LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Metamorphosis of the Traditional Church:

The Hybrid Church Model

A Thesis Project Submitted to

the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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May 2023

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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For several decades, church attendance in America has steadily declined. This observation is corroborated by extensive surveys and academic research analyzing church attrition. The national attendance phenomenon is also evident at Livingwater Church of God. Using the Livingwater Church of God as the test lab, this project utilized and implemented the Hybrid Church Model and evaluated its effectiveness for improvements. Substantiated by practical research surveys, interviews, and academic research, this thesis addresses attendance declension with a systematic implementation, evaluation, and modification of the Hybrid Church Model for the local church unique to the Western North Carolina area. The ministry project resulted in modest but encouraging gains in all targeted areas, with plans for potential improvement and re-implementation.

Key Words*:* Hybrid Model, Community, Family, Spiritual Growth, Discipleship, Small Groups

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Abbreviations

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

LWCOG   *Living Water Church of GOD*

LUSOD   *Liberty University School of Divinity*

Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

For the last several decades, Church attendance in America has steadily declined. Paul Silas Peterson reports that numerous statistical and sociological studies reveal traditional Christianity is in decline across the Western world.[1] Research has attributed this to America's changing religious landscape and the extensive cultural drifting away from Christian fundamentals.[2] Werner Ustorf, Professor of Mission Studies at the University of Birmingham, sounds the alarm that approximately 7600 Christians depart from Christianity daily in the West.[3] In 2016, the Barna Group reported that 73 % of Americans identified themselves as Christian, and a comparable percentage expressed that religious faith is a very important factor in their life (51% strongly agree + 21%).[4] In 2018–2019, Pew Research Center conducted telephone surveys showing that only 65% of American adults identified as being Christian, a 12% decline over the past decade.[5] Barna reports that after applying the triangulation of affiliation, self-identification, and practice variables, the numbers drastically drop to one in three adults in the United States or 31%. [6]

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[1] Paul Silas Peterson, The Decline of the Established Christianity in the Western World, ed. Paul Silas Peterson (London: Routledge, 2017), 50. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4324/9781315142852

[2] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." October 17, 2019. Accessed October 24,2019. https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/

[3] Werner Ustorf, "A Missiological Postscript," in The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000, edited by Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 218–25. ttps://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/books/decline-of-christendom-in-western-europe-17502000/missiological-postscript/6791C1549C0D395CE722F16062FE630F.

[4] Barna Group, "The State of the Church 2016," Sept 15, 2016. Accessed November 9, 2019. https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/.

[5] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace."

[6] Barna Group, "The State of the Church 2016."

A reliable benchmark of religiosity over the decades has been church attendance, and for

the most part, Americans are attending church less.[7]
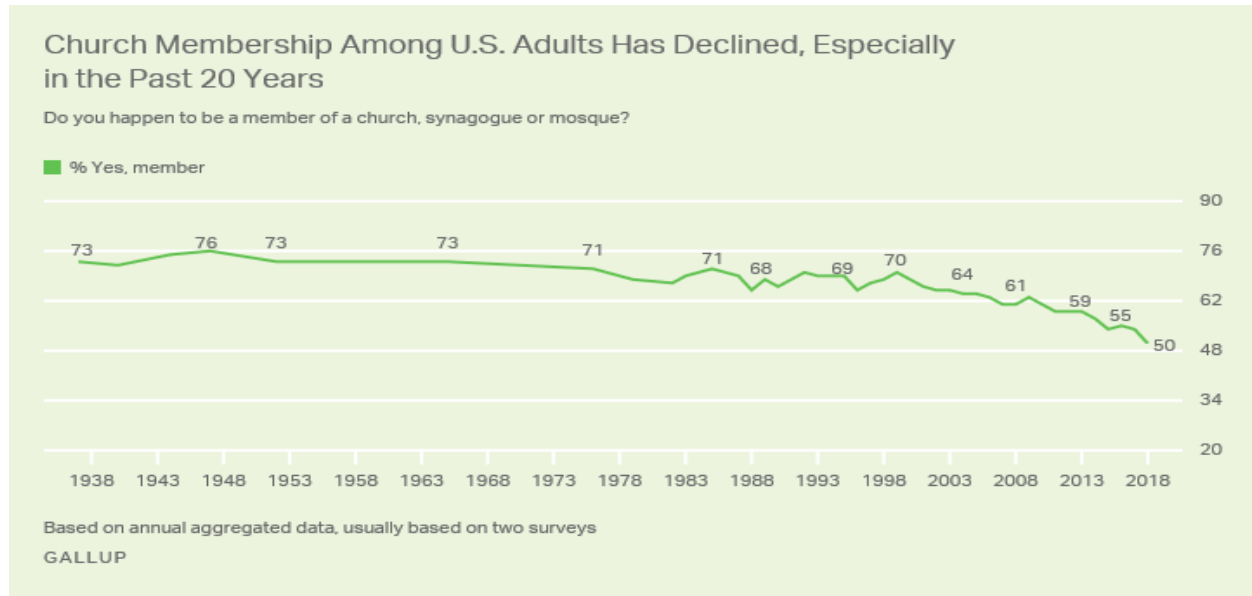
Figure 1.1 Church membership

It appears on the surface that most Americans identify as Christian and that religious faith is of

the utmost importance in their life, yet these impressive percentage believe the significantly

smaller number of Americans who consistently practice their faith with the support of their

attendance in the local assembly.

These alarming statistics reflect the attendance decline of churches in every

denomination, size, socio-economic group, geographical locations, race, and educational level.

Even though part of a large international Pentecostal denomination that stresses evangelistic

fervor, dynamic preaching, and infectious music, declining attendance is a prevalent reality that

has affected our local assembly at the Livingwater Church of God.

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[7] Barna Group, "The State of the Church 2016."

Ministry Context

Description of Community

Livingwater Church of God is nestled in the rural southeastern part of North Carolina in Laurinburg, in Scotland County. The census report of July 1, 2019, Scotland County has an estimated population of 34,823, contrasting the April 1, 2010, census estimated population of 36,160. Thus, the population change between April 1, 2010, to July 1, 2019, stands at -3.7.[8] As of 2017, Scotland County reports the population's median age of 39.3 and a median income of $32,739 with a poverty rate of 29.8%. There has been a constant decline in population and industry in Scotland County for the last two decades. Michael Schmidt, a prominent attorney, and resident of Laurinburg, NC, reports a significant percentage of the industries and businesses have either gone out of business or have moved from Scotland County, rendering the county's job market particularly weak, with an unemployment rate of 14.6, approximately double the national rate in 2013.[9] Scotland County is among the poorest counties in North Carolina, in contrast to the highest tax rate allowed in North Carolina while experiencing the lowest income levels.[10][11] This dismal report of the economy, unemployment, high taxes, declining and fleeing industry of a once thriving community has led to a decline in the population of those seeking employment and opportunity. These situations have been a factor for many youths, college-age adults (graduates), young adults, and upward mobile adults to make their exodus. The decline of

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[8] U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, "Scotland County," Accessed June 25, 2020. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/scotlandcountynorthcarolina/INC110218.

[9] Thomas C. Frohlich, USA Today: The Poorest County in Each State, 24/7 Wall St. 10 a.m. EST January 10, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2020. tps://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2015/01/10/247–wall-st-poorest-county-each-state/21388095/.

[10] Thomas C. Frohlich, USA Today: The Poorest County in Each State.

[11] "North Carolina Poverty Rate by County, Person Below Poverty Level," 2009–2013. www.indexmundi.com.

the population has significantly impacted the remaining industry, local businesses, and churches in the area.

North Carolina Percent of Population Below Poverty Rate By County
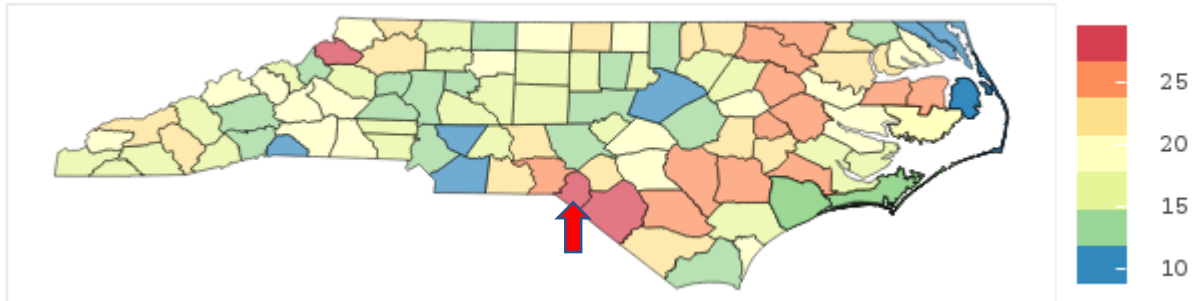
Figure 1.2 Population below poverty rate by county
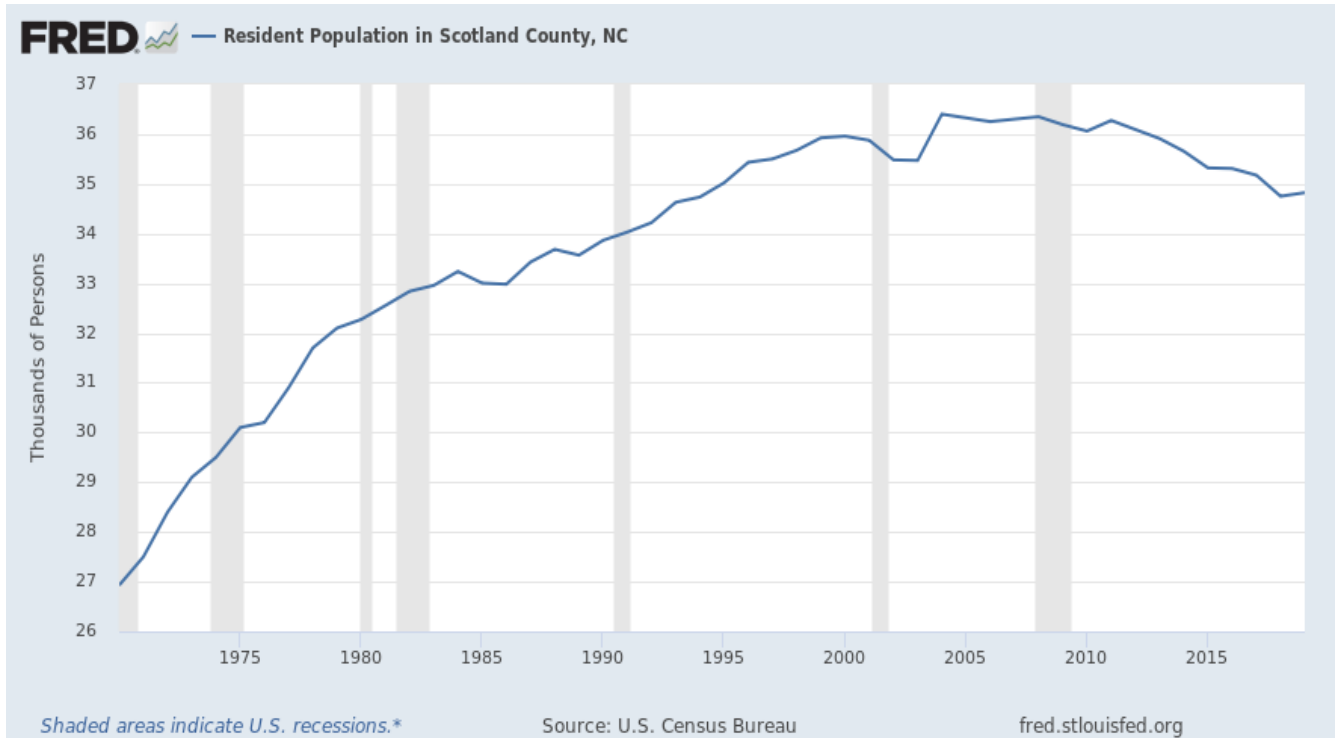
Figure 1.3 Resident population in Scotland county
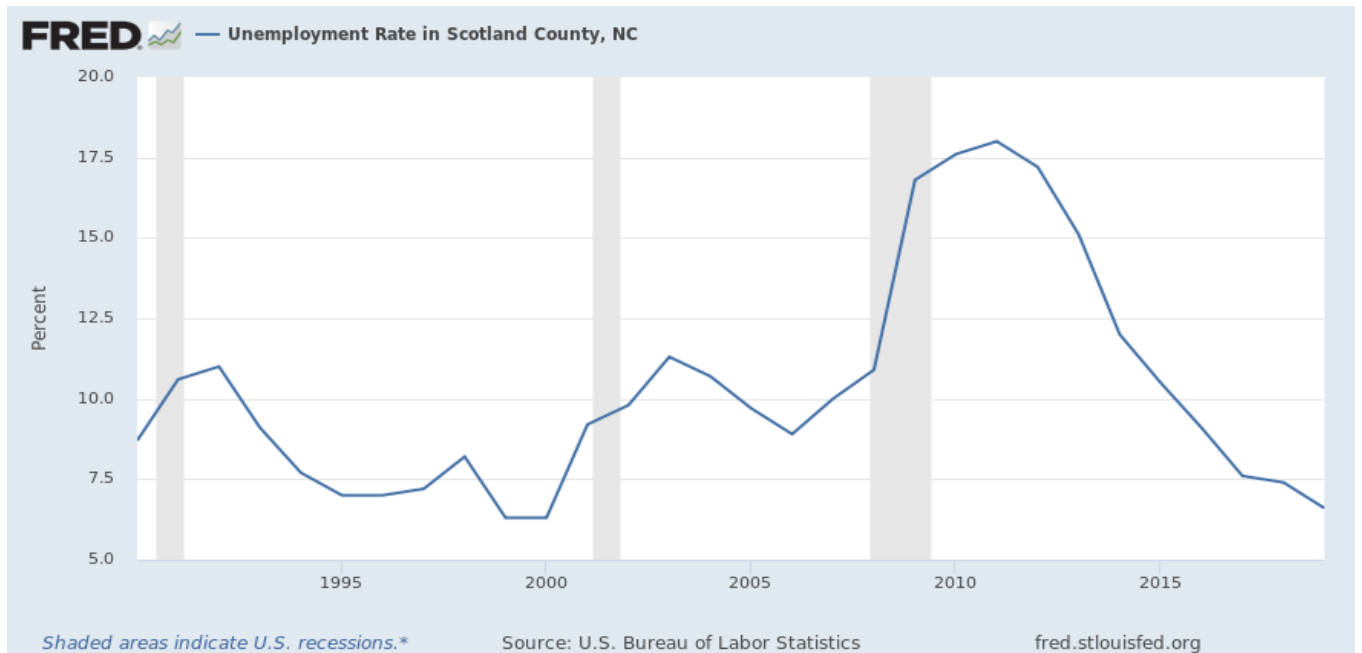
Figure 1.4 Unemployment rate in Scotland County

Households in Scotland County, NC, have a median annual income of $32,739, less than the median annual income of $61,937 across the entire United States. This is in comparison to a median income of $30,013 in 2016, representing a 9.08% annual growth.
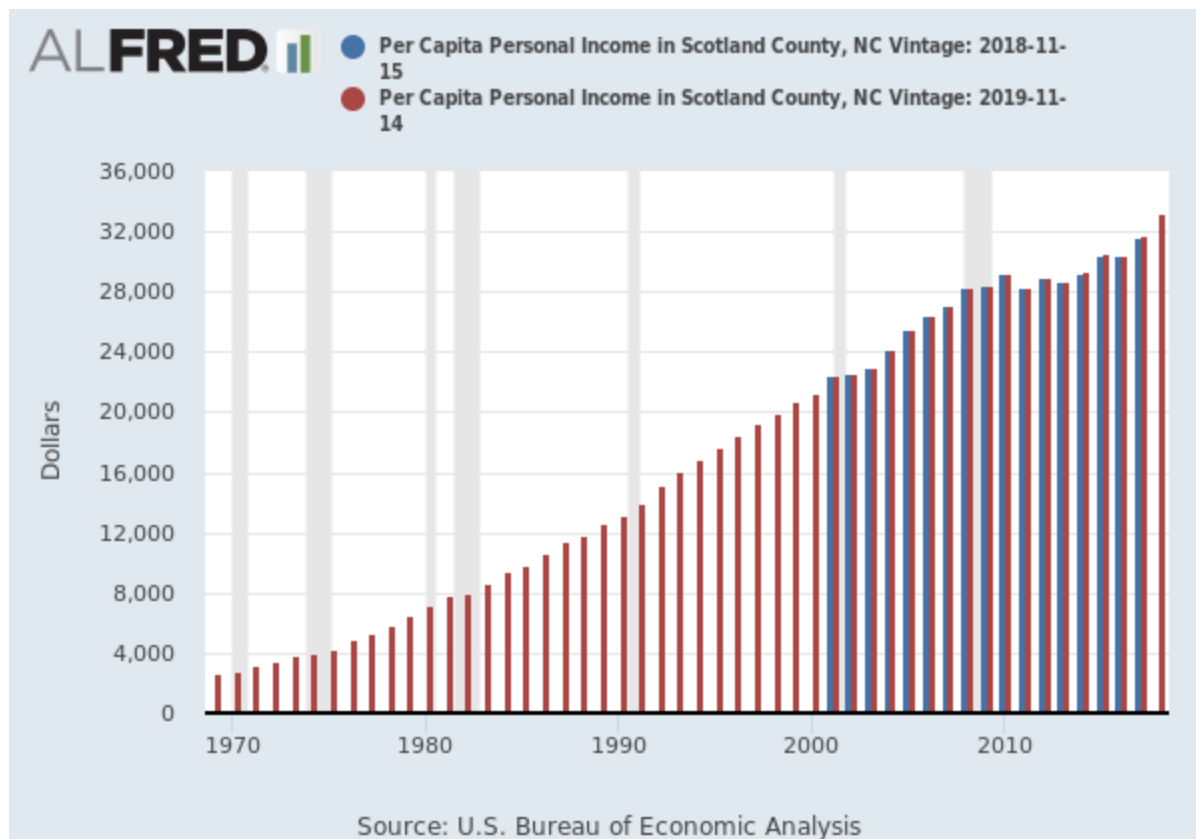
Figure 1.5 Scotland county per capita personal income

Description of Church

Livingwater Church of God is a part of the international denomination of the Church of God. The Church of God, with international offices in Cleveland, Tennessee, is one of America's largest Pentecostal church bodies.[12] Livingwater Church of God, formerly known as the South Laurinburg Church of God, was organized in the spring of 1973. The genesis of the church was housed in a former VFW building with approximately 20 charter members from the mother church, East Laurinburg Church of God. Five pastors have served the South Laurinburg Church of God (Livingwater Church of God) in the first twelve tumultuous years of its inception. In 1989, South Laurinburg Church of God experienced some stable growth that led to the

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[12] Stanley M. Burgess, The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 530.

construction of a new sanctuary and thriving daycare. In 1996, the researcher was appointed as senior pastor of the South Laurinburg Church of God (Livingwater Church of God) and has continued for over two decades to serve the body of Christ at the Livingwater fellowship. As of 1996, the church was in a significant transition as the daycare and school were moved to a different location due to the former administration (i.e., pastor) starting a new and separate ministry apart from the Livingwater Church of God. This difficult transition precipitated a power struggle among several factions within the church at the time of the researcher's appointment as the senior pastor by the State Bishop with this instruction, "I want to send you to hold the church together." A season of healing over the months and years followed as Christ-centered ministry followed, and a moderate steady growth ensued.

Livingwater Church of God would be categorized as a traditional Pentecostal church that over the last two decades, has experienced many growing pains to evolve into a multicultural fellowship in the recent years. A community outreach, Morning Manna, was initiated in the fall of 2013, and the purchase of the Bible Bookstore located in Laurinburg in 2017 has caused a greater awareness of the Livingwater fellowship in the town of Laurinburg and throughout Scotland County and surrounding areas. The Livingwater Church God is a diverse fellowship composed of families and individuals that represent both the indigenous and transplants population of Scotland County.

Problem Presented

Livingwater Church of God appears to be a healthy, thriving church with Bible-based ministry, infectious music, beautiful facilities, and has been described as a welcoming and loving fellowship. A sense of family prevails in the membership, friends of the church, and others who are a part of Livingwater. However, over the last several years, the problem of waning

attendance subtly invaded the Sunday and Wednesday evening services with a concerning impact. This decline in evening service attendance has adversely affected new converts, discipleship, and the morale of the church in general. The selective attendance of various members, friends, and families of the church has caused a shift in the cohesive feeling of family. A decline in Sunday morning attendance could be on the horizon.

This researcher has noticed that every service is a mirror image of each other in its format and structure. Could the familiarity or the predictability of the services be a factor in the fading attendance? In the 1300s, Geoffrey Chaucer, in his work "Tale of Melibee" articulated the old proverb, "Familiarity breeds contempt." This appears to be germane to the deterioration of attendance as the more someone is exposed to someone or something, the more bored one becomes and the less appreciation for that person, thing, or event.[13] The need to revitalize the old format or routine seems to be a viable option to impede the declining attendance and morale. The problem of the lack of attendance at the various evening services has threatened to unravel the fabric of an intimate sense of family and loss of close community that, in essence, affects the overall health of the whole church.

Purpose Statement

Using the Livingwater Church of God as a test lab. The purpose of this project is to utilize and analyze, explore, and implement the Hybrid Church Model in order to harness and realize both impact and intimacy. Implementing the Hybrid Model will seek to blend the larger corporate group for impact of the collective traditional setting and the smaller group setting for intimacy to bring our church to a higher level of community and family. Dana Browning

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[13] "Familiarity Breeds Contempt," Grammarist, accessed June 10, 2020, grammarist.com /proverb /familiarity-breeds-contempt/.

advocates the fusion of intimacy (a personal, relational, transparent church) and the impact (a powerful, relevant, and transformative church) to actualize or create the third form that is known as "hybrid."[14] The Hybrid model will allow members to experience a metamorphosis into active participants.[15] Hopefully, this will develop meaningful relationships where every member can sense a feeling of belonging, which is essential to the definition of being a church.[16] The sense of belonging will be centered around a common purpose: shared values, beliefs, and mission.[17] Randy Frazee advocated that a community will have a clearly defined mission to unite and knit them into a cohesive family.[18] Frazee points out the first-century church at Jerusalem had a common purpose that made it such a vibrant body. Acts 2:42–47, Luke reported:

> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.[19]

Sandra Van Opstal observed that the idea of community has gained in popularity in this present-day faith generation. The word *community* has Latin roots and means "common, public, shared by all or many." A community is viewed as a unified group of people who share common

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[14] Dave Browning, *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2010), 3. Accessed July 3, 2020. ProQuest eBook Central.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2. 0: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Accessed July 6, 2020. ProQuest eBook Central.

[17] Ibid., 26.

[18] Ibid., 34.

[19] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the King James Version (1769).

circumstances, beliefs and values, and endeavor to seek ways to incorporate (or work through)

their differences.

The idea of Christian community, as described in Acts 2:42–47, is deemed as a Christian

community because it is unified, though not primarily by circumstances, values, or beliefs. The

Apostle Paul points out that a Christian community is unified by the common life in Christ.

> Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the with
> the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the of the
> apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom. All the
> building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also
> are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22).

Paul uses collective language to describe to the Ephesian church the idea of a beautiful

building with Christ as the cornerstone, meaning the most weight-bearing stone. Opstal

advocates that this vision is a vivid and exciting portrayal of the church, where we are being built

together as a people where God's Spirit may dwell.[20]

In a biblical, theological, and historic context, the recurring concept of community and

family were paramount in the early New Testament church. The sense of belonging to a family

where the strong bonds of commitment were forged that transcend the individualistic mindset of

the Western culture. New Testament way of thinking like family and having an interest in what

is best for the whole family would be a step in the right direction for a resurgence in the

commitment to the local body in the church. A sense of community or belonging encourages

people to come and forge relationships and be a part of something larger than themselves.[21]

The Hybrid Model is a practical application that helps the church family in the corporate

setting in the morning worship, but it allows for a more intimate feeling in a small group setting

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[20] Alex J. Kirk et al., *Small Groups Leader's Handbook: Developing Transformational Communities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 39–40.

[21] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family,* 34–52.

that forges close relationships, wonderful fellowship, ministry opportunities, and growth in the

Lord. This would encourage growth on the physical (attendance, financial), emotional

(relationships, fellowship), and spiritual (worship, service) levels.[22]

Basic Assumptions

The researcher believes there will be three significant results when the Hybrid Model is

fully implemented in the Livingwater Church of God. First, the church members will be aware of

a strong sense of family and community. Second, growth will be experienced in the morning

worship service in the corporate setting and the evening small group services. Third, passive

spectating church members will be metamorphosized into active participants.

First, when the Hybrid Model is implemented, the church members will experience a

renewed sense of family and community. Humans were created to be a part of God's family.

Ephesians 1:5 reveals that God's unchanging plan has been to adopt humanity into His family

through Jesus Christ.[23] Joseph H. Hellerman points out that spiritual formation occurs in the

community context.[24] Those who remain connected with their brothers and sisters in their local

church virtually always experience growth in self-understanding (self-awareness), and they

develop in their ability to relate in healthy ways to God and wholesome ways to their fellow

human beings.[25] Hellerman advocates that this is especially true for those who experience the

unpleasant and challenging process of interpersonal discord and conflict resolution.[26] Long-term

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[22] Browning, *Hybrid Church,* 14.

[23] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 117.

[24] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family,* 1.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

interpersonal relationships are the gauntlet or challenge to real progress in the Christian life.[27]

People who stay also grow.[28]

Second, when the Hybrid Model is in place, growth will happen in both the morning

worship service (corporate, impact) and the evening service (small groups, intimate). Acts 2:42–

47 serves as a template for the church to function practically as a community and family. It was

in this inauguration of the church at the Advent of the Holy Spirit that the believer had such unity

(all things in common) in the corporate worship (daily with one accord in the temple) as well as

in the small groups (breaking bread from house to house) that significant growth was realized

(the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved). Acts 2:46 reveals, "they,

continuing daily in the temple with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to

house." Rick Warren correctly points out that the first Christians met every day.[29] Warren

continues to point out that even in the perfect, sinless environment of the Garden of Eden, God

stated, "It is not good for man to be alone."[30][31] Humanity was created for community, formed for

fellowship, and design for family, as none can fulfill God's purposes by themselves. [32]

Third, as the Hybrid Model is actualized, passive spectating members will be transformed

into active participants. Life is meant to be shared in experiences of interaction, fellowship, and

relationship.[33] Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless advocate that relationships forge "people

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[27] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family,* 1.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 151.

[30] Genesis 2:18.

[31] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 130.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 138.

connections" that strengthen involvement, commitment, and a sense of family.[34] These "people connections" are paramount and pivotal in reaching people and preventing many so-called "back-door losses."[35] Calvin Ratz stated, "Newcomers don't come with Velcro already applied, it is up to the congregation to make them stick."[36] Ratz employs the idea that a congregation (active participants) serves as "Velcro" to ensure the visitor and potential members will desire to be a part of the local assembly. Relationships are a key part of the Velcro.[37] Lawless conveys an example of the Velcro principle in action: Vern, a Midwestern layperson who participated in our study, understands this reality. A coworker and friend first told Vern about Christ and invited him to attend his church, where Vern and his wife responded to the gospel in a church small group setting. They are now leaders in the church as active participants by evangelizing and discipling, primarily through relationships.[38]

Larry Osborne advocates that there is no room for high-impact, life-on-life ministry in most churches.[39] There is usually a limited amount of up-front teaching roles, a handful of worship leader positions, and a few youth and Sunday school openings to be filled. After that, other roles would compare to supporting cast (spectator mode/ inactive member), designed more to keep the machine running than touching lives. [40]This setting will lead to spiritual boredom, stagnation, and a passive spectator mentality, resulting in a disconnect or lack of involvement.

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[34] Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 41. Accessed July 9, 2020. ProQuest eBook Central.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Calvin Ratz, "The Velcro Church," *Leadership 11* (Fall 1990): 38.

[37] Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 41.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 39. Accessed July 9, 2020. ProQuest e-book Central, https://ebookcentral-proquest-.

[40] Ibid.

However, with the implementation of the Hybrid Church Model, new ministry opportunities will be afforded for front-line ministry in the local body, resulting in the metamorphosis of the inactive member into an active participant.[41]

Definitions

Familiarity Breeds Contempt is an old proverb with the first recorded use of this expression attributed to Geoffrey Chaucer in his story of the "Tales of Melibee" (c 1386).[42] The idea behind this phrase is the more exposure to someone or something, the more bored one becomes and the less appreciation for that person, thing, or event.[43]

The definition of *family* in the context of the New Testament Church or the Christian community is based on the model of the Mediterranean family.[44] In the ancient world, a male was regarded as the immediate family (a) his father (received his blood), (b) his brothers and sisters (shared blood), and (c) offspring of both genders (to whom he passed on his blood). Females, like males, viewed fathers and siblings as blood kin (consanguine). Since the mother could not pass on membership in her patriline to the next generation, her children technically belonged not to her family but to the patriline of her husband. Since the husband and the wife had different fathers and belonged to different patrilines, married persons in the New Testament gave their relational allegiance not to the spouse but to their family of origin. Thus, this blood-based placement to kinship directly informed the nature of family relationships.[45] Joseph

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[41] Osborne, *Sticky Church*.

[42] Famous Sayings: #95– "Familiarity Breeds Contempt" accessed July 9, 2020. https://shmaltzandmenudo.wordpress.com/2018/01/06/famous-sayings-95–familiarity-breeds-contempt/

[43] "Familiarity Breeds Contempt," Grammarist, accessed June 10, 2020, grammarist.com /proverb /familiarity-breeds-contempt/.

[44] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 36–37.

[45] Ibid.

Hellerman continues, "No image for the church occurs more often in the New Testament than the metaphor of family." The idea of family captures the relational integrity of the first-century Christianity for the church today.[46]

The *Hybrid Church* is defined as "the blending or fusing together of the intimacy (a personal, relational, transparent church) and impact (a powerful, relevant, and transformative church) to create a third form, that is what a hybrid is."[47] Dave Browning elaborates to give a more practical explanation of the Hybrid Church Model:

> It brings two things together in a synergistic way. I view it as a preferred design. We prefer the two together because the whole is greater than the sums of its parts. When the church combines intimacy and impact, it gives us the best of both worlds.[48]

In Romans 12:4–5, Paul wrote: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one of another.[49] Just as the scriptures liken the church to the body with different parts performing distinct functions, the Hybrid church today recognizes the parts and the role they play in building the whole body. This is an intentional endeavor to unite the intimate qualities of a contemporary small-group church and the impact of the present-day mega-church together. The Hybrid Model does this with the goal of designing a seamless merger of the two.[50]

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[46] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 36–37.

[47] Dave Browning, *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy* (Hoken: John Wiley & Son, Incorporated, 2020),3. ProQuest eBook Central.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Romans 12:4–5.

[50] *IvyPanda*, "Idea of Hybrid Church by Dave Browning," November 29, 2019. https://ivypanda.com/essays/hybrid-church/.

Delimitations and Limitations

The root cause of the declining attendance in the American churches is left to much speculation, conjecture, and debate with no one answer that can pinpoint the common denominator of this ongoing problem. While there is a myriad of theoretical methods to rationalize and describe this phenomenon.[51] Jochen Hirschle reports the secularization theory is believed by many to be the major culprit, which suggests structural changes, namely, rationalization, societalization, and social differentiation, as the leading causes of religious decay.[52] However, church attendance is viewed as the most important and the most common measure to estimate a population's religious practice level.[53] This research intends to explore the decline of attendance in the evening services using Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, NC, as the test lab with the implementation of the Hybrid Model by engaging members and friends of the Livingwater Church of God, area pastors of various denominations, and senior pastors in the Churches of God in the Western North Carolina conference by survey, in-person interview, and interview by phone.

This research will select twenty-one members and attenders of the Livingwater Church of God, twelve pastors of various denominations in Scotland County, and fifteen senior pastors in the Western North Carolina conference of the Church of God to participate in a survey questionnaire and a follow-up in person or telephone interview. This research may yield some potential limitations. The impact assessments of this model are based on forthcoming

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[51] Jochen Hirschle, "From Religious to Consumption-Related Routine Activities? Analyzing Ireland's Economic Boom and the Decline in Church Attendance." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 4 (2010): 673–87. www.jstor.org/stable/40959054.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Stanley Presser and Mark Chaves, "Is Religious Service Attendance Declining?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (2007): 417–23. www.jstor.org/stable/4621989.

observational findings. The elements of biases, incompletion, inaccuracies, embellishment, and lack of candor may influence the model. This small sampling of members and attendees of Living Water Church of God, twelve regional pastors of various denominations, and five senior pastors in the Western North Carolina conference will be used for this study. Results may not be generalizable beyond the scope from which the sample was taken.

The sample size of this research will include only 21 members and attendees of Livingwater Church of God, 12 regional pastors of various denominations in the Scotland County area, 15 pastors who are ordained ministers in Church of God and their pastorate located in the Western North Carolina conference of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). Only a multiple-choice survey instrument will be mailed to the selected participants in the initial stage of this research to manage the collected data reasonably.

The second stage of the research will be a follow-up with an interview either in person or via telephone with the participants. This follow-up interview will include more in-depth open-ended questions as it also completes data collection. This thesis will propose to address the issue of attendance decline with a systematic implementation evaluation and modification of the Hybrid Church Model using the Livingwater Church of God as a test model for Churches of God in the unique Western North Carolina area. A two-month time frame is set to conduct this research feasibly.

Thesis Statement

The implementation of the Hybrid Model in the local assembly will allow for the impact of the corporate body and the intimacy of the small groups to promote a renewed sense of community and family, help increase attendance in both morning worship service and the small

groups as well as the midweek service and help passive congregants or traditional members to be metamorphosed into active participants.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

In his book, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, Neil Cole advocates that Christianity needs more than new programs, buildings, or worship format.[1] The idea of an upgrade for the church is imperative. Cole is correct that church is not just an event to be at, but a family to be a part of. Cole's idea of the church is not a program to reach out to the world, but instead, the Body of Christ (church) that is to be a people that bring God with them to the world.

Cole employs the analogy of computer upgrades to describe the need for the church to upgrade to develop, embrace, engage, and be cognitive of the present shift in the culture. The idea of the first-century church would be deemed as church 1.0, as the Jerusalem church (1.0), Antioch church (1.1), Galatian churches (1.2), Corinth (1.3), Ephesians (1.4), and the changes continue throughout the next two centuries. The changes in the 1.0 church were kept relatively simple and organic due to oppression and persecution from Rome. Cole revealed that during this initial period of the church, heresies arose and were squelched. The establishment of regional bishops and the institutionalization manifested itself during this period of Christianity. However, the church remained a grassroots, marginalized movement during this period of concentrated persecution.[2] However, a change occurred in AD 313 when Constantine announced that the Roman Empire would tolerate Christianity. Thus, Christianity evolved from a marginalized

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[1] Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrade for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), front cover.

[2] Ibid., 4–6.

grassroots movement to the mainstream state religion. Cole recognizes this transition as a shift to the upgrade Church 2.0, which has remained the traditional mode of operation for over four hundred years.[3]

Cole unabashed advocates for the need for the church to upgrade to Church 3.0! Cole declared, "I believe that the second major shift is occurring now, in our lifetime."[4] It is apparent that the change is not just coming but already here.[5] This researcher concurs that there is a change in the culture, and the need to upgrade is imperative to demonstrate that we can do church better. Cole challenges the church to open its eyes to look at various ways the body of Christ (church) can achieve its mission in an improved manner in the future than it has in the past. Cole's concept of Church 3.0 is much in accord with this researcher's thoughts, as it brings about the vision of the shift from just program-driven and clergy-led institutionalized (reminiscent of Church 2.0) approach of the church to one that is relational, simple, and communicable.[6] The resounding theme throughout Cole's book is the change from an organization to an organism that is healthy, thriving, and reproductive.[7]

In his book, *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact*, Dave Browning introduces the concept of a metamorphosis of the impact of the traditional church and the intimacy of the small groups (cell groups). The fusion of the two components to coexist and cooperate leads to the best of both worlds: Hybrid church.

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[3] Cole, *Church 3.0,* 6–7.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.,10.

[6] Ibid., 11.

[7] Ibid.

In a world where bigger is better, Browing wisely points out, "In God's economy, there is beauty in both the large and the small."[8] The idea that God inhabits the tiny seed, as well as the immense redwood tree, is interwoven throughout the text in biblical examples ranging from Moses' staff, David's sling, Samson's jawbone, Aaron's rod, Rehab's scarlet thread, Mary's ointment, and Dorcas' needle.[9]

In the book of Acts, the early church met "House to house and in the Temple court." Browning points out that the first-century church is reminiscent of the design of the modern internet, an architecture of small pieces loosely joined. The early church would assemble in small groups, but it also gathered collectively in large public areas. Browning explained the believers were having their needs met in the small gatherings, but they were also making a significant impact in the community in the large gatherings.[10]

If both the small groups and large corporate groups are biblical, then why not embrace them both? Browning points to the vastness of God's truth and employs the phrase, "God's truth is often in stereo:" fellowship and worship, freedom and accountability, grace and holiness, justice and mercy, evangelism and discipleship, community, and outreach.[11]

The tendency for the "extreme" is ever present in our society to be excessive in one direction or another. This fact is common in Christianity as well. However, Browning defuses the polarization of extremism with the simple thought of balance. The thought of being extreme is okay, but it is not okay to be unbalanced. The theme of balance is prevalent in Browing's writing and conveys that it is not an either/or situation but both. John 1:14 describes Jesus as

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[8] Dave Browning, *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (Hoken: John Wiley & Son, Inc., 2020), 14 ProQuest eBookCentral.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 15.

"full of grace and truth," completely truthful but gracious. Ephesians 4:7–16 expresses God's

desire for His church in that people will speak "speak the truth in love." Browning stated,

"Greatness appears to be balanced extremes."[12]

       Balance is challenging to maintain for Christians. We tend to gravitate toward certain

styles (in preaching, music, liturgy, programming), and assume that our preference is the "right"

way, and become critical, contemptuous, and judgmental of others for being different. It is

imperative to avoid the temptation of this mindset to embrace the diversity of the body of Christ

and maintain loyalty to the Master and mission, not to method and manner.[13]

       The church must come out of its self-imposed bunkers created by our mission statements,

dogma, and ministry philosophies to learn from other Christians who may do things differently.
[14]When the church stretches its wings toward impact and intimacy, it will experience a new lift.

Browning commented about his book, *The Hybrid Church,* "This book is about the church

having its cake and eating it, too."[15] In other words, blending intimacy and impact is having the

best of both worlds in a hybrid church.[16]

       Joseph Hellerman presents some significant insights in the text, "*When the Church was a*

Family," about family in the New Testament and what it meant when family language was

employed to encourage healthy relationships in their churches. The American idea and meaning

of the brothers and sisters cannot be used in our interpretation of the New Testament. The idea of

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[12] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, xiii.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., xvi.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

"brother" meant immensely more to the early New Testament church than modern-day society. The sibling relationship was the most important family relationship.[17]

The Mediterranean family values were the model for the early New Testament church. Hellerman gives three fundamental principles that were the hallmark of the New Testament church. Principle 1 is the group took priority over the individual. Principle 2 is a person's most important group is the blood family. Principle 3 is closest family bonds were not the bond of marriage. It was between siblings.[18]

The stark contrast between American family values of individualism and the Mediterranean worldview of collectivism of the early New Testament may be troubling to the American evangelical. Thus, the issue of priorities comes into play for connection in the early stages of Christianity of the New Testament church to God and the loyalty to God's group and the typical mindset of individualistic American evangelicalism that has created an antithesis between commitment to God and the commitment to the people of God. Many people are persuaded the two can be separated. The result of that mindset is as follows: (1) God—(2) Family—(3) Church—4) Others.[19] Hellerman holds the position to return to biblical roots, where relationships with God and others are paramount, the priority would more likely resemble this: (1) God's Family—(2) My Family—(3) Others.[20] Since family served as the central venue for relational commitment in the social milieu of the New Testament world, those who followed

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[17] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 50.

[18] Ibid., 39–40.

[19] Ibid., 73–75.

[20] Ibid.

Jesus were to practice primary allegiance to the new family, as modeled by Jesus: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).[21]

Hellerman alleges that Jesus did not resist the collectivist mindset of human relationships that depicted the lifestyle of Mediterranean antiquity. Jesus wanted His followers to relate and interact with one another as members of a surrogate family distinguished by collectivist commonality and commitment on every front.[22]

This strong idea of family is a continual theme of the Scriptures, especially in the early New Testament church. This sense of "Family" brought unity and solidarity, bringing the Roman empire to its knees. This is the power of community that God intended for today's church. The power of the Body of Christ is at its zenith when the church realizes it is a family![23]

Theoretical Foundations

Amid the constant declining attendance of the American churches, numerous pundits have accurately discerned the impact of culture on the church. At best, the church is viewed as irrelevant and relegated to just another activity to try to work in an already overcrowded schedule.[24] In contrast, in the biblical perspective in Psalm 122:1, David expressed gladness and delight to go into the house of the Lord. Notice that "let us go" implies an agreement of more than one (a corporate body) "to the house of the Lord," a specific place for the expressed purpose of worship. David G. Barker points out the experience of joy to hear the announcement of the journey to the house of the Lord and to focus on the goals of our life and faith on the place that

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[21] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 75.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 33.

[24] Thom S. Rainer, "4 Key Attitudes that are Killing Church Attendance," *The Christian Post*, December 8, 2018. (Accessed November 23, 2019) https://www.christianpost.com/voice/4–key-attitudes-that-are-killing-church-attendance.html.

God dwells, the place of refuge and unity, the place of praise and worship to Yahweh. Barker draws a parallel between the prison poems of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Psalms of Ascent as expressions of living, present, and vital faith and pilgrimage in the present.[25] Luke 4:16 reveals Jesus set an example with His attendance to the house of God, "And he came to Nazareth where he was brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read." John Riches points out the opening of the narrative of Luke 4:16 suggests a sense of normality: Jesus is back home and goes to the synagogue "as his custom was."[26] Luke 2:22–40 chronicles the childhood and adolescence activity of Jesus at the temple that instilled His custom of being in the house of the Lord on the Sabbath.

Carol R. Taylor and Roberto Dell'Oro offer this theological insight: "The intrinsic relationality of God and human is a fundamental theme in the entire theological tradition."[27] Genesis 1:26–28 describes humans as being made "in the image of God." Taylor and Dell'Oro emphasized, "relationality as essential to God's image and present the creation of male and female as the first human relationship."[28] Since God is relational, and humans are in the image of God, it stands to reason that humans are relational beings. In Genesis 2:18, God declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him," and God made a "woman" to complete Adam and instituted the first family. Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:34–40 points out the close connection between human relationship and humanity's relationship to God,

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[25] David G. Barker. "Voices for the Pilgrimage: A Study in the Psalms of Ascent," *The Expository Times* 116, no. 4 (January 2005): 109–16. doi:10.1177/001452460511600401.

[26] John Riches, "Contextual Bible Study Notes on Luke 4:16–22," *The Expository Times* 118, no. 3 (December 2006): 137–38. doi:10.1177/0014524606072701.

[27] Carol Taylor and Roberto Dell'Oro, eds, *Health and Human Flourishing: Religion, Medicine, and Moral Anthropology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press), 2006. 213. (Accessed November 22, 2019. ProQuest eBook Central).

[28] Ibid, 211.

"Come you blessed of my Father…Truly I tell you, just as you did it for one of the least of these who are my family, you did it unto me."

Taylor and Dell'Ora point out that the idea of the "family" perfectly illustrates the types of relationships in which Christians are called.[29] This "family" that Jesus refers to is not one of blood and marriage but to a new community of believers known as the church. Born again believers constituted of brothers and sisters in Christ, into a family that will also be the "Body of Christ." The church represents the "Body of Christ" and communicates the redeemed relationships that genuinely exemplify Christ in the world and are consistent with human relationality.[30]

Catherine LaCugna stated, "The point of trinitarian theology is to convey that it is the essence or the heart of God to be in relationship with other persons…." The church is called to represent God's trinitarian life; the Christian has been called to participate in the divine life through transformation by the Holy Spirit. This will require the Christian individual and the church to change patterns of relationships toward increased involvement and exchange.[31]

Historically, the "family" model is also seen in the early church. The dominant image used most often in the New Testament is the metaphor of family, and this usage of the family image elicited more promise for evoking the relational veracity of the first-century church for the contemporary church. It was Harry O. Maier who asserted that most of the New Testament mirrors the social landscape of the eastern Mediterranean.[32] Joseph H. Hellerman goes even

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[29] Taylor and Dell'Oro, *Health and Human Flourishing*, 213.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Harry O. Maier, *"The Household and Its Members,"* in *New Testament Christianity in the Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 145–146. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018. doi:10.1093/oso/9780190264390.003.0005).

deeper to point out that the early church functioned like an ancient Mediterranean family—

unlike the American family.[33] The idea of kinship was the dominant mindset in the New

Testament in which the closest family was not between the contractual bonds of marriage but the

blood-based bonds of siblings.[34] This same mindset prevailed in the early church as a strong-

group outlook meant that the New Testament Christians did not distinguish between commitment

to God and commitment to God's family. Cyprian of Carthage (c. AD 250) expressed, "He who

does not have the church for his mother cannot have God for his Father."[35] The reality of this

prevailing mindset cannot be overstated for early Christians, devotion to God was equated to

definite daily expressions in steadfast faithfulness to God's group, the family of surrogate

siblings who called Him "Father."[36]

    In the biblical, theological, and historic context, the recurring concept of community and

family were paramount in the early New Testament church. The sense of belonging to a family

where the strong bonds of commitment were forged that transcend the individualistic mindset of

the Western culture. New Testament way of thinking like family and having an interest in what

is best for the whole family would be a step in the right direction for a resurgence in the

commitment to the local body in my church. A sense of community or belonging encourages

people to forge relationships and be a part of something larger than themselves.

    The Hybrid Model is a practical application that helps the church family in the corporate

setting in the morning worship. Still, it allows for a more intimate feeling in a small group setting

that forges close relationships, wonderful fellowship, ministry opportunities, and growth in the

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[33] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 36.

