, support ,share and encourage one another in the word of God. In Christian community supporting one another, and building strong relationships is what helps to keep us growing spiritual and moving forward on this journey.
P7	There are available relationships where I can discuss superficial personal concerns and receive supportive helps like discussing religious issues or concerns regarding my well-being. I would not consider them as strong healthy attachments since the emotional bonds are not strong.
P8	As Christians, we must hold to our beliefs and stand our ground in a world where anything goes. The idea of being conformed to the world can be an excuse to justify actions that we know goes directly against God's plans for us. We are not perfect people but people who are perfected by the one who is perfect. But the reality of things is that we all have weaknesses and insecurities about something and in our dealings with people and in particular in the church, it stands out. In observing the workplace, churches, and various other places I noted in my observations that the church is more tolerant of strange behavior and insecure people than anywhere else I could remember going. It should be no surprise when most things happen because most things are not new just updated due to the times in which we live.
P9	It is a gift. Being in community provides accountability and connections. As I have met people on different levels with various background it helps me to stay humble as I listen to different perspective. As the scripture states, iron sharpens iron.
P10	supportive and encouraging

P11	My experience with my church family has been nothing short of supportive, healthy, informative and necessary. I consider each and every one of my church members to be as close to me as my blood family.
P12	My experience in the Christian community has been the most impactful experience of my entire life. My thoughts, actions, and deeds have are foundational built by my above listed bonds and relationships.
P13	I consider my experience in a Christian community amazing. I am in a women's group that is very informative and have a very strong prayer life. They make sure every day we pray at 12 noon and they share everything they know.
P14	In the my Christian community, I consider as added family and friends. I am most closest with members in the older generation. I consider them as surrogate grandparents, as the majority of my grandparents passed before I was born. I can look to them for guidance and advice and also overall support. There are seriously close bonds, some even closer than actual family members. There are some people that I know will have my back in good times and bad. These relationships are truly valued and there would a major defect in my life if these relationships weren't present.
P15	Consider emotional bonds
P16	Very positive experience: My circle is vert supportive, encouraging and holds me accountable. In times that I really need someone it's been my church family that helped me get through wherever trials.
P17	I experience my Christain community simmilar to the way I relate to my family. I view My pastor (and wife when applicable) in the patental role), and my fellow members as brothers and sisters. Commited members take on various responsibilities, and we love, encourage and support each other spiritually, emotionally and financially.
P18	In the christian community my experience is more like supportive relationships.
P19	I feel a special feel a special relationship with my church family. I believe they are especially supportive.
P20	Its very family oriented
P21	I feel more connected with individuals at my church and have developed a stronger sense of fellowship in the Christian community. There are more outlets to receive the word of God and learn about biblical teachings and how to re-apply it in my life
P22	I have a great support system in my Christian community.
P23	My experience in my Christian community, has been great experience. I have the support from my Pastor. He has created a environment that is non judgmental. Due to this aspect, I am honored to be apart of the Christian faith.
P24	Very acceptable
P25	The Christian community is giving me an advantage to experience new varieties of career choices.
P26	I have a supportive church family

SQ2. Tell me about a time where you witnessed something of value being given away to another person in Christian community because they had a material need.

P1	The only thing that I can remember is food give always when I was younger as well as current age and the community was so grateful and it felt so good knowing I helped someone in need.
P2	
P3	I saw it my creative arts group & church all the time back home. Pastor Spencer 1 Sunday gave a couple of cars away to single mothers. And gave away about $25000 to help people housing & paying their bills. But i experienced that personally when i came to Abundant Grace from my Bishop helping me. Letting me keep my stuff at his house. Hiring me to do wk to help with $. And He just gave me some $ one time & didn't realize it needed it.
P4	I can list several times a person in need received something of value from the church. One lady was gifted a car, because she got a new job and did not have reliable transportation to get across town to the job. From groceries, to appliances, to furniture, to assistance with moving, to paining a whole house, I've seen a lot of great examples of God's richest blessings.
P5	Rents paid & cars given away.
P6	Time and money were given at the same time and much need at the time. Some times a listening ear is of much valuable for someone. To be willing to emphatic and listen to someone without judging has proven to be a priceless.
P7	Eight examples of witnessing give aways of value in Christian community are in food give-away ministries, facial coverings, Covid-19 home test kits, assistance with a car purchase, major home appliance gifts, reducing a house rental, bus and car transportations for state convention meetings, and workshops.
P8	Buying of groceries for a family that the mother had lost her job due to sickness. The groceries were purchased through instacart and delivered to the house and I mean groceries.
P9	I remember being at an evening church service and offering was getting ready to be collected. The Pastor stopped his speech midway and asked if the people who had immediate needs would raise their hands. He then preceeded to let the community of believers know that half of the offering being collected would go to these indivuals and encouraged those who had to give a little bit more. It warmed my heart because I could see the material needs for things like food, gas, pocket money being given to the members right there on the spot!
P10	A Thanksgiving Basket of food and gift certificate to a homeless mother with 3 young girls
P11	I have been a recipient of personally receiving several valuable gifts, jobs, and advice from my church. I have also witnessed my church finding housing, clothing, food, mental health services and much much more for anyone that has a need that are members of the church and for anyone in our local community.
P12	Food distribution within the Christian community is a common experience I have witnessed in regards to something of value being given away to another person in need.
P13	I've witnessed a car being given to someone because they do not have a car to get their children to and from school and work

P14	I have witnessed a young single mother given a car by a church member. The mother actually hadn't even expressed the need, but the member had observed her over a period of time. And had noticed that the mother had been mostly coming to church service on the bus, sometimes catching a ride when she could. The member had just gotten another car and didn't need the older one. And that car was given to the mother.
P15	Food, clothing, and housing.
P16	A house burnt down and our christian community came together and gave away new not used possessions. Monetary and even a home. We supplied food, kitchen items and all.
P17	One of the families (a mother, father and two very young children), needled money to to make ends meet, and we collected a special offering to meet their needs.
P18	During the food giveaways, large amounts of food are given away to those that needed it. Also I've witnessed the children being given support with school supplies as well as monetary gifts for college. I've also witnessed my mom received support during a health scare.
P19	When I needed to remember instructions before my surgery, I was provided a tape recorder to record instructions from the Dr. & medical professionals.
P20	When a family walked into the church one Wednesday night during Bible study and we were told the family was in need of food and shelter. We immediately took a collection from everyone and was able to meet the need of food and shelter by giving enough to rent a hotel room. EVERYONE there rushed to give.
P21	N/A I have never personally witnessed such event take place.
P22	A person needed money to pay their rent and another person got a cashiers check to pay the rent.
P23	Every year my church gives away school supplies to young boys and girls. The purpose of this giveaway is to encourage students to stay in school and value education.
P24	A member and spouse were ill and the deacon and his wife went grocery shopping after getting the list and paid the bill
P25	my church sponsors the grab in go
P26	My church has a grab and go Monday thru Friday

SQ3. Would you say that there is a general sense of loyalty, among the members in community, in your local church? Describe an example of when you saw or participated in a situation when loyalty was evident.

P1	Personally I would try to attend anything the church or the Bishop was involved in and if I wasn't able to attend I would make sure my daughter would go. I try my best to be loyal to my church.
P2	I do believe their is a sense of loyality
P3	I see loyalty every Sunday when the musicians & Pastors show up to serve. There is loyalty in a few members that come because of loyalty in their hearts to God & community. Every SUNDAY.