[34] Ibid., 37.

[35] Ibid., 73

[36] Ibid., 73–74.

Lord. This would encourage growth in the physical (attendance, financial), emotional

(relationships, fellowship), and spiritual (worship, service).

Theological Foundations

Joseph C. Atkinson explained that New Testament Christians are grafted into a prior

experience of God's revelation to Israel.[37] The Apostle Paul reveals this relationship between the

Old Testament and New Testament covenants: "For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which

was wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more

shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree" (Romans 11:24)?

This revelation is essential for an ever-increasing clarity and a deeper understanding of the

Christian faith. Since there is only one divine will being worked out in time and history, it is

paramount to realize a necessity of an organic connection among all parts of that revelation. This

points to an inherent relationship between Israel and the church. Thus, the organic unity between

Israel and the church will explain the need for the church to always position itself within the

revelation to Israel and never apart from it.[38] Joseph Atkinson stated, "As the elder brother, Israel

possesses a revelation foundational for Christianity."[39] This explains why locating the roots of

the "domestic church" in the Old Testament is essential. By so doing, this concept's theological

foundation and richness will become clear.[40]

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[37] Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical Theological Foundation of the Family: The Domestic Church* (Washington: Catholic University of American Press, 2014), 15. https://ebookcentral-proquest-.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=3135162&ppg=1 (Accessed August 20, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.).

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 14.

[40] Ibid., 15.

The Apostle Paul correctly points to the effect of salvation: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Paul reveals to the Christians at Galatia that being incorporated into Christ results in one to become a part of the family of Abraham, the father of Judaism. Atkinson stated, "To reject the Judaic core of Christianity is to reject the foundation of one's own salvation."[41] Thus, ignoring or discounting the significant connection or relationship between Judaism and Christianity would be profoundly remiss and flawed.[42]

Examining the New Testament texts concerning the domestic church, it is paramount to understand that there is no fully developed theology of the family within the New Testament. However, Joseph Atkinson explained this detail by pointing out that the early church was primarily Jewish. Christianity was considered as emerging from Judaism and was called "the Way" (Acts 9:2).[43] Atkinson continued that the early church saw no conflict in embracing the Hebrew covenant; rather, the early Christians held the belief that in Christ the covenant with Abraham had reached its teleological conclusion.[44] Thus, the early Christians held to the Old Testament concept of the family and, therefore, would deem it an essential component of the New Testament covenant.

Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey explain that the early church saw itself as God's new family. The religious activities that transpired in the setting of the house church were extremely flexible, but all were associated and conducive to the small-group community. The book of Acts portrays to the reader that homes were used for prayer meetings (2:42, 12:12), communion (2:42;

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[41] Atkinson, *Biblical Theological Foundational of the Family*, 193..

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 193.

[44] Ibid.

46), fellowship (2:42), evangelism (2:47), and teaching (2:42; 5:42).[45] It is in the context of the small group that the early church experienced the intimacy that strengthens the impact of the corporate body.

John Townsend and Henry Cloud equate the small group to be a second family for people.[46] Townsend and Cloud continues to convey whatever needs the original families or environments did not address or provide, or whatever they provided that the child did not need, the small groups serve as a place of restoration. The small group is like a second chance to members with immaturities and needs, and the small group serves to move them to the next stage. Townsend and Cloud boldly stated, "Groups of people working like that repairing family are a large part of God's process of maturing us: 'God set the lonely in families' (Psalms [sic] 68:6)."[47]

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[45] Harley T. Atkinson and Joel Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cells Groups," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no.1 (Spring, 2014): 75–87. http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1517636268%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[46] Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 60. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5607899&ppg=12

[47] Ibid.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Vern L. Bengtson correctly points out that in the last three decades, the religious landscape of societies worldwide has undergone vast changes. These dramatic shifts have resulted in a decline in attendance in churches of every denomination and apprehended the attention of the mass media because they suggested a cultural change. Bengtson contends, "Nowhere has this more evident than in American society."[1] Bengtson cites headlines that appeared in May of 2014 reporting, "Religion on the decline in the US (Lauter & Branson-Potts, 2015)." Paul Silas Peterson attributes that many of the theories of decline point to generational shifts as the major culprit in the attendance issue of the modern church.[2] In addition, David Voas has developed an insightful analysis of this contemporary secularization, "Each generation in every [European] country surveyed is less religious than the last, measured by the best available index of religiosity."[3] Voas continues to report that many people are neither regular churchgoers nor self-consciously non-religious. He employs the term "fuzzy fidelity," which describes a casual loyalty to tradition.[4] A CNN story announced, "Millennials leaving the church in droves, study finds...Americans considering themselves Christians drops 8% (Burke, 2015)." These

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[1] Vern L. Bengtson et al., *New Dimensions in Spirituality, Religion, and Aging*, ed. Vern L. Bengtson (Boca Roca, FL: Routledge, 2018), 4. https://www.ezproxy.liberty.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9780429463891/.

[2] Paul Silas Peterson, ed., *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World: Interpretation and Responses* (London; New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 41–42.

[3] David Voas, "The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe," *European Sociological Review* 25. No.2 (2009): 155–168, 167.

[4] Ibid.

stories, and thousands like them, were in response to the Pew Religion and Public Life report on the "America's Changing Religious Landscape (Pew Research Center, 2015)."[5]

These staggering statistics reflect the severe decline in attendance that affects every denomination, size, socio-economic group, race, location, and educational background. These facts of attendance declension have become a manifested reality at the Livingwater Church of God. The researcher intends to learn whether implementing the Hybrid Model at the Livingwater Church of God would positively impact the attendance and growth of our local assembly. The major template for the Hybrid Model was taken from David Browning's book, *Hybrid Model: The Fusion of Intimacy of Impact,* and Neil Cole's work, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church,* as the remaining research has supplemented the Hybrid Model in this project. This research aimed to examine and implement the Hybrid Model within the framework of the cooperate body and small groups of the Livingwater Church of God, a church experiencing a decline in attendance and church growth. The significance of this project was to help Livingwater Church of God and similar churches address their problems of declining attendance and stagnant church growth.

Intervention Design

Setting

The actual study was conducted in the town of Laurinburg, North Carolina. This research was primarily conducted at the Livingwater Church of God, 13200 Blue Farm Road, Laurinburg, North Carolina 28352. The Livingwater Church of God is in the jurisdiction of the Western North Carolina Churches of God and is a part of the International Church of God in Cleveland,

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[5] Voas, "The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe," 155–168, 167.

Tennessee. At present, the Livingwater Church of God offers three weekly services. The church services are comprised of a Wednesday night Bible study, Sunday morning worship, and Sunday evening small group. The Sunday morning worship consists of traditional Pentecostal worship, infectious music, and a thriving children's church. Small groups are the mode of Sunday evening worship. Implementing the Hybrid Model as proposed above was integrated into the Livingwater Church of God. There were three small groups in the genesis of the implementation of the Hybrid Model, but only two groups currently meet. A Tuesday morning service that included a full breakfast called "Morning Manna" was suspended as of March 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic.

In tandem with this research, the importance of selecting the Livingwater Church of God is that the church has experienced a growth stagnation and attendance declension in the various services. Furthermore, Livingwater Church of God was selected as the local congregation the researcher has served as the senior pastor for over the last two decades. Additionally, this actual church is a prime example of the stereotypical size and socio-economic diversity that normally fits the description of a traditional church struggling with a decline in attendance and growth stagnation. The membership of this church exceeds seventy members and a strong core of both members and friends of the church, which varies in age and educational levels. The key leaders in the church consist of the pastor, elders, treasurer, and elected board members. The rest of the church included men, women, teenagers, and children who actively performed the various duties within the church. This research has also included the input of selected local pastors of various denominations in the Laurinburg, North Carolina area and selected pastors of the Churches of God in the Jurisdiction of Western North Carolina.

Participants

Selection for participants has been divided into two distinct groups: 1) laity and 2) clergy. The selected participants of the laity group for this research consist of the two small groups that were active at the Livingwater Church of God. Group one met on Sunday evening at the fellowship hall at the church and was led by a married couple team from the church. Group two met off campus at the home of the couple who served as team leaders. Each group averaged ten participants in the individual small group setting that yielded twenty individuals from the Livingwater Church of God collectively. The ages of the laity groups ranged from the late twenties to senior adults of sixty-five plus. The specific reason for allowing the varied ages to populate each group has been identified as the setting of intimacy to foster a sense of community and family. Randy Frazee adds that a community will give a defined focus that will bring about togetherness and knit them into a cohesive family.[6] In addition to small groups, some classes ministered to the smaller children and teenagers when the small groups were in session.

The selected participants of the clergy group for this research were two-fold: 1) Pastors of various denominations in the Laurinburg, NC area. 2) Pastors in the Western North Carolina Church of God jurisdiction. The selected pastors in the Laurinburg area represent churches the attendance ranges from fifty to two hundred plus, with a collective attendance median of sixty-five. The selected Laurinburg area pastors are of various races, with the majority being Caucasians at sixty%, African Americans comprising twenty%, Native Americans constitutes approximately ten%, and ten% Hispanic background. The education level of selected pastors

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[6] Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan 2008), 34.

ranges from college graduates to high school graduates. The selected number of Laurinburg area pastors was twelve, and all were males.

The Church of God pastors were selected exclusively from the Western North Carolina Church of God jurisdiction. The Western North Carolina Churches of God jurisdiction extends from Laurinburg, NC northward to the Virginia State line, then westward to the Tennessee state line. The ten pastors were selected to participate in this study represent churches varying in attendance from forty to five hundred plus with a collective median attendance of one hundred and fifteen on Sunday morning worship. These selected pastors had various educational levels ranging from undergraduate to advanced graduate degrees. The selected pastors were all Caucasian and male.

The methodical selection in choosing all participants in this research was that of a non-laboratory setting. Every participant was made verbally aware of the research subject matter and the criteria and conditions for participating in this research. After the oral explanation of the research subject, requirements, and parameters, each participant was asked to consent to a commitment to a thirteen-week course individually.

Recruitment of Participants

The recruitment process commenced with the approval of the council of the Livingwater Church of God to enlist prospective participants involved in the Livingwater Church of God. The preliminary step was to address the attendees of the small groups, explain the research project, and invite their participation in this project. Mark A. Lamport and Mary Ryanburger point out the importance of anchoring the ministry practice in biblical insight and leadership development within small groups.

It was communicated to the prospective participants that a questionnaire would be given at the conclusion at the end of the thirteen-week study, and their input would be anonymous and confidential. It was communicated to the prospective participants who participated in this research that they would do so as volunteers and without compensation, with the option to discontinue their participation at any juncture of the study. The participants were instructed on the protocol and decorum that is appropriate research behavior when engaged in group interaction. David Resnik points outs that research involves an immense amount of cooperation and coordination among a group of people of diverse backgrounds and disciplines, set ethical standards and boundaries encourage the principles that are indispensable to collective work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness.[7]

The recruitment of the pastors was a two-fold process that involved local Pastors in the Laurinburg, North Carolina area and Pastors of the Churches of God in the Western North Carolina jurisdiction. The local Pastors were selected from a group of ministers (of which the researcher is a participant) of various denominations that meet every Thursday at 8:30 a.m. to fellowship with a brief devotion and to have prayer together. The researcher initially recruited the local Pastors through the introduction of the research project and with an extended invitation to participate through a questionnaire and follow-up interviews to add input and insight to the project.

The recruitment of Pastors from the Western North Carolina Churches of God was selected from peers, colleagues, and friends that serve or have served as Pastors in the Church of God. This group of ministers was initially contacted by telephone, email, or in person. The

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[7] David Resnik, "What is Ethics in Research and Why is it Important" *Journal of National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences* 1, no. 10 (2011): 65.

research project was introduced to each of them individually and the study's parameters, with an invitation to participate in this research. It was communicated to the prospective participants who took part that they would do so as a volunteer with no compensation and with the option to discontinue at any juncture. It was also communicated that their response to the questionnaire and interview would be anonymous and confidential.

Subsequent to the approval of the council of the Livingwater Church of God, notice and contact was made to secure potential participants. The laity groups were informed of the commencement of the small groups, including the time and locations of the various small groups. The Pastors' groups were informed of the genesis of the research with the instructions of a forthcoming questionnaire and at a later appointed date for a follow-up interview. The Pastors' follow-up will be conducted in one of four ways: 1) in person, 2) by telephone, 3) by email, and 4) via Zoom.

The second phase of the recruitment procedure was to explain to each group a synopsis of the research project and the implementation of the process. It was reiterated that there would be no compensation for their participation in this project. The participants were informed that the reason for non-compensation was to ensure their responses will not be swayed by inducements. Both Laity and Pastors participants were made aware that the risk of this study would be minimal, such as found in daily life. The participants were informed that this study's direct benefits should be expected in the form of a deeper sense of community, relationships, family, and becoming a part of something bigger themselves.

The matter of confidentiality within this research will be kept private. It is made clear that the research will be published work; however, no information will be contained to compromise a subject's identity. The researcher assured each participant that all research would be kept safe

and secure and only the researcher could access the data. The participants in this research will be appointed a pseudonym. The information and data of this research will be kept on a computer with a password lock and may be used in future presentations. After five years of the completion of this study, the electronic records will be removed. The notes from personal interviews, events, and other such gatherings will be recorded and transcribed following the same protocol as other data. The researcher will be the only one to access the data.

Data Collection

The process to amass the essential data for this study was a survey of questions as well as notes and observations made in the small group setting. The reasoning for this process is to determine the effectiveness of the small group and the participants' contribution. Local pastors from the Laurinburg, North Carolina area and Church of God pastors from the Western North Carolina Jurisdiction were invited to participate in a questionnaire format and were followed up with an interview.

The questionnaires for the small groups (laity) consisted of twenty-two questions and a comment section. The researcher administered the questionnaires to the participants of this study at the Livingwater Church of God with the aid of the team leaders of the small groups. The small group participants were allowed to take their questionnaires with them to complete and return them to the researcher the following week. The researcher interviewed the small group participants in person or via telephone.

The questionnaire for the clergy was given to two distinct groups: 1) Twelve local ministers of various denominations in the Laurinburg, North Carolina area. 2) Ten Church of God pastors in the Western North Carolina Jurisdiction. The questionnaire consists of twenty-two questions and a section for comments from local ministers and the Western North Carolina

Church of Pastors. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher for both groups. The local ministers in the Laurinburg, North Carolina area were followed up with an in-person or via telephone interview of thirty to sixty minutes. The Church of God pastors in Western North Carolina were followed up by in-person, email, telephone, or Zoom interviews of thirty to sixty minutes.

The data (questionnaires, notes from both email, observations/ participation, both in-person and telephone interviews) from the small group settings of the Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, North Carolina, was recorded and coded to identify the common denominators that occurred in both small group settings as well as the discrepancy that emerged through trends, opinions, and a closer examination of the subject.

The data (questionnaires, notes from email, observation/participation, in-person interviews, zoom interviews, and telephone interviews) from the local pastors of various denominations from the Laurinburg, North Carolina area and the Western North Carolina Church of God pastors was recorded and coded to discern the commonality the developed as well as the inconsistency that surface among these groups.

The researcher has protected the collected data on a computer secured by a password. The researcher obtained IRB approval for this project (see Appendix IRB Approval Letter). Through the collection and conservation of all the data, an expected direct link will be discerned between the effectiveness of the small groups, the Hybrid Model, and the outcome.

Hybrid Model and Small Groups

The purpose of this research was to examine, analyze, and study church growth at the Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, North Carolina, through the implementation of the Hybrid Model for the blending of the larger cooperative group for the impact of the collective

traditional church and the smaller group setting for intimacy with the expectation for our church

to realize a greater level of family and community resulting in church growth and attendance. At

the conclusion of this study, if the results are positive, this research may be used for the growth

of institutions that would seek to implement the Hybrid Model.

Gathering and Events

The foundation of this study included both the corporate Sunday morning worship for

impact and the small groups that convene on Sunday evening to foster intimacy that set the

implementation of the Hybrid Model. The small groups entail the personal commitment of each

selected participant to be in their assigned group, share in the group activities, and contribute to

the discussion topic. The sessions for the small groups had a duration of thirteen-week meetings

once a week on Sunday evenings. The first small group met at the church fellowship at six p.m.

The second small group met off-campus from the Livingwater Church of God at the team

leaders' home on Sunday evening at six p.m. The second group also alternates between the team

leaders' home and another couple's home in Laurinburg, North Carolina. Both group one and

group two had a time of refreshments, sometimes a meal, snacks, and times of fellowship at their

designated locations. Each small group meeting took approximately two hours for the meal,

study, and discussion time.

Curriculum

The small group's Bible-based program of study was written, reviewed, and approved by

the pastor and an appointed committee comprised of the church membership. Mark A. Lamport

and Mary Ryanburger point out the importance of anchoring the ministry practice in biblical

insight and leadership development within small groups. The leaders were responsible for learning to keep the group on track and avoid erroneous conclusions and off-track ideas.[8]

Lamport and Ryanburger suggest three steps in this process: 1) Small groups should plan to use prepared Bible study materials that are relatively inductive or else simply study biblical passages inductively without guides. 2) The small group leader should prepare for discussion through personal study of the passage by consultation with Bible study aids. A firm grasp of the material and the passage's original meaning may bring a more fruitful discussion and accurate conclusion. 3) The small group leader is responsible for learning and practicing how to keep the group on track and away from erroneous conclusions and off-track ideas tactfully.[9] Jim Egli and Wei Wang advocate that thriving small groups are marked by four essential elements: a praying leader, an outward focus, loving relationships, and the empowerment of the group members. For churches to realize long-term group growth, three components should be in place: 1) the church should cultivate an atmosphere of prayer, 2) active involvement with leadership, and 3) equipping the members and the leaders.[10]

In the process of recruiting potential participants, the issue of spiritual formation was paramount. It was proposed the focus of relationships must be kept in balance with learning and application of biblical truth for greater growth as the results. Rynsburger and Lamport's voices concern the tendency for some small groups to irresponsibly operate by stressing the relationship over Scripture truth.[11] Rynsburger and Lamport sound the alarm that since the Reformation,

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[8] Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport, "All the Rage: How Small Groups are Really Educating Christian Adults Part Three: Anchoring Small Group Ministry Practice-Biblical Insights and Leadership Development," *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 2009): 112–15.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Jim and Wei Wang, "Factor that Fuel Small Groups Growth," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring, 2014): 131–51.

[11] Rynsburger and Lamport, "All the Rage," 112–115.

which called for the text of the Scripture to be in the common language of the common people, the Christian laity remains in large part uninformed about the Bible's content. Thus, when assessing the educational efforts of the Church in general, it is not unreasonable to conclude the myriad of flawed interpretations of the Bible may be related to defective educational practices. When the church fails to introduce its laypeople to methods and tools of theological reflection on the Scriptures, they are confined to their own opinions and interpretations.[12] Duke theologian Stanley Hauerwas weighs in on this complex and sensitive issue:

> No task is more important than for the church to take the Bible out of the hands of individual Christians in North America. North American Christians are trained to believe that they are capable of reading the Bible without spiritual or moral transformation. They read the Bible not as Christians, not as a people set apart, but as democratic citizens who think their sense is sufficient for the Scripture.[13]

Rynsburger and Lamport add that theological naivete or inexperience is due to a lack of critical thinking rooted in and modeled by the educational practices of the church.

The prospective small group participants are instructed on the unique learning in the church small group setting due to the distinct nature and function of the key subject matter, the Bible. It was stressed that the Bible is distinctive in a myriad of ways: 1) Scripture is uniquely authoritative. Unlike other secular or religious material, the Bible presents the final authority to all matters of faith and doctrine. The group leader's goal would be to stimulate discussion of biblical material to distinguish between the meaning (God's objective truth from the text) intended by the author of a passage and the array of possible personal applications. 2) Scripture makes small group learning exceptional in its demand for holistic life application. Studying the Bible is more than just a mere intellectual exercise; there must be a "bridging of the gap"

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[12] Ryanburger and Lamport, "All the Rage," 112–15.

[13] Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 15.

between principles and life, challenging each group member to be specific in determining individualized applications, and offering encouragement and support to help the group member's efforts to change.

3) Scripture as a study curriculum possesses the additional exclusivity of inherent power. The Bible is a living organism. The Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16), does not return void (Isaiah 55:11), and can transform learners through the renewal of their mind (Romans 12:2). On a practical level, the attitude toward the Word of God is that of faith and expectancy in its power to transform. Due to the transforming power of the Word of God, it is imperative to guard its place in the small group, not allowing other inferior elements to encroach on the assigned time and opportunity to study.[14] For an outline of the events (see Appendix A).

Implementation of the Intervention Design

This project was intended to yield research-based results that are threefold. First, implementing the Hybrid Model served as a catalyst to engage the Livingwater Church of God members to experience a renewed sense of family and community. Secondly, the renewed sense of family and community was conducive to growth, fellowship, involvement, and commitment in the morning worship (traditional/impact/corporate) and the evening service (hybrid/intimacy/small group). Finally, the church saw the metamorphosis of the passive members into active participants to stimulate the various gifts that were dormant in the body of Christ to enhance the impact of the local church.

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[14] Ryanburger and Lamport, "All the Rage," 112–15.

The Hybrid Model echoed the pattern of Act 2: 42–47, which serves as a template for the church to function as a community and family:

- The church had such unity (all things in common) in the corporate worship (daily in one accord in the temple) as well as in the small groups (breaking bread from house to house)

- Significant growth could be realized (the Lord added daily such as should be saved).

- The Hybrid Model fostered a sense of belonging that translated into the involvement of the passive member metamorphosed into an active participant.

<div align="center">Evaluation Process</div>

This project consisted of two small groups that met for thirteen weeks. Small groups met once a week at the church fellowship hall on Sunday at 6 p.m. for thirteen weeks. Small group two met once a week at the team leaders' residence on Sunday at 6 p.m. for thirteen weeks. At the end of the thirteen-week study, a questionnaire was given to each participant comprised of twenty-two questions and a comment section in small groups one and two. The questionnaires were analyzed to find common themes, experiences, and interactions that appeared dominant and prevalent in both groups and the discrepancy and inconsistencies that emerged within the study.

Selected local pastors from the Laurinburg, North Carolina area and selected Church of God pastors were invited to participate in a questionnaire survey and to be followed up in an interview. Each pastor in this study was given a questionnaire of twenty-one questions and a comment section to further their observation and analysis of their local church. A follow-up interview was administered in person, by email, telephone, and via Zoom to obtain a more thorough and systematic result. The information gleaned from the questionnaires and interviews was then reviewed and coded to discern the emergence and development of commonality of

themes between the various churches as well as the deviation that occurred between the different churches.

Approved by the Liberty University Review Board, several distinct kinds of sampling were taken in the form of observation, questionnaire, and interview from two small groups from the Livingwater Church of God; selected pastors from various denominations from the Laurinburg, North Carolina area, and selected Church of God pastors from the Western North Carolina Jurisdiction. The collective samplings or "triangulation data" captured the different nuances and dimensions to cross-check the accuracy of the same phenomenon of this project. The importance of this project was to design an effective program grounded in proven techniques and strong qualities that would be viable in time and still quantifiable. The qualitative method was employed to determine the gathered data. The observations, questionnaires, interviews, and other samplings were coded by recognizing reoccurring themes, experiences, and interactions.