P4	There is definitely a sense of loyalty in our local church. My father left a church where he was a sitting pastor, because the musician there had too much control. A vote was called to keep him or let him go. The church voted to keep the musician and my father decided he would be better off leaving himself. Some of the members wanted to continue the bible study series and asked he would be willing to finish out the series. He agreed. The loyalty part came in when a group approached my father to say that if he were to start a church they would go with him. We started the new church in his home after gathering for bible study.
P5	Yes. Regardless of personal opinions, people respond to fulfilling the needs of others.
P6	Yes, I do believe their is a general sense of loyalty in community. I witnessed someone being wrongly accused in the church and saw how members stood with the accused, stood on loyalty to God and self. In the end the accused was cleared and God received all the glory.
P7	A general sense of loyalty is applicable to everything listed in SQ2. Additionally, there are visitations to grieving church members with follow-up phones calls. Moreover, seniors receive in-home computer maintenance and those present in worship receive monitoring about their family and self well-being.
P8	One of the members was trying to obtain employment and another member helped her with her resume in the wording and format of it. She got the dream job she had gone back to school to obtain her degree in.
P9	Yes. I feel like I have been blessed with an extended family within my local church. About five years ago my pastor went through a divorce and some of the members had a few negative things to say and left. The majority of members stayed and prayed and the church has been thriving every since.
P10	Monthy assistance to a man living out of his car who regularly attended church and participated in the choir
P11	Yes, most definitely. I have seen the members of my church help members of our local neighborhood get alcohol and drug abuse counseling, personal health items, etc. Other members of my church, upon finding out about what was needed, one by one chime in offering any additional items and services needed to help others get their lives back on track.
P12	Yes, often times family members within a local church participate in worship with one another out of a sense of family loyalty.
P13	The ones that I associate with are definitely loyal. My church is very well-connected to a lot of individuals that are on the stronger and that can help each other out.
P14	There is definitely a sense of loyalty to local churches and oftentimes to the pastors of the churches. I feel that individuals' longevity at churches is tied to their loyalty at that specific church. I am very loyal to my local church. It is the church of my mother and grandparents. And I could not presently see myself worshipping at another place.
P15	I have seen loyalty, by seeing the members helping someone in need.
P16	In the community our neighbors watch our backs and homes. In church my cicrle has loyalty written on their foreheads. I go back to my circle in the community and church. I choose wisely. We care for each others parents and trust is an important issue. We can depend on each other to be there not just when there is a death, but when secrets have to be kept, we can that it won't go any further.

P17	About 35 members of our congregation recently went to lunch together after service, in celebration of our pastor's 55th birthday.
P18	There is a great sense loyalty amongst the members in community. My particular church the majority of the members are related by birth or by marriage so the loyalty is evident.
P19	When members have a crisis they all spring into action. tion
P20	Yes. Others churches will open their parking lots and other facilities when needed without hesitation. The people in the community will donate cloths and any other necessity when asked for drives that the churches and community may have
P21	Yes, Many members from my church have been apart of the congregation for several years, and have dedicated time and effort into participating in church events, services, and tithes and offerings. An example of that was when my friend associate pastor had to make contribution to church totaling $300. Many people would say that amount is too much or impossible to give to the church. Despite her financial drawbacks she intentionally put money aside each check or monthly to reach goal. In these hardship times for someone to set aside funds in efforts to make church's goal demonstrated loyalty because she could've just opted out and explain how she didn't have the money to cover expenses.
P22	A member offered food to a homeless person. Our church has back to school annually where the children get school supplies, hair cuts and food
P23	Loyalty is big in our community. We understand our assignment, and the goal of our assignment. We have an ministry where some of the members go out and feed the homeless. There are members who are excited about donating food and clothes. Prior to the event, the membership was excited about being a blessing to the homeless in the community.
P24	A deacon & his wife got sick and another deacon and his wife got the grocery list went to the store and got them all the groceries
P25	my church sponsores the back to school giveaways.
P26	We invite the community to attend all our services

SQ4. Read the following passage: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (1 Thessalonians 2:17). What words come to mind when you read Paul's description of being physically separated from the church at Thessalonica?

P1	Excitement to be back together
P2	Pandemic, COVID-19, fear, loneliness, social distancing, lost, eagerness to unity
P3	I see great Passion to commune with family. It expresses deep love & tenacity that one day they may see you each other again. A longing, a great hope. Feeling like a child and mother being tien apart. There has been such deep connection of community that not even distance can remove the love.
P4	Pandemic, COVID-19, Corona Virus, isolation, prison, virtual, Zoom, online, streaming, media, opportunity, shift, innovation, change, and growth are all words that come to mind when I thing about Thessalonians 2:17 and compare it to church as we have come to know it today.

P5	great desire to see you
P6	2020 pandemic, faith, panic, faith, sorrow, lost, fear,sickness, death, faith, mask, social distancing, uncertainty, loneliness, isolation, anticipation, Faith
P7	Words that come to mind are painful separations, emotional longings, tenacity, unhealthy detachments, and physical presence. "Torn away" is a physically painful separation from the Christian community. "Not in heart" suggest the physical separation, although brief in the text, could not overcome their loving (emotional) affection for the people [due to an unsolicited detachment]. "We endeavor the more eagerly and with great desire" addresses their efforts to resolve this dilemma of physical separation, but could not at that time. Paul uses the term again and again to accentuate first his determination to see them as community members. Second is the desire to see them as part of their missionary works of salvation. Third to protect them against demonic forces (1 Thess 2:17-18). face to face reemphasizes physical presence as important to healthy attachments whenever possible, especially for the newer (less mature) converts to Christianity.
P8	The people were in his heart and it was painful to be away from them. Yet he gave the message of hope that they will one day meet again.
P9	Grief, isolation, hope, anticipation, love, joy, excitement.
P10	longing to communicate
P11	Even though we may be physically separated from one another, we still conduct our lives as being and remaining one body in Christ.
P12	The recent (and still active) COVID pandemic comes to mind after reading the passage of scripture from 1 Thessalonians 2:17. Many church families were forced to be physically separated during the high of this pandemic.
P13	Distant, alone yeah, disconnected
P14	The saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Even though you are physically away from someone, they are always and still in your heart and mind. And though you may still communicate by various means, you still try to make a concerted effort to see them in person.
P15	Sin, disobedience, and unfaithful.
P16	Fellowship, where two or three are gathered I am in the midst.
P17	Paul is expressing a sincere desire to see and fellowship with the church at Thessalonica, because he sincerely missed them during his brief time away from them.
P18	Being seperated from my church by the Pandemic comes to mind.
P19	The pandemic.
P20	Although we are not together in person. We are still together in heart and on one accord worshipping together. Praising together, to the same father, looking forward to worshipping face to face.
P21	Integrity... physically stripped away from church didn't discourage him to disregard the message of the lord nor foundation of church's principles & teachings.
P22	Missing your church family
P23	Sad, necessary
P24	Missing the physical person

P25	missing personal contact.
P26	This left the people missing the on person fellowship

SQ5. How would you describe the impact of social distancing on your experience of Christian Community? Consider how the lack of physical presence made you feel, alterations you made to interact with others, and learning new technology.

P1	When we first started and was using zoom it was A little better because we got to see one another for church and Bible study and after we were done with both services we would hang out kind of chitchat with each other but when it went to basically on Facebook only it was a little more closed off didn't feel connected anymore. Then when the church open back up it was still a little standoffish because you couldn't touch People or sit next to people and not a lot of people was back at church so it seemed a little closed off. It was also a little difficult in the beginning to learn how to zoom but after a while got the hang of it.
P2	The impact of social distancing brought with it confusion, fear, and uncertainty . Being told not to touch and embrace those you love and want to embrace is difficult
P3	Personally for me it was quite difficult. I am a hands on touchy feely type of person. I like to hug my community, be around my community. There were times when I felt like I would die from not having human contact. During the pandemic was the time especially that you want to be be around your family/community. The saving grace for me was being able to still go in to church and be around some community even if it was at a distance. That saved my life. I believe social distancing is still forged a wedge for the Christian community. But in some way we've got to regain that. Facetime was my best friend. Especially do not have any family here or nobody to be around facetime also save to my life lol
P4	Social distancing in the Christian Community was difficult at first. On one hand, a small group of us went to church to complete a live stream, so that others at home could enjoy Sunday morning worship. We also enjoyed bible study from home as our pastor did the same from his home or the church. On the other hand, people we say weekly were no longer there. We eventually found ways to stay connected outside of the church, however when it was time to go back to in person worship, many decided that they liked staying home. As far as technology is concerned, there was not a big shift for me as a computer major. However, some of our seniors had some challenges. At one point, I went to one couples house weekly to ensure they were ready to experience the live stream.
P5	Abandonment
P6	We are social beings therefore not being able to hug, kiss, touch or see one another affects every part of one's being. Social distancing has an affected on all age groups ,however, l believe the elders who lack computer knowledge are affected the most. Many have died due to COVID-19 and many are to afraid of getting sick an won't return to in person worship. In person worship is what we desire as children of God. Being forced to watch on line is a blessing yet does not compare to in person worship. To be face to face with others who have gathered for the same purpose is a joy. A joy on the inside that is expressed on the out side as we come together face to face in one place.