Conclusion

At the end of the thirteen-week study and all the questionnaires were reviewed from both small group one and small group two, three main common observations seemed to arise as prominent in both groups: 1) A sense of family or relationship was strengthened 2) A sense of community was in both the small group setting as well as the cooperative body of the local church was prevalent 3) A clearer understanding of the biblical issues and the application of the biblical principles was observed in the demeanor, conduct, and attitude of participants.

The response in the pastor's group, both the local area pastors of various denominations in Laurinburg, North Carolina, and the selected Western North Carolina Church of God pastors yield great commonalities as well as some unique discrepancies. The questionnaires yielded four discernable common denominators in both the local area pastors in Laurinburg, North Carolina,

and the selected Western North Carolina Church of God pastor: 1) The Hybrid Model provided an atmosphere of intimacy, 2) conducive to building relationships, 3) personal involvement and 4) spiritual growth/maturity. However, there were some common discrepancies expressed and noted by the local and Western North Carolina Church of God selected ministers: 1) Cliques that tended to develop and divide, 2) The problem of staying on the subject matter to render maximum results and to realize the objective of the small group and the Hybrid Model.

The qualitative method was employed to determine the gathered data. The observations, questionnaires, interviews, and other samplings were coded by the discernment of reoccurring themes, experiences, and interactions. Chapter 4 yields deeper and more detailed insights into the above-mentioned general observations.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The focus of this research was to examine, analyze, implement, and explore the effects of the Hybrid Model on the growth of the Livingwater Church of God through the impact of the traditional church setting and the intimacy of the small group setting. The participants engaged in this research experienced a greater awareness and focus on involvement in the local church. The Hybrid model influenced and impacted the collective body of the traditional church and the intimacy of the small group setting that provided insight into the crucial problem of declivity in the issue of attendance at the Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, North Carolina. This research was expanded to include selected local ministers of various denominations in Laurinburg, North Carolina, and to selected Church of God ministers in the Western North Carolina jurisdiction to realize the commonality and discrepancy of the attendance declension issue among other churches.

In Chapter 1 contains the presentation of the problem: church attendance waning imperceptibly in the Wednesday and Sunday evening services with infectious effects. This problem has adversely affected new converts, discipleship, and the morale of the church in general and threatens to unravel the prevailing feeling of family and a sense of community that, in essence, affects the general health of the whole church. Chapter 2 includes a literature review provides a myriad of material on church attendance and small groups. However, the subject of church attendance declension is a controversial topic with no definitive remedies for this

universal phenomenon. Chapter three revealed the methodology and intervention to address the issue.

Chapter 4 will demonstrate the results yielded from the diverse intervention tools, the insights from the data analysis, reflections and thoughts on the research findings, and the strategy used to reach the desired and expected results. The researcher anticipated and sought an explanation and strategy to impede the attendance decline and bring about a transformation through the practical application of the Hybrid Model. The surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and small groups have offered insights and answers that justified a change or transformation in the church protocol.

Survey/Questionnaire Results

Laity Survey Data

Surveys/questionnaires were distributed to two distinctive groups: 1) Laity and 2) Pastors. Twenty-two surveys/questionnaires were distributed to the laity/ participants of the two small groups at the Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, North Carolina. Out of the twenty-two surveys/questionnaires distributed among the small group laity participants, fifteen were returned to the researcher. The survey/questionnaire given in the study yielded some insightful results and established the need for the intimacy and impact offered in the hybrid model.

The first five questions of the laity survey/questionnaire focused on the participants' history, attitude, and consistency (attendance) related to the local church. The first question of the survey/questionnaire gave the history of participants in relation to the Livingwater Church of God.

- How long have you been attending your present church?

    Of the fifteen surveys received, 60%, or 9 participants have attended their present church for 10 years or more, 20%, or three participants have attended their church for 5–10 years, and 20%, or 3 participants have been attending their present church for 1 year or more.
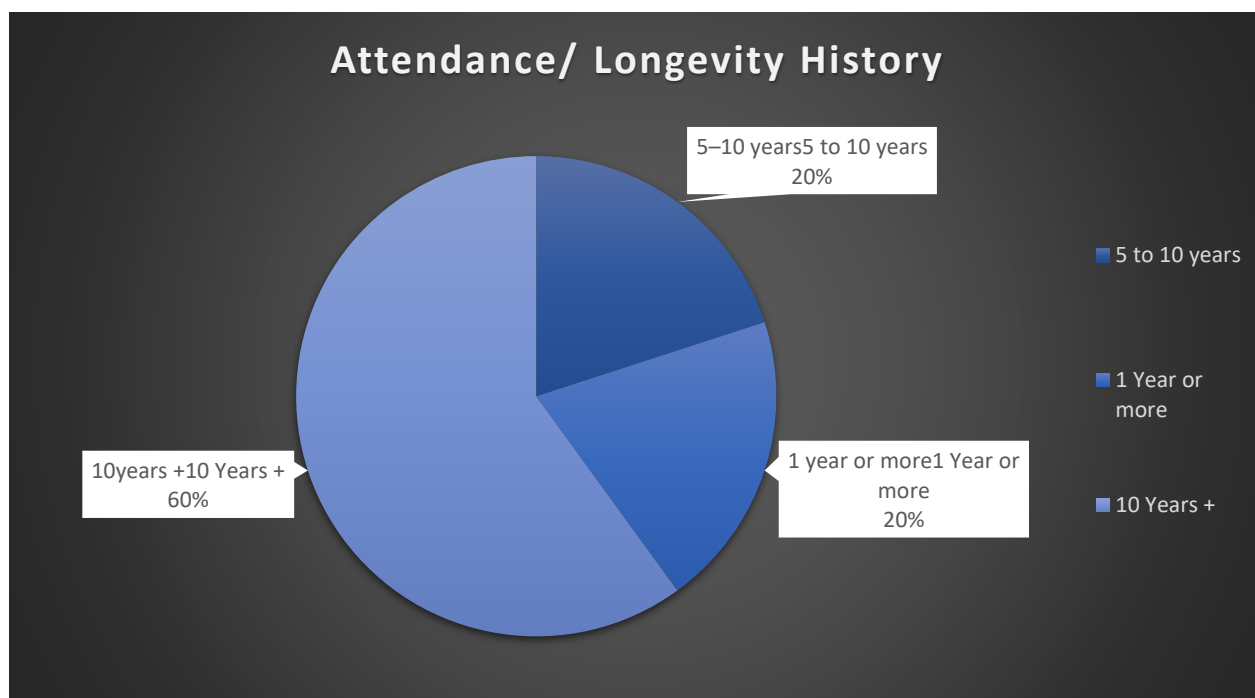

Figure 4.1 Attendance/longevity

The second question on the survey/ questionnaire helps develop a better insight into the participants' mindset and viewpoint of consistent church attendance against the backdrop of modern culture.

- On a scale of 1–10 (1 the lowest and 10 the highest), how important do you feel regular (consistent) church attendance is in our modern culture?

Of the fifteen surveys/questionnaires returned to the researcher, twelve participants, or 80%, gave the highest rating of ten to express their sentiments of the importance of regular or consistent church attendance in the present culture. There was one participant who gave a rating of 9, or 7%, and another participant gave an 8, or 7%, to the importance of consistent church attendance, and a 7 assigned by another participant constituted approximately 6% to the importance of consistent church attendance in modern culture.

The third and fourth questions of the survey/questionnaire examine the number of services offered at their local church in contrast to how many services the participants attend regularly. Questions three and four are given below, respectively.

- How many regular worship (opportunities) services does your present church offer in a week?

- How many worship services offered do you regularly attend at your present church?

Out of fifteen participants, their local church provided an average of three services a week; 67% indicated attendance in all three services regularly, 20% indicated they attend two of the service provided regularly, and 13% reported regular attendance to all worship services including a separate prayer service offered on a Monday night.

The fifth question attempts to probe the participants' attitudes concerning their attendance and commitment at the local church on a personal level. In Acts 2:41–47, Luke (author of the book of Acts) provides a picture of a model congregation centered around the teachings of the apostles, fellowship, "breaking of bread and the prayers," Christian love, and a

spirit of equality and shared responsibility ("all things in common").[115] Paul Silas Peterson points

out, "This spirit of equality has another name in the Christian tradition: The Priesthood of the

believers (Revelation 5:10: 'You have made them to be a kingdom and priests; 1 Peter 2:9: 'you

are a chosen race, a royal priesthood; Acts 6:2: 'the whole community; Acts 15:12: 'the whole

assembly…').[116] Silas emphasizes the responsibility of the whole congregation for the work of

the ministry as an essential theme to be reconsidered in the present day, and the laity be involved

and given more responsibility.[117]

- Question 5 gives five choices to the participants to describe their commitment and
  attendance at their local assembly; the choices were as follows: 1) Random (hit and
  miss), 2) Casual (one service weekly), 3) Regular Attendance (present but not involved)
  4) Connected (participate in certain events), and 5) Passionate (A priority).

Fourteen out of the fifteen participants responded to question 5. 64% indicated the choice

of priority in their commitment and attendance, 21% indicated the choice of connected, 7%

identified as a regular attendee, and 7% identified as a casual attendee.

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[115] Paul Silas Peterson, "Christianity in the Western World after the Decline," in *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World Interpretations and Responses*, ed. Paul Silas Peterson (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 256.

[116] Ibid

[117] Peterson, "Christianity in the Western World after the Decline," 256.
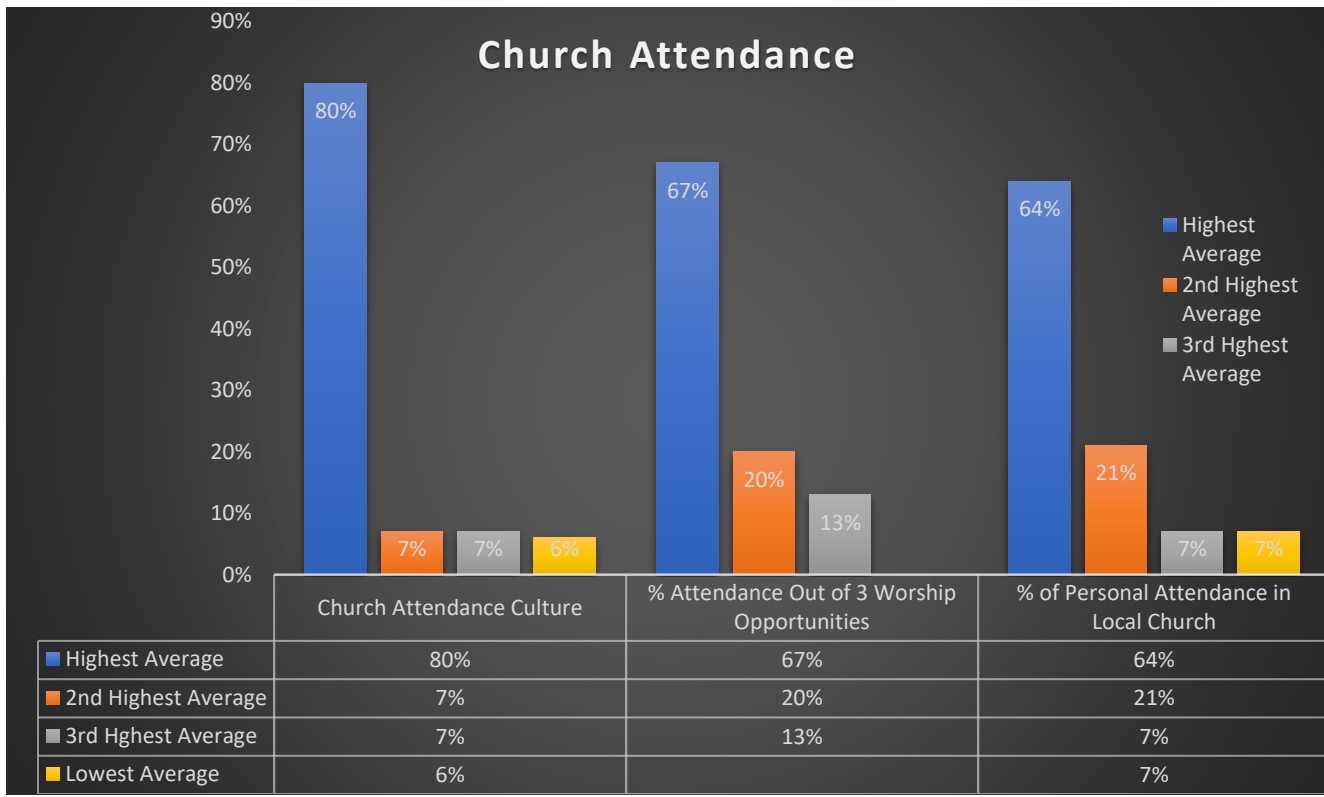
Figure 4.2 Church attendance

Questions six through nine examined the participants' viewpoints on the mode of worship, participants' attraction to the Livingwater Church of God, and the participants' assessment of any updates to the format of the worship services.

- Question 6) was "What would you consider the mode of worship at your present church?"

  There were four choices the participants could choose from to answer the question; they were as follows: 1) Traditional, 2) Contemporary, 3) Hybrid and 4) Other (specify). Out of fifteen responses from the participants, 5 participants, or 33%, chose not to answer, 5 participants or 33% viewed the mode as traditional, 2 individuals or 13% indicated the mode of worship as contemporary, 2 participants or 13% indicated the mode

of worship as Hybrid, and one individual, or 6% as other without any specifying comment.

- Question 7 asked, "What is your attraction to your local church?"

  There were seven choices given to the participants; they are as follows: 1) Music Program, 2) Pastor 3) Family/Friends 4) Strong Programs (e.g., children's church, men's fellowship, youth program, etc.), 5) Spiritual Growth, 6) Ministry Opportunities, and 7) Other.

The participant could check more than one choice on question 7. Out of those surveyed, 42% indicated spiritual growth was the attraction, 26% indicated family and friend was the attraction, 16% stated the attraction was the pastor, 11% was attracted by the music program, and ministry opportunity was 5%.
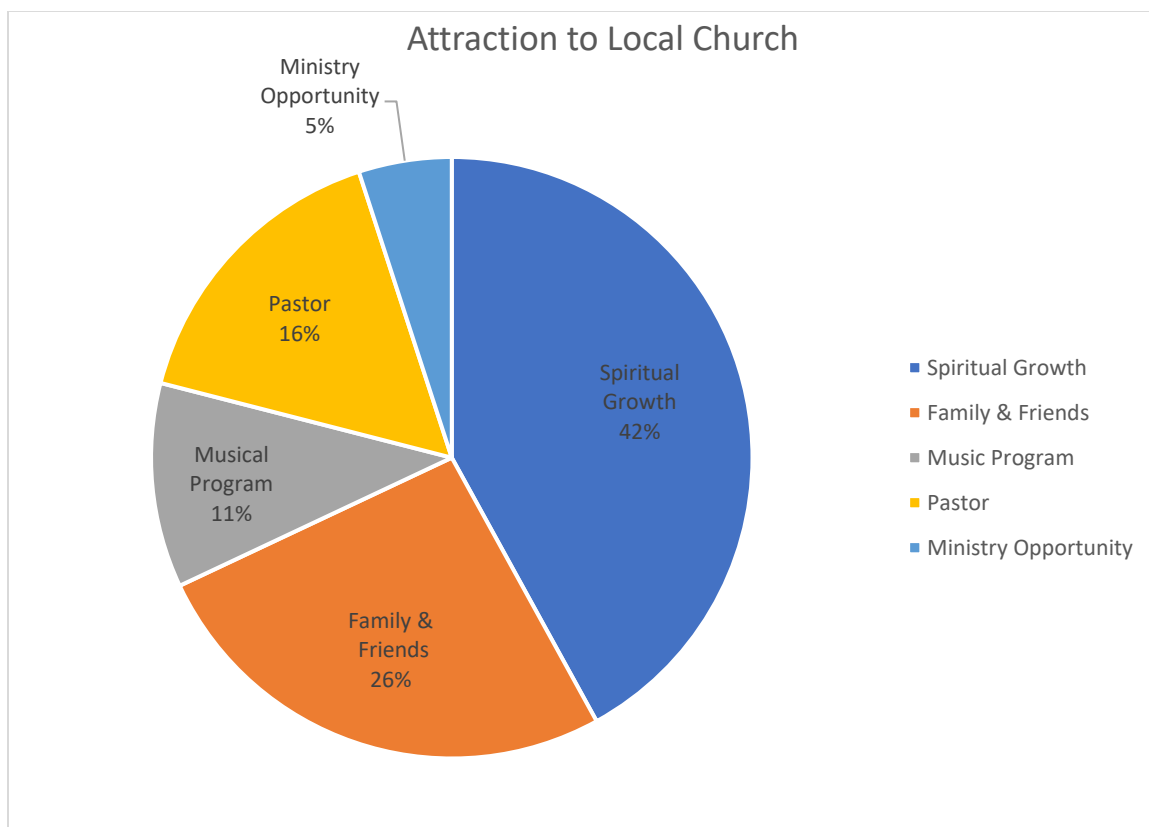
Figure 4.3 Attraction to local church

- Question 8– asked participants to describe the format (order of service) of the different

  service (s) offered at your local church. Three options were given for this question: 1)

  Redundant, 2) Varied, and 3) Other.

  Out of fifteen responses, fourteen individuals, or 93% chose varied as the format of their

  local assembly, and 1 individual, or 7% indicated other for the format of their local

  church.

- Question 9– was "On a scale 1–10, do you agree that the present-day church needs an

  upgrade in the format of the worship service?"

Out of fifteen responses, 3 participants, or 20% indicated 8, 2 participants, or 13% chose 5, 2 participants, or 13% chose 1, 3 participants, or 20% chose 4, 1 individual, or 6% chose 3, and another individual, or 6% chose 9, 3 participants, or 20% did not answer.

Figure 4.4 Format upgrade

Questions ten and eleven seek to assess the participant's perspective on the sense of family or community that may or may not exist at the Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, North Carolina. The participant's responses to the survey/questionnaire indicated a keen sense of family or community was prevalent at the Livingwater Church of God.

- Question 10 asked, "With 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, do you feel your local church has a sense of family or community?"

Out of the fifteen responses, 5 individuals, or 33% responded with a 10, 5 individuals, or 33% responded with a 7, 2 participants, or 13% indicated a 9, 2 participants, 13% indicated an 8, 1 individual or 7% replied with a 1.
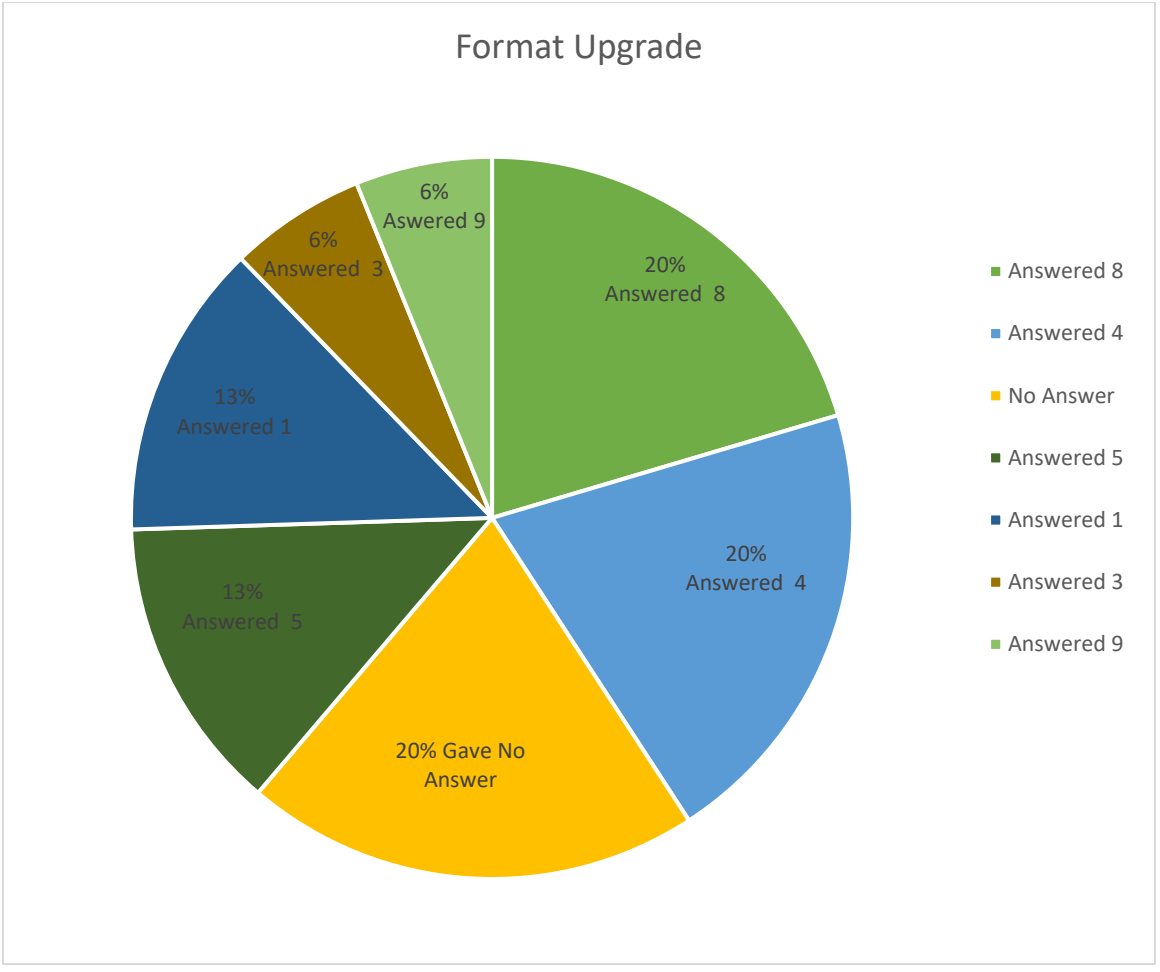
- Question 11 asked, "With 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how satisfied are you with the feeling or the sense of family or community in the Livingwater Church of God?"