P7	It denies the ability to evaluate body language and spoken narrative congruency. It also minimizes the value of physical touch as additional methods of communication. Technologies do breakdown which affect in the moment multi-directionally responses across digital platforms like podcasting (audio and video), blogging, and conferencing. Moreover, it could distract people from the Holy Spirit at work, especially those with limited technological skills, or fears of technologies, which restrict responses. Moreover, it denies healthy physical attachments known for inspiring (encouraging others) from trying or minimizing explorations. Research findings show areas like accepting new jobs, returning to school, and developing additional relationships may affect healthy physical attachments.
P8	It has been very difficult for the church community in that the church is not just a place of worship but also the gathering place of like-minded people who know how to have a good time even at the church.
P9	Distanced, fearful, seperated and sometimes feelings of hopelessness at the inability to change the current situation.
P10	loss of connection. I always hugged. Social distancing felt strange and unreal
P11	Social distancing made me feel closer to members of my church and other churches across this country. Technology has allowed me to visit the churches of friends and family members, any and everywhere.
P12	Social distancing has caused my members of the church family to become accustomed to worshiping from home. Many prefer this new style of worship and find it difficult to return to the more traditional face to face style. I find myself receiving increased correspondences from the Christian community requesting phone calls for prayer, counseling, and spiritual education.
P13	The impack social distance had on meWas very depressing. I need one on one contact in face-to-face contact with people.
P14	Firstly, the lack of physical presence will definitely make one feel complacent. There is quite an effort to get up on Sunday mornings, get dressed and get to church on time. Once that activity was gone, and everyone was forced to become a member of "Bedside Baptist," there was certainly some complacency. Now, you don't even have to get out of bed, to turn on Youtube, Zoom or Facebook. And if you missed it on Sunday, it's just an "oh well, I'll just watch it another time." The urgency to get to church was and is still gone. Secondly, I feel as though Covid-19 hit the Christian community like a ton of bricks. And we were forced to learn new technology, if we wanted to survive. In the past (pre-Covid), I was rebuffed at the mention of starting a social media page for the church, with a slew of valid and invalid reasons. But those previous reasons quickly went away, once social media methods become the only manner to reach out to members. People had to learn very quickly to use new technology and they quickly saw the benefits of being able to connect with the community in that way.
P15	It made me learn to depend more on God and see the things that he trying to say to me.
P16	I felt a sense of distancing. We are one when we come together. A part of me was missing. I am still learning the new technology. But I'm not tech savvy.

P17	The lack of being physically present in services during the pandemic was somewhat disconcerting. Commenting on the chat function, while watching the live broadcast was remotely rewarding in some ways, is was not comparable to seeing, and interacting with my brothers an sisters in person. For me, virtual interactions are incomparable to personal hugs, smiles, handshakes and pats on the back.
P18	The impact of the social distancing was positive. I became present more. I learned to watch the sermons online and it gave me the opportunity to do multiple things at one time. To be honest, I loved the lack of physical presence. I attended church and bible more often while enjoying my one day off from work. I no longer had the pressure of finding appropriate clothing for the family and the difficulty process of getting my children ready. Come as you are was a real thing.
P19	Although I missed seeing everybody, I was excited to be able to communicate by Zoom which was new to me
P20	The impact of Social distancing really exposed people who really werenot committed to the church or God. It really made the churches communicate in a different way by requiring the church and the peoples to upgrade and learn new technology in order to communicate the word in a different form. I personally Love coming to the house of the Lord and could wait to return physically. Social distancing really inpacted some churches to where people do not want to physically return because of new technology of attending church from home or other places.
P21	The lack of physically being In the church did result in a lot of distraction while at home tuning in virtually. However once church regularly resumed in service social distancing didn't really have an impact on me because of the magnificent emotional support congregation provides lack of physically interaction only partially impaired significance.
P22	I was able to attend church until I got Covid. That was a very difficult because I love being with my church family. I called and text people more. We had zoom fellowship
P23	The lack of physical presence have been hard on myself. I have been used to physical interaction for my entire life. When it was taken away, it was challenging to adopt. Over the course of two years learning and experiencing virtual worship has been great
P24	I missed the physical contact and in person conversation
P25	church never closed down.
P26	I stayed home for 5 months because I was afraid to leave my home. I talked to my church family weekly