Fifteen responses yielded 6 participants, or 40% replied with 10, 5 participants, or 33% indicated a 9, 2 participants, or 13% indicated an 8, and two participants who constituted 13% registered a 2. Joseph H. Hellerman expressed the importance of recapturing the social vision of the early Christian church as a strong community and surrogate family.[118] The Christian community established by Paul, Peter, and the early church leaders in the Roman Empire was a strong group, a surrogate family unit in which the priority is placed upon the good of the group over the individual's desires and objectives.[119] Hellerman continued to point out that this collectivist worldview resulted in some relational and behavioral expectations that brought about a distinctive to the Christian church in the Greco-Roman world.[120] This kind of social solidarity that the early church displayed and reflected in the strong-group family values eventually rought

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[118] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, xxviii-xxx.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

about the demise of the entire pagan empire.[121] This is the power of community that God

intended.[122]

Spiritual formation is usually found in the framework of family and community. Joseph

H. Hellerman advocates it is paramount for people to remain connected to the church family to

grow in self-understanding and mature in their ability to relate in healthy ways to God and to

their fellow human beings. Long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine

progress in the Christian life.[123] This is reflected in the participants' responses about the

importance of the framework of family in their local church.
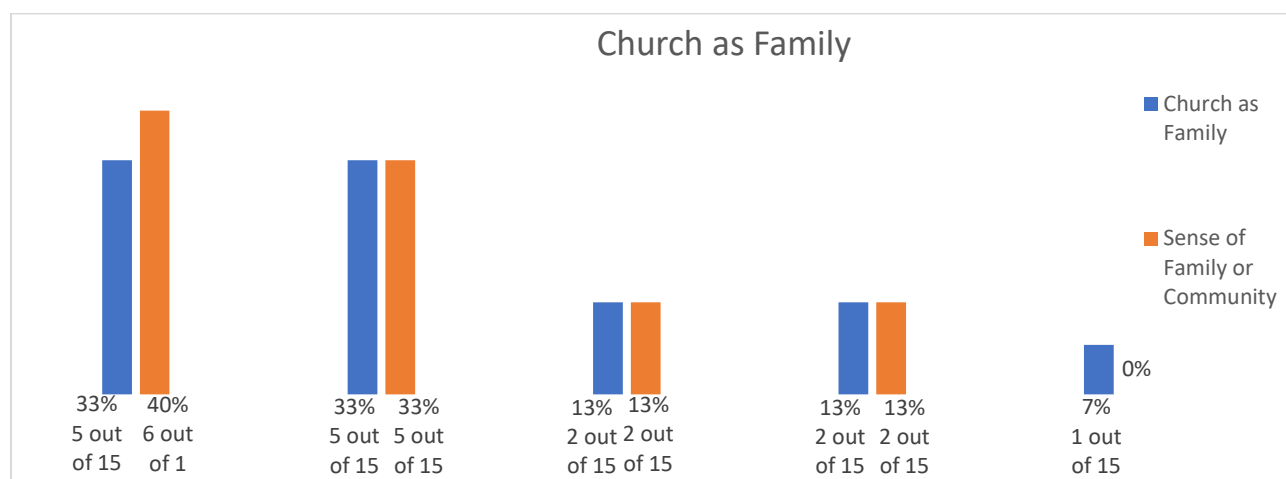
Figure 4.5 Church as family

Questions 12 through 15 focused on the attitude, effectiveness, and benefits realized and

gleaned from the small group setting for the participants. In the book *Hybrid Model: The Fusion

of Intimacy and Impact*, author Dave Browning offered this insight, "Small groups are a side

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[121] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, xxviii-xxx.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

door into the church …and the weekend worship is the front door of the church."[124] Browning continues to point out some individuals are attracted by the small group or fellowships and then find their way into public worship; others are attracted by the large gatherings, and we try to funnel them into small groups.[125] According to Browning, this synergetic approach yielded rapid growth in his church in the early 1990s.[126]

- Question 12– was "With 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, How would you rate your small group experience?"

Reviewing fifteen responses, 7 participants, or 47% responded with a 10, 5 participants, or 33% responded with a 9, 2 participants, or 13% responded with an 8, and 1 individual, or 7% responded with a 1.

- Question 13– asked, "What was the highlight of the small group?"

Four choices were available: A) Fellowship, B) Stimulating discussions, C) Relevant topics, D) Other. Out of fifteen submitted Survey/Questionnaires, 3 participants, or 20% responded that relevant topics were the highlight of the small groups, 5 participants, or 33% responded that fellowship was the highlight of the small groups, and 7 participants, or 46% responded stimulating discussions were the highlight of the small group.

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[124] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 76.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.
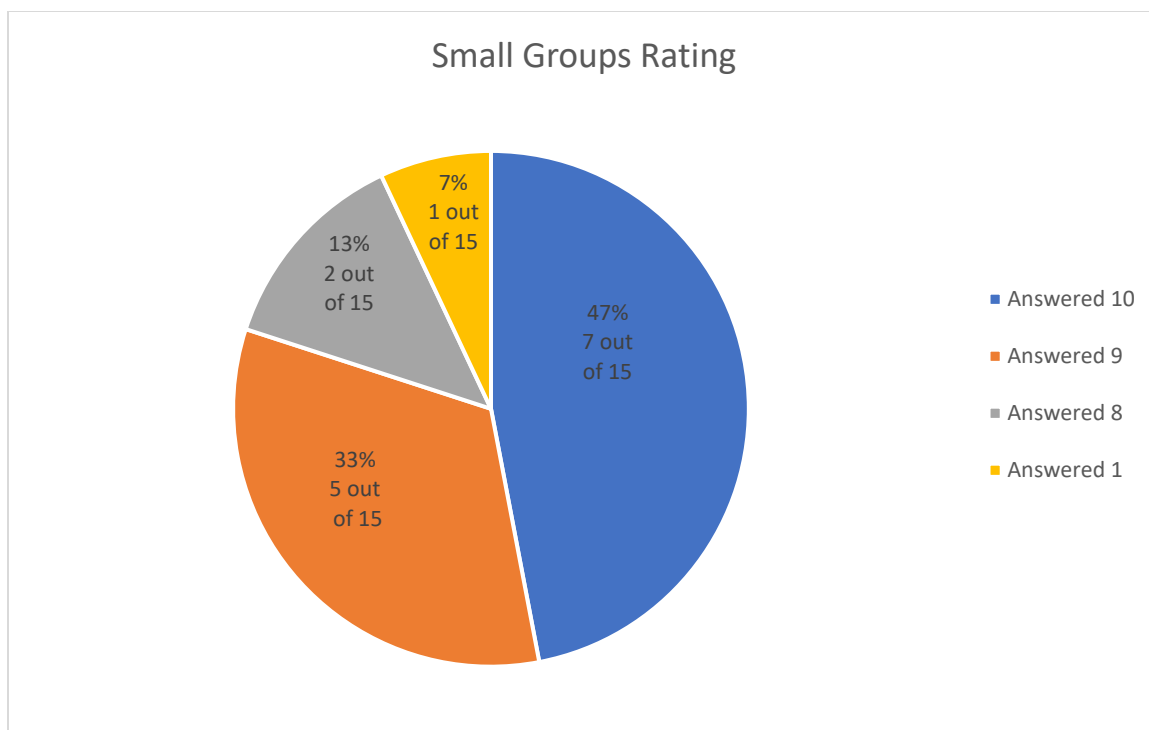
Figure 4.6 Small groups rating

- Question 14– was (with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you agree that small group has expanded your biblical knowledge?"

Reviewing fifteen responses, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 10, 4 participants, or 27% responded with a 9, 5 participants, or 33% responded with an 8, 1 participant, or 6% responded with a 6, 2 participants, or13% responded with a 5, and 1 participant, or 6% responded with a 4.

- Question 15–asked participants to rank (with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) on a scale of 1–10, "Do you feel that the small groups have a sense of family and community?"

Fifteen Surveys/Questionnaires were submitted: 3 participants, or 20% responded with a 10, 6 participants, or 40% responded with a 9, 3 participants, or 20% responded with an 8. 1

participant, or 7% responded with a 7, and 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 6, and 1participant, or 7% responded with a 5.
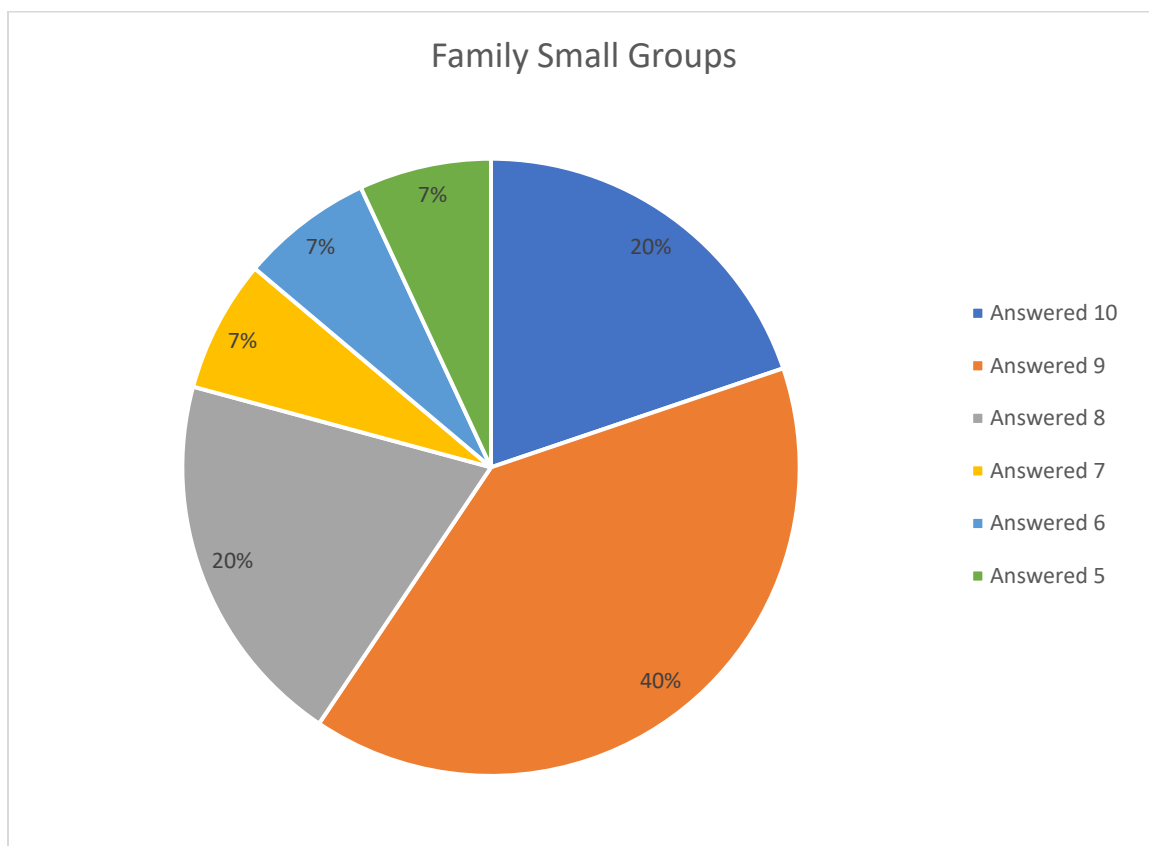
Figure 4.7 Family small groups

Results from questions 12 through 15 established the importance of the intimate setting of the small group. The fellowship for many participants was viewed as a highlight of the small group session. While the survey/questionnaire rated the fellowship at 33% and the stimulating discussion at 46%, the two combine to complement one another to produce the desired intimacy. Neil Cole, in his book, *"Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church,"* conveyed that the message of the kingdom of God has always flown best on the wings of relationship.[127] Cole also

[127] Neil Cole, *Church 3.0*, 29.

said he often used an informal survey to ask people how they first received the gospel. The results were that 95% of those surveyed usually came through a close friend, relative, coworker, or classmate.[128] Thus, the importance of the small group or an intimate setting that is conducive and has the potential to build strong relationships that lead to a life-changing process that has no limitations to our growth by blending both small group (intimacy) and the traditional church (impact) producing the Hybrid Model.

Questions 16 through 21 focused on the effect of the small group in relation to the traditional setting of the corporate body of the Livingwater Church of God. The personal effects upon the participants were explored to determine any change in attitude, behavior, and participation in the local church setting.

- Question 16– was (On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) "Do you feel that small groups (intimate settings) have enhanced the traditional church setting (cooperative setting)?"

With fifteen surveys/questionnaires submitted, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 10, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 9, 4 participants, or 27% responded with an 8, 4 participants, or 27% responded with a 7, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 2, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 1.

- Question 17– required people to identify (On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you feel the intimate setting of the small groups aided in forging a closer connection with the cooperative setting of the traditional service of the church?"

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[128] Ibid.

Out of the fifteen surveys/questionnaires submitted, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 10, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 9, 4 participants, or 27% responded with an 8, 3 participants, or 20% responded with a 7, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 5, 1 participant, or 7% response with a 2, and 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 1, and 1 participant did not answer.

Both questions 16 and 17 have rendered similar results in the response of the participants that indicated a sense of the significance of the small groups (intimacy) concerning traditional church (impact), which could be compared and described in terms of a symbiotic relationship where the small groups and traditional exist together in a way that benefits the whole. In their book Sticky Church, Larry Osborne and Maurice England stated, "A strong small group ministry can help a church become more authentic in their relationships and far more disciplined in its spiritual disciplines."[129] Osborne and England continued to assert that small groups can help curtail and even break the cycle of the "back door" losses of the traditional church through the honesty and transparency of the structure of the small groups.[130] Dave Browning echoes a similar sentiment in his book*, Hybrid Church: The Fusion of the Intimacy and Impact, he* stated, "Small groups are a side door into the church."[131] Browning contended that the weekend worship is a front door into the church. Thus, some people are drawn in by the small group of small fellowship and then find their path to the public or traditional church (cooperative setting); others are fascinated by the large or cooperative gatherings, and we try to direct them into a small

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[129] Osborne and England, *Sticky Church*, 41–42.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 75.

group.[132] According to Dave Browning, this synergetic approach or hybrid model offers

excellent potential for church growth, as Browning experienced in his pastorate in the 1990s.[133]
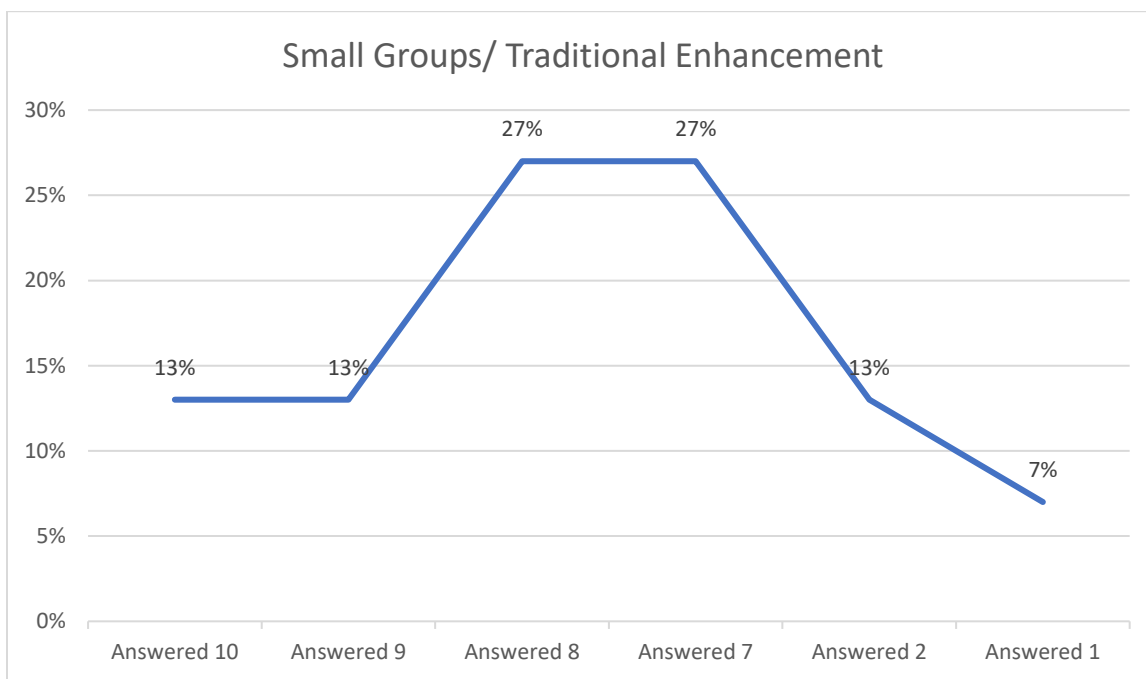
Figure 4.8 Small groups/traditional enhancement

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[132] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 75.

[133] Ibid.
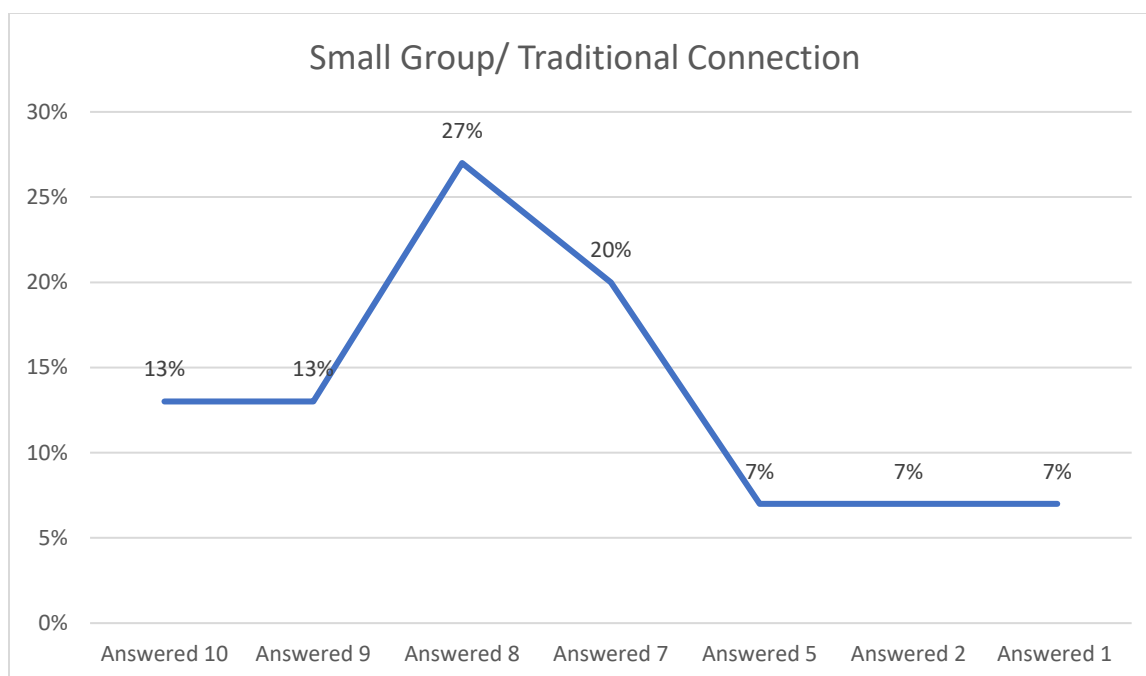
Figure 4.9 Small group/traditional connection

Questions 18–21 sought to examine any change in the participation of the individuals involved in the small group setting. Larry Osborne and Maurice England observed that in most churches, there are limited opportunities for high-impact ministry and life-on-life ministry. Small groups open many new opportunities for involvement in ministry.[134] When discipleship training is offered, it is also paramount to provide a platform for the participants to perform and serve in their training capacity.[135]

- Question 18–was (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you feel that your opportunities to minister were augmented with the implementation of the small group?"

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[134] Osborne and England, *Sticky Church*, 39.

[135] Ibid.

Out of fifteen surveys/questionnaires, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 10, 3 participants, or 20% responded with a 9, 3 participants, or 20% responded with an 8, 3 participants, or 20% responded with a 7, 2 participants, or 13% responded with 6, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 3, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 1, and 1 participant did answer the question.

- Question 20– asked (On a scale 0f 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you feel more involved or connected in your local assembly due to your interaction within the small groups?"

From the fifteen submitted surveys/questionnaires, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 10, 6 participants, or 40% responded with a 9, 2 participants, or 13% responded with an 8, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 7, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 5, and 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 4, and 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 1.
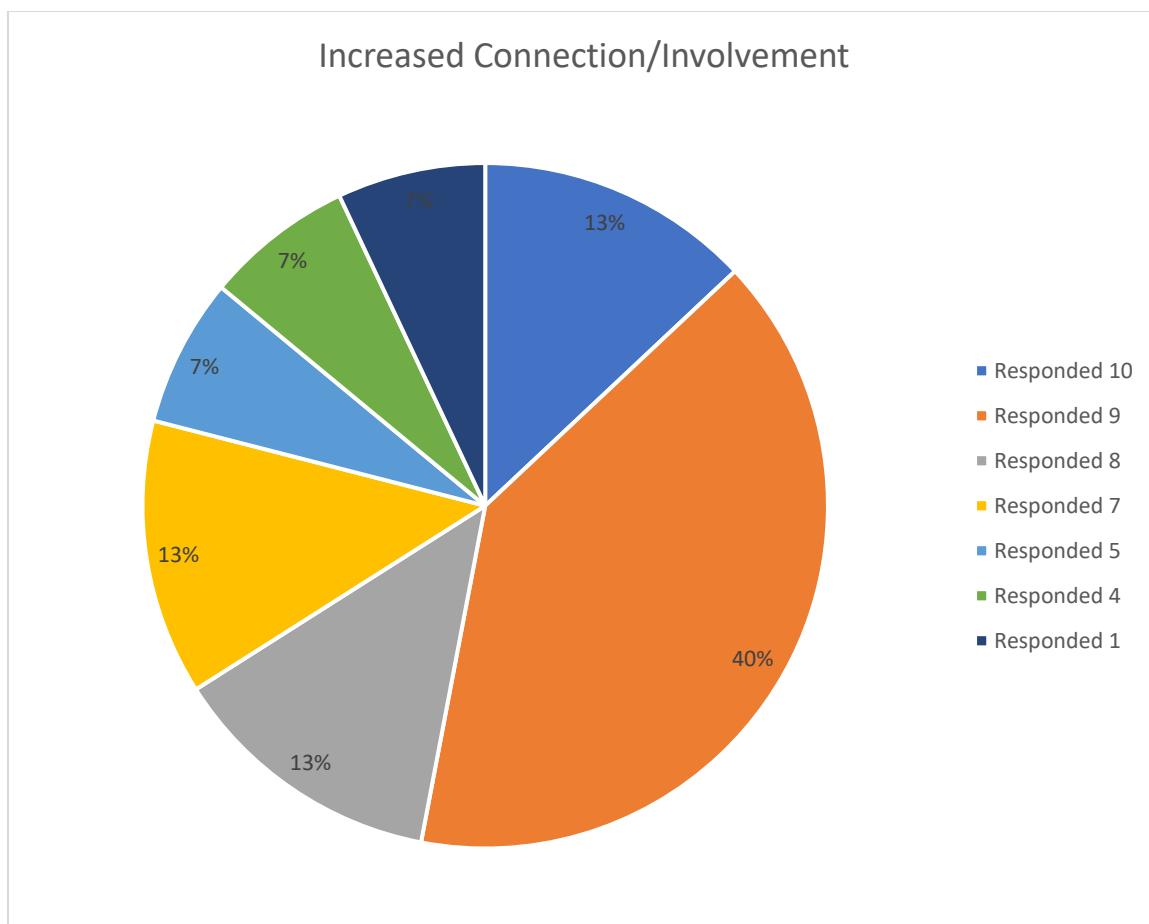
Figure 4.10 Increased connection/involvement

- Question 21– required ranking (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) "Do you feel that the intimate setting of the small groups has strengthened you spiritually?"

Out of fifteen surveys/questionnaires, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 10, 3 participants, or 20% responded with a 9, 6 participants, or 40% responded with an 8, 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 6, 2 participants, or 13% responded with a 5, and 1 participant, or 7% responded with a 1.
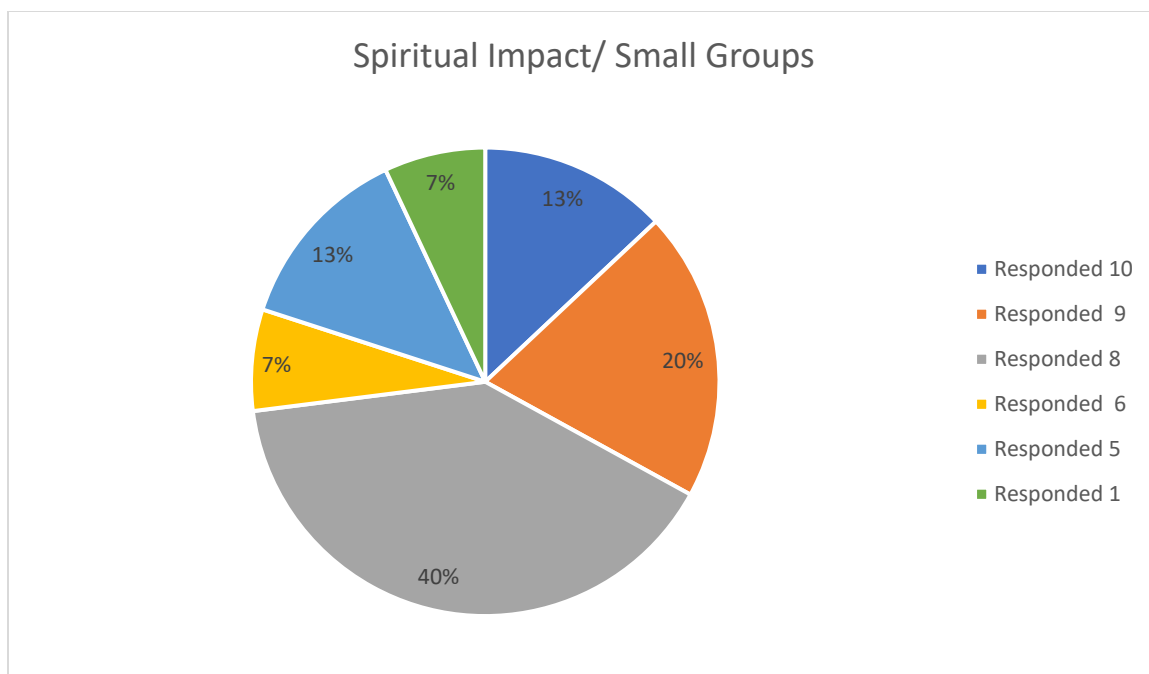
Figure 4.11 Spiritual impact/small group

The hybrid model of combining the intimacy of the small group setting with the impact

of the traditional cooperative body setting has brought about several significant and surprising

changes to the Livingwater Church of God. The intimate settings of the small groups have

fostered many of the participants to build some substantial relationships that transcend the small

groups and translated into the traditional church in ways of being a more unified and healthy

body. It is easy for people to come to the same church and find it filled with strangers where they

may know one another's name and have a casual acquaintance, but that is all. The Hybrid Model

has helped develop respect and friendship on a deeper level that brought about a deep sense of

family within the church. Larry Osborne's book, *Sticky Teams: Keep your Leadership and Staff

on the Same Page*, advocates that concentrating on developing camaraderie produces some rich

and beneficial dividends.[136] The researcher has observed this truth and phenomenon within the

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[136] Osborne, *Sticky Team*, 2010), 21.

local church at Livingwater Church of God. For example, a shy, mild-mannered lady, who was

relatively new at the Livingwater Church of God, attended a small group when it started. From

the small group platform, her ministry gift of hospitality came to the forefront and proved a

blessing to the small group she attended but expanded to other areas of the church that benefitted

both the cooperative body and other private individuals from the servanthood of this one lady.

This servant-hearted lady is now established as part of the Livingwater Church of God ministry.

The small group is not only to offer the participants mere exposure to knowledge of

God's Word but help them to obtain the actual knowledge that leads to an encounter with the

living Word to bring about transformation. Question 21 of the Surveys/Questionnaire (laity)

indicated that 77% of the participants responded with 8s through 10s that they were strengthened

spiritually through the ministry of the small group setting. The spiritual renewal in many of the

participants may be attributed to the Bible-centered discussion. To develop the quality of the

discussion, the group leaders would endeavor to make sure the discussion questions were given

out to the participant before the next small group meeting. The team leaders worked hard to

encourage the participants to seek out and come into the group with the answers to questions to

become more engaged in the small group setting. It was noted that one of the most effective

ways to have more participants engaged was by having the team leader periodically ask various

individuals in the group to read what they had written down.

Larry Osborne offered valuable insight into how the homework of the small group should

consist of types of questions: 1) Getting to know me, 2) Into the Bible, and 3) Application. The

getting-to-know-me questions afford a non-threatening look into the past and current life

situations. While the questions may appear to be worthless and silly to many people, they greatly

help to expedite the process of getting to know everyone's history and background in a harmless

but enlightening way. Into the Bible questions take the group into the biblical passages of the

discussion to a deeper level of understanding. The Application section is the third type of

question designed to take the biblical passage and drive them home to deal with attitudes and

life-change issues.[137]

Clergy Survey Data

The second set of Surveys/Questionnaires was given out to members of the clergy. There

were twenty-two Surveys/Questionnaires distributed to Church of God pastors in Western North

Carolina in addition to pastors of various denominations from the Laurinburg, North Carolina

area. Out of the twenty-two Surveys/Questionnaires distributed to the pastor/clergy group, there

was a total of eleven pastors who returned the Survey/Questionnaires to the researcher. It

consisted of twenty-two questions in which valuable insight and input were gleaned from the

pastoral groups that demonstrated and warranted the transformational benefit of the

implementation of the Hybrid Model in their local church.

The first three questions of the pastoral Survey/Questionnaire focused on the pastors'

length of history at their respective churches, the available worship opportunities offered, and the

general observance of the atmosphere of their local church in regard to the Hybrid Model. The

first question of the Survey/Questionnaire established the history of the pastors' tenure at their

respective churches.

- Question 1) was "How long have you been pastoring your present church?"

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[137] Osborne and England, *Sticky Church*, 67–68.

Of the eleven surveys received, 82%, or 9 pastors have been serving their present church for 10 years or more, 9%, or 1 pastor has been serving their church for 1–5 years, and 9%, or 1 pastor has been serving their congregation for 1 year or less.
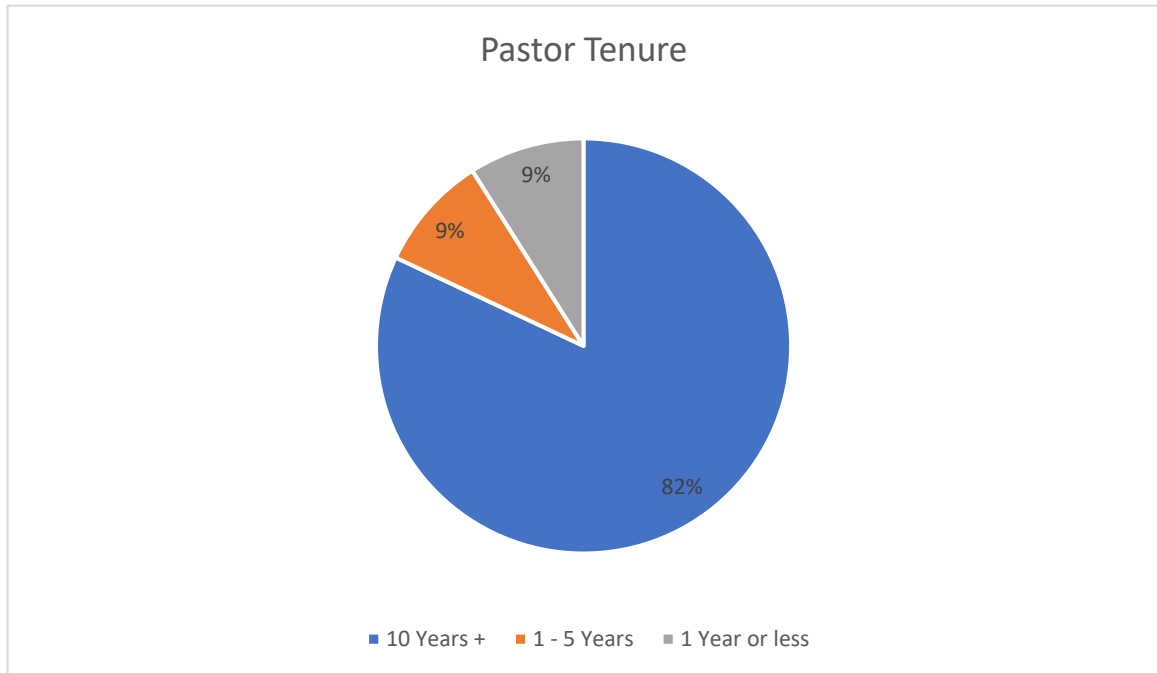
Figure 4.12 Pastor tenure

The second question of the survey/questionnaire established the number of worship opportunities afforded on a weekly basis as the respective churches.

- Question 2) asked, "How many worship opportunities does your church offer each week?"

Of the eleven surveys received, 55%, or 6 pastors had 3 worship opportunities offered each week, and 45%, or 5 pastors had 2 worship opportunities offered each week.

Worship Opportunities

45%

55%

■ 3 Services ■ 2 Services
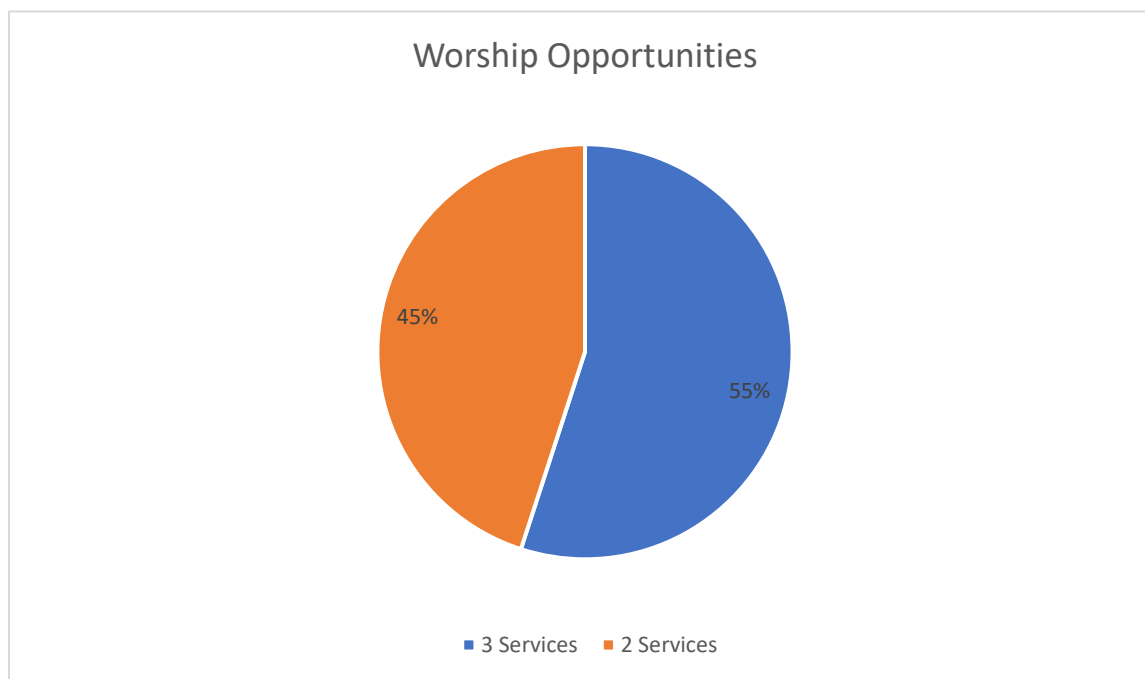
Figure 4.13 Worship opportunities

The third question of the Survey/Questionnaire asked the pastors' opinion to evaluate the effectiveness of the hybrid model to encourage an atmosphere conducive to the feeling of being a family.

- Question 3) was, "In your opinion, how effective is the hybrid model (Traditional service/small group) to foster a family atmosphere?"

Of the eleven surveys returned to the researcher, 45%, or 5 pastors rated the hybrid model as good to foster a family atmosphere, 36%, or 4 pastors gave the hybrid model as excellent to foster a family atmosphere, 18%, 2 pastors rated the hybrid model as fair in fostering a family atmosphere.

Questions 4 through 7 seek to establish a link to the sense of family demonstrated in the early New Testament that may be reflected or replicated in the present-day church through the implementation of the hybrid model in the respective churches of the pastors surveyed.

- Question 4) had participants rate, (On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 as the highest) "The early church considered themselves as a family, do you agree this New Testament sense of 'family' should be a paramount goal for the local church today?"

Gleaned from the eleven surveys collected, 82%, or 9 pastors gave the highest rating of 10 to concur that the sense of family is a paramount goal for the local church, 9%, 1 pastor gave a 9 to the sense of family as a paramount goal, and 9%, or 1 pastor assigned a rating of 7 to the sense of family is a paramount goal.

- Question 5) measured, (On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you agree that your church is a New Testament 'family' model?"

Of the eleven surveys received, 27%, 3 pastors rated their respective churches as a 10, 27%, or 3 pastors regarded their respective churches as a 9, 9%, or 1 pastor assigned an 8 to their church, 18%, or 2 pastors considered their churches as a 7, 9%, or 1 pastor considered their church as a 6, and 9%, or 1 pastor assigned their church as a 4.

- Question 6) ranked, (On a scale of 1–10, with 1 as the lowest and 10 as the highest), "Do you agree that the sense of family/community encourages people to forge relationships?"

From the eleven surveys received, 82%, or 9 pastors agreed that a sense of family encourages individuals to forge relationships, 9%, or 1 pastor assigned a 9 to the forging of relationships in the sense of family/community, 9%, or 1 pastor assigned a 7 to the forging of relationships in a sense of community/family.

- Question 7) used a Likert scale (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you feel the New Testament way of thinking like a family provides a foundation for a resurgence in the commitment to the local body?"

From the eleven surveys collected, 73%, or 8 pastors assigned a 10 to the mindset or sense of family/community provides a foundation to a resurgence of commitment, 18%, or 2 pastors rated a 9 to thinking like a family to rekindling commitment, and 9%, or 1 pastor gave an 8 to the connection of thinking like family/community and relationships.

Neil Cole points out that Jesus sent out disciples in teams of two (Matthew 10:1–2; Luke 10:1), and He invested in the inner circle of Peter, James, John, and on occasion Andrew, himself, which collectively made a team of five. He lived every day with a spiritual family of twelve disciples which He poured Himself into for the continuation of the ministry.[138] Cole advocates that it is imperative to follow Christ's example of the various leadership roles one may realize in the church and joins them to a number of people one can influence in those roles. The church needs to be seen as a place of connections of people for a myriad of purposes and in groups whose size varies with the purpose.[139] Genesis 1:28 introduces the original family and sets the divine order, template, and protocol of the family and respective relationships. Thus,

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[138] Cole, *Church 3.0,* 158.

[139] Ibid.

Neil Cole advocates in his book, *Church 3.0: Upgrades to the Future Church,* that when God chose a place of nurture and development, He chose a family. Cole stated, "From the beginning, it is clear that the best environment for growth and development is a family setting."[140]

Questions 8 through 12 probes the commitment level that evolves from the family/community setting fostered by the implementation of the Hybrid Model. Lyle E. Larson and J. Walter Goltz stated, "It was found that church attendance, duration in marriage, and satisfaction with family life are the major predictors of structural commitment."[141] According to Larson and Goltz, The importance of religion in family life is apparent.[142]

- Question 8) evaluated subjects, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Does the small group experience produce a level of intimacy that translates into the cooperative traditional setting of the church?"

From the eleven surveys received, 27%, or 3 pastors assigned a 10 to the intimacy of the small group translated to the cooperative boss, 18%, or 2 pastors assigned a 9 to the translation of intimacy of small group in the cooperative setting, 45%, or 5 pastors assigned an 8 to intimacy being translated into the cooperative setting, and 9%, or 1 pastor assigned a 7 to the intimacy of the small groups translated into the cooperative setting.

- Question 9) measured, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Does a sense of community appear to be realized in the traditional cooperative setting?"

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[140] Cole, *Church 3.0,* 210.

[141] Lyle E. Larson and J. Walter Goltz, "Religious Participation and Marital Commitment," *Review of Religious Research* 30, no. 4 (1989): 387–444.

[142] Ibid.

Out of the eleven surveys received, 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 10 to a sense of community being realized, 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 9 to a sense of community realized, 45%, or 5 pastors rendered an 8 to the sense of community, and 18%, or 2 pastors assigned a 7 to the sense of community.

- Question 10) was, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) do you feel your local church has a sense of family or community?"

John Townsend and Henry Cloud liken the small group to a second family for people, to what extent do you agree that the small group is like a second family where people may find a place of belonging? Or receive restoration? Eleven surveys received yielded that 35%, or 4 pastors gave a 10 to small groups like a second family, 9%, or 1 pastor gave a 9 to the small group like a second family, and 55%, or 6 pastors assigned an 8 to the small group like a second family.

- Questions 11 and 12 have been examined and results rendered in the interview section.

Questions 13 through 17 seek to explore any perceptible changes that the pastors have realized as a result of the implementation of the hybrid model in their respective local assemblies. Stephanie Speller advocates that the one-to-one relational meeting is the basic building block of all relational organizing.[143] According to Paul Litchterman, "Sociologists

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[143] Stephanie Speller, "The Church Awake: Becoming the Missional People of God," *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 92, (2010): 39–40.

already have started showing how routine group practices shape the way the members talk and act in the group and in the world outside the group.[144]

- Question 13) asked, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you see the involvement level of the passive spectator changing in the small group?"

Out of the eleven surveys collected, 27%, or 3 pastors gave a 10, 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 9, 18%, or 2 pastors rendered an 8, 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 7, 9%, or one pastor gave a 6, and 9%, or 1 pastor gave a 5.

- Question 14) inquired, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do the small groups help reveal the diversity of gifts that lay dormant or may go undetected in a cooperative setting?"

Eleven surveys received yielded that 27%, or 3 pastors rendered a 10, 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 9, 36%, or 4 pastors gave an 8, 9%, or 1 pastor rendered a 7, and 9%, or 1 pastor gave a 6.

- Question 15) asked, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "The Scriptures liken the church to the body with distinct parts performing specific functions, do you recognize the hybrid model (small groups/cooperative setting) in a distinct role they play in building the whole body?

Eleven surveys revealed that 45%, or 5 pastors gave a 10, 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 9, 27%, or 3 pastors gave an 8, and 9%, or 1 pastor gave a 7.

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[144] Paul Litcherman, *Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups trying to Bridge America's Divisions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 57.

- Question 16) measured, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Would you agree that the hybrid model (small groups/cooperative) affords new ministry opportunities in the local body?"

Out of the eleven surveys received 27%, or 3 pastors gave a 10, 36%, or 4 pastors rendered a 9, and 36%, or 4 pastors rendered an 8.

- Question 17) explored, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "If the hybrid model affords new front-line ministry opportunities, does this result in the transformation of inactive members into active participants?"

From the eleven surveys received 27%, or 3 pastors assigned a 10, 9%, or 1 pastor gave a 9, 45%, or 5 pastors gave a 7, and 18%, or 2 pastors gave a 6.

Questions 18–21 probe the effect of the hybrid model on the discipleship and evangelistic area of the local body of the respective pastors' church. Dave Browning points out that as people are awakened to the kingdom of God, they bring that with them into every area of society in their play, work, and relationships.[145] The starting point for the church's impact is personal, but the objective is to proliferate disciples, leaders, churches, and movements.[146]

- Question 18) probed perspectives by asking, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "Do you agree that the small group setting has been a tool to help with discipleship of the local body?"

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[145] Browning, *Hybrid Church*, 154–58.

[146] Ibid.

Of the eleven surveys received, 45%, or 5 pastors gave a 10, 27%, or 3 pastors gave a 9, and 27%, or 3 pastors gave an eight.
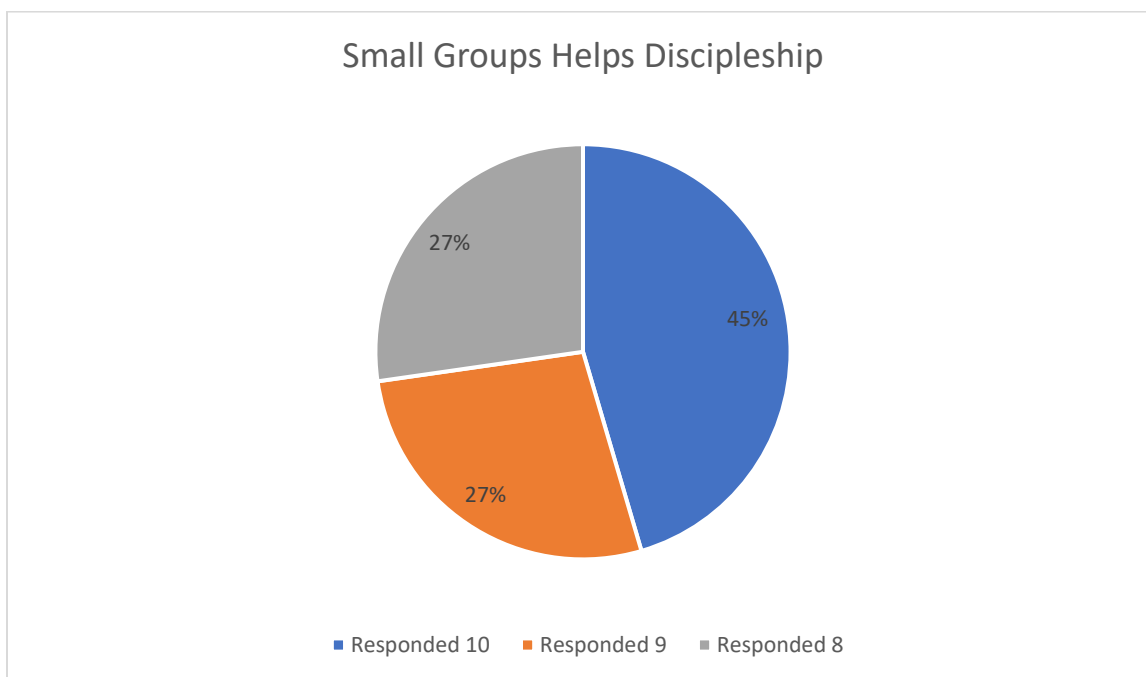
Figure 4.14 Small groups helps discipleship

- Questions 19 and 20 will be addressed in the interview section.

- Question 21) asked, (On a scale of 1–10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), "To what degree has the hybrid model made a transformation to your local church?"

Out of the eleven surveys received, one pastor chose not to answer question 21, thus out of the remaining 10 surveys 10%, or 1 pastor ascribed a 1, 10%, or 1 pastor gave a 9, 50%, or 5 pastors gave an 8, 10%, or 1 pastor gave a 7, and 20%, or 2 pastors gave a 4.