Appendix G: Codebook

Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
THEME #1. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY	This theme refers to the participants' perceptions about their Christian church communities	1	12
Sub-Theme #1. Christian community as a family	This code refers to the participants' statements related to the community as a great family guiding their members	1	9
extended family		1	2
learning family		1	4
supportive family		1	3
Sub-Theme #2. Christian community's environment	This code denotes the characteristics of environment in the Christian communities. Especially, it refers to the marge of tolerance/fellowship that can be found in the church.	1	3
fellowship environment		1	1
tolerance environment		1	2
THEME #2. LOYALTY AT THE CRISTIAN COMMUNITY	This is a theme deploying the meaning go loyalty and the different ways to manifest their loyalty to the church. To some extent, being loyal involves the higher or lower significance that participants accord to belong to the church	1	25
Sub-Theme #1. Ways to be Loyal to the Church	This sub-theme refers to the different manner in which loyalty can be manifested	1	25
attendance to church's services		1	7
close relationships among church's members		1	1
compassion and assistance for fellow human beings	It refers to the many manifestations of assist others in theirs needs. These are actions/activities developed to help and support others during their hard moments	1	14

Name	Description	Files	References
support in conflictive situation		1	3
THEME #3. SUPPORT SYSTEM IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY	This theme refers to the characteristics and organization of the community as the support system that consolidate the Christian Churches' aims.	2	57
Sub-Theme #1. Building Durable Laces	The code refers to the opportunities that the Christian communities offer to build relationships on the base of confidence and trust because of the same sharing Christian principles.	1	11
expanding supportive relationships	This code refers to the opportunities that church provide to expand the net of connections of the community's members. Role of connections in the Christian community. The code also refers to the role played by the direct connection the participant has in the Christian community.	1	11
Sub-Theme #2. Types of Support	This sub-theme refers to the types of help provided and received by participants in their corresponding communities	2	46
Employment		1	3
fostering and employing		1	2
jobs and advice		1	1
Financial support		1	12
assistance with moving		1	1
house's painting		1	1
housing and paying bills		1	3
money and gift certificates		1	3
rents' payments		1	3
transportation for convention meetings		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Food and Health Support		1	14
food		1	10
grab in go		1	2
health		1	2
Immaterial Needs		1	1
time and empathy		1	1
Material Needs		1	15
appliances		1	2
cars		1	6
clothes		1	2
Covid test		1	1
furniture		1	1
school supplies		1	2
tape recorded		1	1
THEME #4. TOGETHERNESS	This theme refers to the participants' quotations expressing membership. This is a bi-directional theme where participants and church felt a feeling of being linked/ affiliated to the same principles. This theme led to the conclusion that community members develop a "sense of belonging" to their church.	1	5
Sub-Theme #1. Sharing Emotions	This code refers to the participants' emotions about the closeness they felt toward their communities	1	4
shared sentiments	This code refers to the participants' expressions of being sharing values, principles, or feelings	1	4
Sub-Theme #2. Sharing Activities	This code refers to the participants' shared activities that increment/enhance their sense of togetherness	1	1
sharing activities	It refers to the participants' quotations in regard of the activities they perform at the church	1	1
THEME #5. EFFECTS	This theme indicates participants' reactions	2	78

Name	Description	Files	References
OF SOCIAL DISTANCING ON CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY	to the lack of physical presence, the participants' reaction to overcome this difficulty, and how new technologies helped participants to reshape their Christian community		
Sub-Theme #1. The Lack of Physical Presence	This sub-theme deploys the emotional interpretation provided by the participants about the reading they made of the Thessalonians passage	1	21
the Thessalonians passage's emotional interpretations	This sub-theme deploys the emotional interpretation provided by the participants about the reading they made of the Thessalonians passage	1	16
desire, longing		1	2
excitement		1	2
fellowship		1	1
integrity		1	1
missing community		1	4
painful separation		1	2
passion, love, and tenacity		1	1
sadness		1	1
sin		1	1
the Thessalonians passage's explanations	This sub-theme presents the participants about the Thessalonians passage	1	5
Sub-theme #2. Reshaping Christian Community	This sub-theme indicates a) the participants' feelings of being separated because of the pandemic, b) the participants' reaction to overcome the compulsory social distance, c) the new ways to re-encounter with other fellow community members, and d)a the learning process meaning an big effort to achieve technology mastering behaviors and keep near the church community	2	57
COVID 19. The nowadays separation		1	6

Name	Description	Files	References
feelings about the lack of physical presence		1	27
learning to use new technologies		1	4
new ways to communicate		1	10
reaction to the lack of contact		1	10