Hybrid Model Transformation

10%
10%
50%
10%
20%

■ Responded 1   ■ Responded 9   ■ Responded 8   ■ Responded 7   ■ Responded 4
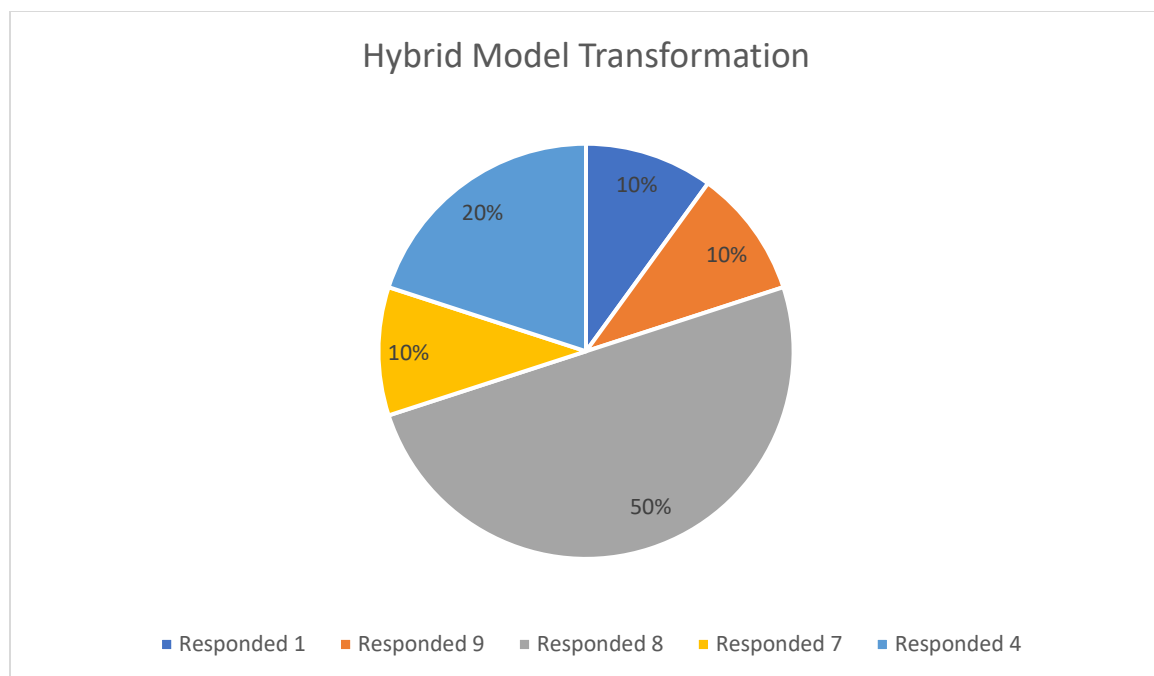
Figure 4.15 Hybrid Model transformation

Results from the Interviews of Clergy

The interview instrument was also employed via telephone or in person. The interview

provided a process to help clarify and verify the various answers on the Surveys/Questionnaires

tool. The interview process was limited to the eleven pastors who participated and returned the

surveys /questionnaires. Initially, the researcher sought to schedule interviews with all eleven

pastors, but only eight took place; three responded to interview requests in the allotted time.

Nevertheless, the eight pastors who did participate provided insight and corroboration of their

answers and the results of the surveys/questionnaires. The researcher encouraged and desired

that each pastor should expand on their answers and offer some details unique to their individual

experience of the implementation hybrid model in their local pastorate. The interview process

was allocated thirty minutes for each participating pastor. The actual time for the one-on-one

interviews of each of the eight pastors took an average of approximately twenty minutes. The

eight pastors' interview process yielded consistent responses that reflected their answers in the survey. The eight interviewees concurred that implementing the Hybrid Model positively impacted their local churches with few adverse effects. The majority of the interviewees commented that the very nature of the hybrid model contributes to the overall well-being of the local church. The common theme "atmosphere of intimacy" was conducive to building relationships, personal involvement, and spiritual growth was prevalent throughout the interviewing process and the surveys/questionnaires of both laity and clergy. One interviewee commented that this "atmosphere of intimacy" inevitably flowed into the corporate /traditional context and added this concept is both biblically and theologically sound. Several of the interviewed pastors observed the commitment level among some of their members increased; one pastor commented, "Once people plug into a small group, it enhanced their desire to become involved and committed to what the church was doing as a whole." The interviewees concurred that the small groups enhanced the commitment levels by implementing the Hybrid Model.

The issue of discipleship was also addressed in the interview process. The majority of the interviewees expressed that a commitment level increase is indicative of the enhancement of discipleship. One pastor shared that in their church, most of the participants in the small group setting were already believers. Still, the believers in the small groups have witnessed more personal spiritual growth that has translated into a deeper commitment, thus creating an evangelistic impact both in and outside the church. Another interviewee indicated that small groups have opened and afforded opportunities for people to minister within the body, seeing that barriers have been broken down and replaced with love, trust, compassion, and sacrifice witnessed through the intimacy of a relationship. Thus, worship in the traditional setting or the cooperative body is enhanced due to the development of fellowship, commitment, discipleship,

and spiritual growth, cultivated in the Hybrid Model and leads to a genuine encounter with Christ.

While the hybrid model has many positive qualities, it also has some minor problems that this researcher has observed: 1) Cliques are easy to form and cause some to feel like outsiders, 2) The challenges of the introverts and extroverts within the small group, 3) The ease to get off subject, 4) Resistance to change. However, the pros outweigh the cons. The early church is an ideal picture of how the hybrid model functions. In the traditional or cooperative context, Acts 5:2 indicates that the early Christians worshipped in the temples, yet they met in small fellowship groups that nurtured relationships through communing, breaking bread, and worshipping together in their homes (Acts 2:46).[147] Every church can learn some significant lessons from this kind of blending or union to preserve intimacy while growing and spreading the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.[148]

The eight interviewees confirmed that their local church has benefitted and has experienced a transformation from implementing the Hybrid Model in the various areas of fellowship, relationship, discipleship, evangelism, spiritual growth, numerical growth, ministry, leadership, and biblical knowledge.

Expectations

Against the cultural backdrop of attendance decline, the impact of the Covid pandemic, contempt of familiarity, spiritual boredom, and religious stagnation produce a disconnect mentality or a lack of involvement in the local churches. The researcher expected positive results

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[147] Ivey Panda, *"Idea of Hybrid Church by Dave Browning"* November 29, 2019. www.iveypanda.com/essays/hybrid church/.

[148] Ibid.

with the implementation of the Hybrid Model in three major areas: a renewed sense of community and family, increased attendance in both the corporate (traditional) and small groups (intimate) settings and stimulated the growth of passive congregants or traditional members to be metamorphosed to active, productive and effective participants.

The researcher thoughtfully fashioned the surveys, data collection, and limited interviews to identify reoccurring themes and key statistics centered on expectations, though supplemental data points were also documented to relate or recognize any other areas completely.

The Implementation of the Hybrid Model

Implementing the Hybrid Model at the Livingwater Church of God entailed three small groups comprising two facilitators for each group at the genesis of this research. As the research proceeded, the third group disbanded after six weeks of the thirteen-week course. The remaining two groups continued the thirteen-week course. Small group one convened every Sunday at 6 p.m. with the facilitators, a faithful couple from the church, leading the discussion. The small group two met at 6 p.m. off campus at the home of another faithful couple from the church who served as the facilitators of the second group. The criteria to be a facilitator consisted of faithfulness to the local church, leadership ability, and competence to teach and lead an effective discussion. The small groups varied in size, but between the two groups, they would average attendance of 10 in each group, respectively. The researcher used the instruments of surveys, interviews, and observation to discern dominant themes that consistently emerged. The following themes were evident: Family and Community, Attendance, and Spiritual Growth.

Theme 1: Community and Family

Genesis 2:18 records that God declared it is not good for man to be alone. Thus, Genesis 2:23–24 reports the divine plan of the family as Adam declared, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" as God brought Eve to Adam, and they shall be one flesh. J Andrew Dearman asserts that autonomy and independence are not portrayed in the second chapter of Genesis as conducive to human flourishing: it is the embeddedness within the social, ecological, and spiritual system that enables human beings to discover meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Social embeddedness is highlighted in the words "flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone" and "become one flesh;" while these have been on occasions referred to as a sexual union, in Hebrew, they refer to the joining of two families.[149] Isabelle Hamley echoes the same sentiment, "Right from the start of Genesis, we see bonds between emerging and forming kinship networks, and we follow the lives of people linked by shared lives, shared blood, and shared destinies."[150]

This theme of family and community is not exclusive to the Old Testament but is also discerned in the New Testament. Joseph Hellerman points out, "Family served as the primary locus of relational loyalty for a person in the strong matrix of the New Testament world." Hellerman expressed those who followed Jesus were to practice primary allegiance to a new family. In Mark 3:35, Jesus set the standard for this level of family commitment, "Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother." The Word of God emphatically and unequivocally declared that it is not good for man to be alone and the need for family, relationships, and community is essential to maintain spiritual health for the individual, the local

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[149] J. Andrew Dearman, "The Old Testament Family," *A Journal of Bible and Theology Interpretation*, 52.2 (April 1998); 117–29.

[150] Isabelle Hamley, "Family and Households in the Old Testament," accessed April 27, 2023, http://www.churchofengland.org

church, and the Body of Christ. Comments, observations, testimonies, interviews, and data gleaned from the survey of the participants of the small groups attest to the need for the atmosphere of family and community in the local church.

Data gleaned from the survey revealed that 93% of the participants indicated a consistent 10, 8, 9, and 7 on a scale of 1–10 felt that the Livingwater Church of God had a strong family atmosphere. However, 7% of the participants indicated a 2 on the survey of the 1–10 concerning the sense of family and community. While 93% acknowledged an atmosphere of family and community is outstanding, but the 7% still is like a fly in the ointment. During the interview process, the researcher requested those individuals who comprised the 7% to expand on their answers about the atmosphere of family and community, to the researcher's delight, one of the individuals had misunderstood that 10 was the highest and 1 was the lowest, and the other individual stated that on occasions they have felt left out. Since the interview, this individual has become more involved and vocal in the various events, and it appears to this researcher that the person's attitude has been affected by the implementation of the Hybrid Model.

This researcher has observed that the intimacy developed during the small group sessions has brought unity that has affected the Sunday morning worship service. The researcher has noticed that on Sunday morning worship, people who have been coming to church for years and were not involved, but since the implementation of the Hybrid Model, several of these individuals have become involved spiritually and socially in the event of the church. A good example of this experience is one of the ladies (now called Lady X) from the church who commented to this researcher how she felt certain people at the church were "stuck up." Still, since getting to know them in the small group setting, a friendship has ensued and affected both parties to become more involved in the local assembly.

One of the highlights of the small groups was the time of fellowship. The surveys yielded the data that 33% of the participants felt the fellowship was a significant part of small group sessions to enhance a sense of family and community. The times of fellowship in the small groups were at their zenith when various designated individuals provided the refreshments. During these times of fellowship, the researcher would observe the façade and pretense that seemed to evaporate and be replaced with a sense of community or family. This sense of family and community experienced in the intimate setting of the small groups translated into the Sunday morning service for a greater impact on the Body of Christ. One lady in the church expressed that her husband, who was not a regular church attender, after church, told his wife that he could "feel something different" at church. Joseph Hellerman stated, "Spiritual formation occurs primarily in the context of community." Thus, believers must remain connected to their brothers and sisters in the local church to experience growth in self-understanding and mature in healthy ways to relate to God to their fellow human beings.[151]

Theme 2: Attendance

Hebrews 10:24–25 addresses the issue of assembling together as believers and emphasizes the importance of not forsaking the practice of assembling as the body of Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1, the apostle Paul stated, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." These verses are so important because they express the believer's need for community or, as recorded in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that man should be alone."

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[151] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family,* 1.

Hebrews 10:24–25 conveys that Christians thrive in community because we "exhort," love, and encourage one another when we come together. Assembling ourselves is essential because of the effect we have on one another. This includes parents, children, co-workers, and everyone encountered, the people in life influence each other.

Since believers are called to live like Christ, it is paramount for the believer to ensure that influence is positive and aligns with the Bible.[152] The biblical priority of believers not to forsake assembling was identified as a key theme collected from the data.

The data collected from the surveys reported that 80% of the participants indicated a 10, on a 1–10 scale with 10 being the highest and 1 the lowest, on the importance of regular attendance at their local assembly, 13% of the participants indicated 9–8 as the importance of regular attendance at their church, and 7% indicated a 6 as the importance of regular attendance in their local church. While 80% of the participants indicated the priority of regular attendance at their local assembly, the same survey revealed that out of the 80%, 68% attended all the worship services offered by their local congregation. This 68% of regular attendees at Livingwater Church of God is consistent with the post covid national average of 68% as reported by *Christianity Today.*[153] The survey also offered 5 choices for participants to describe their attendance and commitment at their local assembly: 1) Random (hit and miss), 2) Casual (one service only), 3) Regular attendee (present but not involved), 4) Connected (participate in certain events), and 5) Passionate (priority). The survey revealed that 64% of the participants described themselves as passionate, which is congruent with the 68% that attended all the offered worship services and consistent with the post Covid national average of 68% in church attendance.

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[152] Brown, "Why is it so Important to 'Forsake Not the Assembling."

[153] David Roach, "Church Attendance Dropped Among Young People, Singles, Liberals," accessed April 29, 2023, http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/january/pandemic.

In a small group setting, an elderly lady (known as Lady E) shared how she was unable to attend church regularly due to being her husband's primary caregiver. However, when she could attend, she expressed how she had missed the encouragement, strength, fellowship, and love of being with those of like faith. Lady E thanked everyone who called or visited during this season of absence but praised God for once again being able to be back in the house of God. Another gentleman in the small group shared a similar story of being in the hospital for an extended time and how it affected him like he was missing something and feeling disconnected. This gentleman and Lady E expressed how glad and thankful they were to be in the house of God with their church family.

Theme 3: Spiritual Growth

The researcher recognized that spiritual growth was consistently alluded to in the interviews, discussion groups, and surveys. The data indicated that 42% of the participants were attracted to the church in the quest for spiritual growth. The 42% was the largest percentage for the attraction to the church. After a closer examination and analysis of the collected data, the researcher determined that spiritual growth could be divided into two distinct groupings, which are biblical knowledge and discipleship.

Biblical Knowledge

The secondary theme (subtheme) of biblical knowledge was discerned in the larger theme of spiritual growth. The survey revealed that 46% of participants indicated that stimulating discussion was the highlight of the small group, followed closely by 33% who responded that fellowship was the highlight, and 20% indicated the relevant topics were the highlight. All three of the previous components, stimulating conversations, fellowship, and relevant topics, are

conducive to spiritual growth and essential to it. The setting of the small groups is a favorable

environment that allows the participant to learn, ask, and discuss topics that may not be

addressed thoroughly in a traditional corporate setting. The data collected from the survey also

provided that the participants not only enjoyed the relaxed learning environment but actually,

73% of the participants indicated their biblical knowledge had greatly been expanded. During

one of the small group sessions, the researcher was surprised by some of the participants'

questions about the Bible that the researcher took for granted as common knowledge and would

not have thought to address it. However, this small group instance provided the insight that

diverse levels of biblical literacy are represented in both the small group and traditional corporate

settings and appropriate measures to be implemented to provide a more comprehensive

approach.

Discipleship

Jesus stated, "Whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom

men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48). As the participants

experienced an increase in biblical knowledge and a better grasp of biblical truth, the second

subtheme of discipleship became apparent in the theme of spiritual growth. Mary Kate Morse

explained that discipleship is the process of learning Jesus' teaching (Word of God) and

following Jesus' example.[154] Thus, the call of Matthew 28:19 is to go and make disciples! Jayson

Bradley pointed out that disciple-making is not a passive activity but requires intentional,

deliberate behavior of sharing the gospel.[155]

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[154] Mary Kate Morse, "Evangelism, Discipleship, and Spiritual Formation: Which is What?" accessed May 1, 2023, https://www.missioalliance.org.

[155] Jayson Bradley, "What is Discipleship and How Does it Work?" http://www.cru.org.

This researcher has observed various participants who desired a deeper understanding of the biblical truths and also expressed a desire to become more involved in ministry and have now done so. One example is a gentleman (hereafter referred to as "Gentleman D") who is faithful to the church but usually sits toward the back and seems to be a passive spectator. However, since Gentleman D's involvement in the small group, the researcher has been amazed at this seemly passive individual's transformation as he shared in Bible discussions, started helping in ushering, and became more involved in special church events such as building sets for the Christmas program and any kind of carpenter work. The Gentleman D example is not an isolated incident, but this scenario has been observed in several of the participants in the small groups. Data collected from the surveys yielded that on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, 40% of the participants indicated a 9, 13% of the participants indicated a 10, 13% indicated 8, and 13% showed a 7 in their participation in the various ministry opportunities available. Collectively, 79% of the participants indicated an increase in ministry activity that can be traced to the implementation of the Hybrid Model.

Summary of Conclusion

The researcher addressed the problem of waning attendance experienced at the Livingwater Church of God by implementing the Hybrid Model. It blends the larger corporate setting for impact and the smaller group setting for intimacy to realize a higher level of community. Through the implementation of the Hybrid Model, the instruments of surveys, observations, and interviews were utilized to engage the participants in small groups and a select group of ministers for their feedback. The researcher discerned several themes that consistently emerged as prominent. The participants' surveys, observations, and interviews showed the need for an atmosphere of community and family, the importance of attendance, and spiritual growth,

which included biblical knowledge and discipleship, are essential elements for a healthy church. By implementing the Hybrid Model, the participants experience the intimacy afforded by the small group setting and is conducive to a sense of community and family as well as spiritual growth, while the impact of the larger cooperative setting is enhanced with the transformation of believers' renewed commitment to their church.

One minister (Pastor T) interviewee stated, "I believe everything revolves around relationships, and I am also a firm believer that small groups foster a familial relationship." Pastor T continued that relationship and discipleship must be the intentional priority when the small group is done correctly (not just a canned setting to do it just because it is something to do). Another example a pastor interviewee shared with the researcher is, "We have seen unchurched spouses become active in our church because of their spouse and children active in the church. The unchurched spouse eventually came to salvation and rededication." One of the individuals who participated in the survey stated, "The Hybrid Model by its very nature contributes to the overall well-being of the church." The researcher has observed that the intimacy of the small groups promotes building relationships, personal involvement, and spiritual growth/maturity. This inevitably flows into the corporate/traditional setting. A pastor interviewee said about the Hybrid Model, "This concept is both biblically and theologically sound."

While the Hybrid Model is not a cure-all, the implementation of the Hybrid Model has restored a significant degree of community and family to the Livingwater Church of God. The sense of community and family seen throughout the New Testament is now renewed and mirrored in the life and attitude of many of the members and attendees of the church. The researcher has observed several individuals who have come to the traditional services for years and just look at the back of the person's head in front of them without really knowing that

person, but since the Hybrid Model, people began to interact and build relationships that lead to a sense of community.

The sense of family is conducive to building relationships and often attracts people to become involved in the family (church) gatherings in the form of attendance. While the Hybrid Model and small groups were instrumental in renewing and restoring many parishioners, attendance has not been at the expected level. However, Covid's impact on attendance figures must be factored into this equation.

The spiritual growth of the Livingwater Church of God has been positively affected by implementing the Hybrid Model. The growth in the Word of God helped the participants in the small groups to take the next step of discipleship. As alluded to previously, individuals who had been just spectators or passive members have been metamorphosed or transformed into passionate participants and involved in ministry in their local church.

The first introduction of the Hybrid Model and its implementation at Livingwater Church of God was met with mixed reactions. Initially, the Hybrid Model started with three small groups, but about six weeks later, the third group disbanded. The other two small groups continued meeting until the Covid-19 virus made gathering unsafe. After resuming gathering together, the small group setting had lost some of its momentum. Eventually, the Hybrid Model evolved into a Wednesday night Sunday school in the sanctuary and small groups in the fellowship hall that have met a need at the Livingwater Church of God of growing closer as a family, larger as a congregation, and more profound as disciples.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research project involves the implementation of the Hybrid Model to experience the impact of the large corporate setting of the traditional church and to encounter the intimacy afforded by a small group setting to address the waning attendance experienced in the Livingwater Church of God in Laurinburg, North Carolina. The Gallup poll reported in 2021 that Americans' membership in houses of worship steady decline to an all-time low, dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend. Only 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque, down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999.[156] While the issue of declining attendance is not exclusive to only the Livingwater Church of God, certain elements are unique to its setting. Still, Livingwater Church of God has much in common with many of the dynamics that are present in most of the churches. Thus, various facets of this project may benefit churches with a comparable framework and context.

The problem of declining attendance to the various services of the church has adverse effects on new converts, discipleship, and the morale of the church in general. This selective and capricious attitude toward attendance by members, friends, and families of the church is infectious. It has led to a subtle change in the cohesiveness of the sense of family and community. The threat to the overall health of the local assembly appeared to be looming if the present trend of selective and declining attendance continued. Thus, implementing the Hybrid Model at the Livingwater Church of God was initiated to impede the declining attendance and

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[156] Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for the First Time." (March 21,2021), accessed May 10, 2023, http:// news.gallup.com/poll/3419631/church-membership-falls-majority-first-time.aspx.

restore the sense of community and family. The intervention of the Hybrid Model was expected to restore a deeper sense of community and family, promote spiritual growth, and transform passive spectators into passionate, active participants. As the research progressed, promising steps appeared that developed this project. The project's genesis entailed a thirteen-week period in which three small groups met at an appointed time and a designated location. The next step was the selection of team leaders or group facilitators for each small group. The researcher determined the criteria to qualify as candidates for team leaders and assigned qualified team leaders to lead and coordinate the topics and discussion for their respective groups.

The outcome of this study exposed, among a myriad of other things, the Livingwater Church of God's continuing need for a concerted effort to intentionally address the issue of declining attendance, the sense of family and community, and spiritual growth. Within this chapter, the researcher will disclose his conclusions concerning this study, suggestions for future research, and how this study may benefit research implications.

A noteworthy observation was made during this study that the practice of small groups is one of the most endemic church trends for adult spiritual formation.[157] Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport pointed out that many churches have restructured their Christian education program centered on the belief that small groups are effective in promoting spiritual growth in adults in the congregation.[158] Thus, the Hybrid Model resulted in a major restructuring of the traditional services at the Livingwater Church of God, including initiating small groups. During this research project, six team leaders were appointed to lead three small groups for thirteen

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[157] Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport, "All the Rage: How Small Groups are Really Educating Christian Adults Part 1: Assessing Small Group Ministry Practice," *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 116–37. www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/all-rage-how-small-groups-are-really-educating/docview/205447691/se-2.

[158] Ibid.

weeks for implementing the Hybrid Model. The small groups averaged ten participants for each

group. The team leaders and the participants engaged in the small group session to experience a

less formal (intimate) environment to enhance a sense of family and community, growth, and a

renewed connection to the traditional church. Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport confirmed

that the widespread emphasis on the small group ministry is crucial in establishing close

relationships to enhance community among the group participants.[159] This truth has been realized

in the small group setting at Livingwater Church of God as the participants have become less

inhibited in sharing and involvement. This renewed sense of community has allowed a deeper

camaraderie within the small groups. This is reflected in the sentiment expressed in Neil Cole's

book, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, "Church is not just an event to be at,

but a family to be a part of."[160]

This research has revealed the stark contrast between American individualism, which is

deeply interwoven in the American culture, and the New Testament mindset of the group that

took priority over the individual.[161] Joseph Heller pointed out that the modern West is a weak-

group culture that prioritizes individual desires and needs. However, for the early Christians, the

church was a family, and since the people in Mediterranean antiquity, the church represented the

primary focus of group loyalty and solidarity for Christians in the first century.[162] On the surface,

the implementation of the Hybrid Mode allowed the Livingwater Church of God to experience

the impact of the traditional corporate setting and the intimacy of the small groups, but on a

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[159] Rynsburger and Lamport, "All the Rage."

[160] Cole, *Church 3.0,* 4–6.

[161] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 31–52.

[162] Ibid.

deeper level has allowed the participants to catch a glimpse of the social vision of the early

Christian church as a strong-groups, surrogate family as described in Acts 4:32–35:

> Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common, And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. For there was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as anyone had a need.

This research involved questionnaires, interviews, and observations of not only the

participants of the small groups at the Livingwater Church of God but extended to ministers of

various denominations in the Laurinburg, North Carolina area, and ministers of the Church of

God in the Western North Carolina Church of God jurisdiction. Out of twenty-two surveys

distributed to various ministers, only eleven were returned before the deadline. However,

responding to the ministers' surveys and interviews added valuable insight to this study. The

dominant themes and common responses gleaned from the surveys and interviews were the

common denominators of attendance decline, discipleship, spiritual growth, and the atmosphere

of intimacy. The commonalities of themes experienced in the minister's surveys corroborate the

need to strategically and intentionally be creative to engage the postmodern culture's shifting

values, busier schedules, detractions, and competing influences.

Robert E. Webber explains that the modern world communication occurred primarily

through conceptual knowledge.[163] Webber continued to point out that the communication of the

modern world used words that dominated the way of knowing were "reading," "writing,"

"intelligence," "analysis," "clarity," "explanation," "logic," and "linear sequence." In contrast,

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[163] Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapid: Baker Academics, 1999, 24–26. ProQuest Ebook Central.

the new postmodern shape of communication has shifted to a more symbolic form. It is knowledge acquired through personal participation in a community. Thus, the new words are "the primacy of experience," "knowledge through immersed participation," the "impact of the visual" such as atmosphere, environment, and space; the rediscovery of "imagination," "intuition," and sensitivity to "spiritual realities."[164]

The shift of postmodern communications is a call to return to a period when the church was a symbolized experience of God expressed in life-changing practices of immersed participation. Webber points out that the rapid changes in science, philosophy, and communication theory present a novel challenge. Where do people go to discover a Christianity that speaks meaningfully to the postmodern world?[165]

Webber concluded that the classical tradition of Christianity appears the most productive or creative. It was shaped by mystery, holism, interpreted facts, community, and a combination of verbal and symbolic forms of communication. Therefore, Webber advocates our challenge is not to reinvent Christianity but to restore and adapt classical Christianity to the postmodern cultural situation.[166] In other words, to return to the "family" feel and function of the local church. Implementing the Hybrid Model seems to have brought some modest success, as the following suggests.

After interviewing fifteen lay participants involved in the small groups setting, eight interviews with pastors, and data collected in the form of a survey from the fifteen participants engaged in small groups and eleven clergies involved in this research, it is evident the need for a sense of community and family, reverse declining attendance, and realize spiritual growth in the

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[164] Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid., 24–26.

postmodern culture. The Hybrid Model's combination of the traditional (cooperative) for impact and the small group setting appears to be a creative first step in a postmodern culture.

Research Applications

A plethora of statistics, numerous books, and even literature reviewed in this research attest to the difficulty of maintaining attendance and participation in the local church. The issue of declining attendance is only getting worse. But why? What are the answers? Much speculation, discussion, and conjecture are espoused without determining a definitive answer to this continuing problem.

In reviewing the data from both laity and clergy surveys, several prominent themes kept reoccurring: 1) Community/Family-the need to participate and be involved. 2) Spiritual growth-to be challenged in spiritual formation, discipleship, and evangelism to pursue, receive, and give. 3) Ministry potential-the development of ministry gifts for the work of the ministry on various levels.

Family and Community

By implementing a Hybrid Model, the subject of community and family comes to the forefront and takes center stage. In the present-day church setting, there is the mega-church on the one hand and the micro-church on the other, with a broad spectrum of sizes in between. Both the mega-church and the micro-church are in place to fulfill the Great Commission mandated in Mathew 28:19. Adrian Rogers, who died in 2005, for more than three decades served as the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church with more than 29,000 members, stated, "If you are too big for

a small church, then you too little for a big church,"[167] While the mega-church has a vast

capacity for influence in its community and immense impact in numerous ways, The micro-

church can focus on relational ties and offer love and intimacy. Both impact and intimacy are

essential to reflect the church portrayed in the New Testament church. The Hybrid Model

provided the perfect blending of integrating these biblical values. The implementation of the

Hybrid Model provided not only an opportunity for the church to grow and have influence but

also a platform where the relationships among the congregants are paramount and personal. [168]

The researcher has observed in the traditional setting of the church that it is easy to come

and watch a "performance" of the choir and enjoy the sermon, then at the benediction, politely

smile, shake a few hands, leave, and do the same routine next Sunday and never be connected.

However, in the small group setting, the researcher witnessed those same people become alive as

they connected with the other participants, and this translated into a feeling of connection to the

church. For example, a young lady, whom this study identifies as Lady Z, started coming to the

morning worship of traditional service. Lady Z was quiet and shy. She could be termed an

introvert. She was polite but usually left after the altar call and did not become involved. But in

the implementation of the Hybrid Model in the small group setting, Lady Z began to flourish as

she demonstrated an impressive amount of knowledge of the Bible. Lady Z became involved in

discussing the various subjects in the small groups, which led to the respect of all the other

participants who got to know her in the small group setting. This respect led Lady "to build

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[167] Drew Menard, "Legacy of Dr. Adrian Rogers Brings Influential Pastors Together to Challenge Crowd," September 15, 2017. https://www.liberty.edu/news/2017/09/15/legacy-of-dr-adrian-rogers-brings-influential-pastors-together-to-challenge-crowd/.

[168] https://ivypanda.com/essays/hybrid-church/.

relationships within the small group that translated into the traditional setting and later led to the salvation of her husband and his involvement in the church.

The primary purpose of a small group is to provide an environment conducive to building relationships with people of faith and sharing in an intimate setting. The fellowship and relationship afforded by the small group setting are also components of spiritual growth.

Spiritual Growth

In Romans 10:13, the apostle Paul proclaimed, "Whosoever shall call upon shall be saved." However, the researcher has experienced those who "called upon the Lord" and genuinely have been saved, and they must realize that is the beginning of the journey. But it must be realized that the journey is not meant for one to go alone. The church must be a community or family of believers to help to mentor new converts or struggling Christians in the ways of the Lord. Three components are essential for spiritual growth: 1) Evangelism, 2) Discipleship, and 3) Spiritual Formation.

Evangelism

Evangelism is simply telling "your" story and sharing the good news of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Evangelism usually occurs through relationships and particular environments such as church or small groups. Mary Kate Morse pointed out that evangelism focuses on faith followed by baptism and connecting to a faith community.[169] For example, one of the team leaders in the small group setting, we will refer to her as Lady M, has a heart for the lost and is talented and bold enough to engage individuals in conversation about Jesus in varied environments and on numerous occasions have led the individual to salvation. Lady M has

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[169] Morse, "Evangelism, Discipleship."

ministered to individuals and families in various settings, such as fast-food restaurants, people

who broke down on the side of the road, and even people who come to church. Lady M is a true

evangelist who believes in the mandate of Matthew 28:19. Lady M has been instrumental in

mentoring new converts and helping the mentees through the various steps of assimilating into

the family and community setting of the church. The next step is discipleship.

Discipleship

The call of Mark 28:19 is not only to go and baptize but to make disciples. Jesus called

his disciples to be disciple-makers.[170] The focus of discipleship is Jesus Christ and to make an

active move toward Jesus, so our new life will be on display for all to see.[171] Mary Kate Morse

defines discipleship as the process of learning the teaching of Jesus and following or emulating

his example or lifestyle.[172] Discipleship will take place in a community setting with those of like

faith and share particular practices.[173] For example, Pastor TH, a participant in this research,

observed an un-churched spouse who became active in the church because their spouse and

children were involved in the small group and the church. The un-churched spouse eventually

came to salvation or rededication. Pastor TH continued to share that there must be relationships

for realizing discipleship.

Spiritual Formation

The next step of spiritual growth is known as spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is

the process of being conformed to the image of the Christ for the Glory of God and the sake of

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[170] Morse, "Evangelism, Discipleship."

[171] Ibid

[172] Ibid

[173] Ibid.

others (2 Corinthians 3:17). Mary Kate Morse expresses that the focus of spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit, who guides the journey.[174] The researcher observed several of the participants in the small groups begin to talk and discuss their prayer time and the feeling closer to the Lord. One gentleman, who will be known as Gentleman Eki, who participated in the small groups, testified he started getting up early in the morning to read and pray before he had to go to work, and his neighbor had been listening to Gentlemen Eki's devotion. The man who listened in on Gentleman Eki's devotion asked for prayer. His transformation has been a witness to the whole community as they could tell that he had been with Jesus and led by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation entails submission to the Holy Spirit, a time of solitude, and accountability. Spiritual formation happens best in a diverse community setting.

<center>Ministry Participation</center>

In the traditional church setting, a limited number of up-front positions are available. Everyone's gift or calling is not preaching, teaching, or singing. The support ministries of usher, lighting technicians, camera operators, sound technicians, and a vast host of individuals whose expertise ensure the seamless presentation of the gospel. The traditional setting or corporate setting may not be the proper arena to exercise or express a particular ministry talent, yet the intimate setting of the small group provides unique ministry opportunities to minister to in that setting or zero in specific skills.

The researcher observed a lady who was new to our church and was quiet and shy in the cooperative setting, but when she became involved in the small group setting, her gift of hospitality made room for her! She was great at making baked goods and refreshments that

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[174] Morse, "Evangelism, Discipleship."

minister to the participants. She flourished in the small groups that later translated that she shared her ministered gift to the whole local body. This is a repeated scenario of a number of the participants in the small groups.

Every member of the Livingwater Church of God brings unique abilities, leadership skills, giftings, and value to the body of Christ. These members that participate in the small group setting eventually affect the larger traditional church. If the sense of community and family experienced in the small groups are maintained and cultivated, they will translate into a stronger and unified ministry.[175]

Research Limitation

The first limitation of this research was found in the small group setting. In the genesis of implementing the Hybrid Model at the Livingwater of Church of God, three small groups were initiated for thirteen weeks of study. After six weeks into the small group meeting, one of the three groups disbanded when several members expressed a lack of interest. The remaining members were assimilated into the remaining two groups.

The second limitation came with the participation within the remaining two groups. Just a minor problem of getting off the subject or socializing that circumvented the purpose of the groups. However, the team leaders were excellent and tactful at bringing the small group discussion and order back to their focus.

Further Research

The researcher has recognized several areas that would justify future investigation during this project. The areas of future investigation are as follows: 1) The need for more in-depth

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[175] https://ivypanda.com/essays/hybrid-church/

training for team leaders, 2) different types of small groups, 3) Hybrid Model with an emphasis on youth and young adults, and 4) the curriculum. All these areas could improve and bring about a new level of development to the implementation of the Hybrid Model to enrich the atmosphere of family and community, spiritual growth, and transformation of the passive spectator into an active participant.

<div style="text-align:center">Team Leaders Training</div>

The team leaders who participated in this research did an outstanding job leading their groups in discussion, teaching, influence, and interaction. Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport report that the group leader(s) is a focal person whose contributions to attaining group goals are significantly greater than the individual contributions of the majority of others.[176] There are a number of leadership styles that can be examined for the effectiveness of the small group, such as 1) the Trait approach suggests that certain individuals just naturally possess the quality of being a good leader, 2) The style approach-in which the examination of how an individual leads on a "control" gauge from laissez-faire to autocratic, 3) Situational approach-which emphasizes that effectiveness of leadership depends on the circumstances, 4) Functional approach-which underscores the effective leader will engage in a variety of verbal and nonverbal actions for the group to reach its goal.[177] A future study of the various leadership styles may be incorporated in the training of prospected team leaders in which the team leaders may analyze their effectiveness as leaders.

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[176] Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport, "All the Rage: How Small Groups are Really Educating Christian Adults Part 2: Augmenting Small Groups Ministry Practice-Development Small Groups Leadership Skills through Insights from Cognates Theoretical Discipline," *Christian Education Journal* 5, no.2 (Fall,2008): 391–414. https://www.proquest.com/docview/205412440?https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?

[177] Ibid.

Small Group Types

Jim Egli stated, "I've concluded that small-group models are much like diets."[178] Like those individuals that jump from one diet plan to another to find one that works—and are often disappointed. Unfortunately, just like a diet plan works for the short-term, small groups are not a cure-all. It is vital to do further research into the various small-group models to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each model in order to gain insight into the effects on relationships, edification, and facilitating evangelism. Some of the more popular small-group models would include the following: 1) Hybrid Model, 2) meta, 3) cell groups, 4) disciple-making small groups, 5) sermon-based small groups, 6) purpose-driven groups, and 7) theological small group.

Hybrid Model with Emphasis on Youth and Young Adults

The implementation of the Hybrid Model with an emphasis or focus on youth and young adults would be an interesting and needed study. In his book *Teaching the Next Generation: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, Terry Linhart points out the alarming challenge of young adults and teenagers fleeing the ranks of the church, even those who grew up in the church.[179] Lindell cites the reason for the mass exodus of teenagers and young adults from the church is the failure of the church to help them think about and answer difficult questions." [180]Thus, Linhart advocates the need to revitalize the task of teaching the next generations, but not with default, "the way we have always done it" approach that has missed the mark in assisting

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[178] Jim Egli, "Which Small-Group is Right for You?" 2009. Accessed May 20, 2023.https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2009/which-small-group-model-is-right-for-you.html.

[179] Terry Linhart, *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Academic, 2016), 10.

[180] Ibid.

the student's growth to maturity.[181] The Millennials and Generation Z will require engaging teachers, wise teachers, joyful teachers, and well-studied teachers to engage this group in relevant ways to establish their faith.[182]

<div align="center">Curriculum</div>

The question of curriculum and study focus that is to be utilized in the small group setting is of paramount importance. Marshall Welch pointed out that when a congregation decides on small groups, many pastors, Christian educators, lay leaders, and spiritual directors face curriculum challenges.[183] Since small groups are an important part of the pathway of discipleship, the small groups are responsible for achieving excellence in the curriculum they follow. There are a myriad of books and resources available. There are two predominant ways to proceed in choosing a small group curriculum. The first is a church-led approach; the second is a self-directed one.[184]

In some churches, complete latitude is given in the choice of curriculum. It is at the discretion of the individual leader, with minimum input from the small group's pastor. In contrast, a church-led curriculum comes directly from the church to the small-group leaders. In selecting material for the small groups, regardless of the curriculum choice, providing good

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[181] Linhart, *Teaching the Next Generations*, 10.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Marshall Welch, "Man-Ifestation of the Spirit: An Investigation on the Impact of a Curriculum and Small Group Spiritual Direction on the Spiritual Formation of Protestant Men," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (02, 2013): 81–99. https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/man-ifestation-spirit-investigation-on-impact/docview/1266990639/se-2.

[184] "Should Small Group Curriculum Be Self-Directed or Self-Directed?" Accessed May 21, 2023. https://influencemagazine.com/en/Practice/Should-Small-Group-Curriculum-Be-Self-Directed-or-Church-Directed

training and proper correction is imperative to ensure that each group is engaged in a

theologically accurate and practically beneficial study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to address the issue of the declining and selective

attendance experienced at the Livingwater Church of God. The implementation of the Hybrid

Model is a deliberate attempt to draw the church into a consistent alignment with the New

Testament church portrayed in the Bible. The Hybrid Model blends the larger traditional church

(cooperative) for the impact and the small group's intimate setting to build personal

relationships, promote spiritual growth, to establish an atmosphere of community and family.

The book of Acts gives a snapshot of how the Hybrid Model is to unfold. Much in line

with the traditional (cooperative) church, the New Testament believers gathered and worshipped

in the temples (Acts 5:42). Acts 19: 8–10 chronicles how Paul daily reasoned and lectured in the

hall of Tyrannus for an extended amount of time Yet Acts 2:46 describes not only worship the

temple (traditional) but depicted a small group setting where the believers communed, broke

bread, and worshipped in their homes.[185]

The Livingwater Church of God benefitted from the blending effect of the Hybrid Model.

The small groups brought the renewal of the community described in Acts 2:44, "And all those

who believed were together and had things in common." The sense of community and family

allowed for ministry beyond the small groups but invaded the traditional setting. Thus, the

Hybrid Model has ushered in a renewal of community and family, attendance, spiritual growth,

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[185] https://ivypanda.com/essays/hybrid-church/

and discipleship at the Livingwater Church of God that parallels the New Testament church described in Acts 2:44–47.

Appendix A

Events

There was a thirteen-week course for the small groups with a total of thirteen sessions for each group and collectively twenty-six sessions total. The order of the small group meetings and goals were conducted as follows:

1. First Week: The objective of week one was to present a conducive format that would provide a comfortable environment to encourage shared experiences, fellowship, and relationships. The forging of relationships leads to people connections, strengthens involvement, and commitment levels, and gives a sense of family. The thirteen weeks of small groups adhered to a casual or informal format in which various biblical topics and current issues will be the focus of discussion in small groups. The topic of discussion for the thirteen weeks was the various kinds of prayer.

   a. Small group 1 convenes Sunday in the church fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

      i. Meal, refreshments, fellowship (15–25 minutes)

      ii. Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

      iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

         1. Topic: Personal Prayer Time (Prayer life of Jesus)

         2. Bible Text: Mark 1:35

         3. Discussion question: What do you need to do to tune your heart to God? Explain.

         4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

   b. Small group 2 convenes Sunday at the designated team residence at 6 p.m.

      i. Meal, refreshments, fellowship (15–25 minutes)

  ii. Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

  iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

    1. Topic: Personal Prayer Time (Prayer life of Jesus)

    2. Bible Text: Mark 1:35

    3. Discussion question: What do you need to do to tune your heart to God? Explain

    4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

2. Second Week: The small groups continued in the casual format in discussion as set up in week one. The development of group dynamics continued in the small group in the discussion mode with interaction and fellowship.

 a. Small group 1 convenes Sunday in the church fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

  i. Meal, refreshments, fellowship (15–25 minutes)

  ii. Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

  iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

    1. Topic: Personal Prayer Time (Alone with the Father)

    2. Bible Text: Matthew 6:5–8

    3. Discussion question: What are some obstacles that keep most people from praying on a regular basis? What are specific ways we can overcome those challenges?

    4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

 b. Small group 2 convenes Sunday at the designated residence at 6 p.m.

  i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

  ii. Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

      iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

          1. Topic: Personal prayer life (Alone with the Father)

          2. Bible Text: Matthew 6:5–8

          3. Discussion question: What are some obstacles that keep most people from praying on a regular basis? What are some specific ways we can overcome those challenges?

          4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

3. Third Week: Small groups continued to study various kinds of prayer. The focus of week three is prayer as communication with God. Each participant in the small groups will be introduced to biblical principles of the Lord's prayer to effectively communicate in prayer.

    a. Small group 1 convenes Sunday in the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

        i. Meal, refreshments, fellowship (15–25 minutes)

       ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

      iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

          1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective prayer)

          2. Bible Text: Matthew 6:5–15

          3. Discussion question: On a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your time spent talking to God this past week? Explain

          4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

    b. Small group 2 convene Sunday at 6 p.m. at the team leaders' residence.

        i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

iii. Discussion (30–50 minutes)

1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

2. Bible Text: Matthew 6: 5–15

3. Discussion question: On a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your time spent talking to God this past week? Explain.

4. Service/Discussion ends with prayer.

4. Fourth Week: Small groups continued with the subject of a personal prayer life with an emphasis on effective prayer. The participants will discuss the and principles of effective communication in prayer.

a. Small group 1 convened Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

2. Bible Text: Philippians 4:6–9

3. Discussion question: Describe a time when God answered an important prayer in your life. How did the way God answer your prayer affect your relationship with God?

4. Service /Discussion ends with prayer.

b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' home at 6 p.m.

i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

    ii. Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

        2. Bible Text: Philippians 4:6–9

        3. Discussion question: Describe a time when God answered an important prayer in your life. How did the way God answer your prayer affect your relationship with God?

        4. Service/Discussion ends with prayer.

5. Fifth Week: Small groups continued to focus on personal prayer time with God. The participants were encouraged to share and listen to others about their various experiences during their personal prayer time.

    a. Small group 1 convenes Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

        i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

        ii. Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

        iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

            1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

            2. Bible Text: Philemon 1:5–7

            3. Discussion question: What can be learned from Paul's example in the way he appealed to Philemon? Is there someone whom you need to forgive and offer restoration? Are you willing to appeal to someone on behalf of another—to assume the role of an advocate?

            4. Service/discussion ends with prayer/

    b. Small group 2 convenes Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

   i.   Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

  ii.   Call to order and prayer (5–10 minutes)

 iii.   Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1.   Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

        2.   Bible Text: Philemon 1:5–7

        3.   Discussion question: What can be learned from Paul's example in the way he appealed to Philemon? Is there someone whom you need to forgive and offer restoration? Are you willing to appeal to someone on behalf of another---to assume the role of an advocate?

        4.   Service/discussion ends with prayer.

6. Sixth Week: Small groups continued discussion on personal prayer life and effectual prayer. The mode of sharing and listening to each participant as they relate their experiences in prayer.

    a.   Small group 1 will convene Sunday in the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

           i.   Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

          ii.   Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

         iii.   Discussion (30–60 minutes)

                1.   Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

                2.   Bible Text: James 5:16–20

                3.   Discussion question: How many kinds of prayers are named in James 5? Describe and explain the various kinds of prayers and their role in the life of the believer.

                4.   Service/discussion ends with prayer.

b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

    i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

    ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Effective Prayer)

        2. Bible Text: James 5:16–20.

        3. Discussion question: A discussion of the many kinds of prayer are named in James 5. Describe and explain the various kinds of prayers and their role in the life of the believer. The discussion ends with prayer.

7. Seventh Week: The small groups will continue their study of the personal prayer life with thanks, as a priority in personal time of seeking the Lord and the benefits of the prayer of thanksgiving.

a. Small group 1 convened Sunday in the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

    i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

    ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Thanksgiving Prayer)

        2. Bible Text: Psalm 9:1

        3. Discussion question: What does thanksgiving mean biblically? How do you pray a thanksgiving prayer? How does thanksgiving strengthen our faith?

        4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

    b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

        i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

        ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

        iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

            1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Thanksgiving Prayer)

            2. Bible Text: Psalm 9: 1

            3. Discussion question: What does thanksgiving mean biblically? How do you pray a thanksgiving prayer? How does thanksgiving strengthen faith?

            4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

8. Eighth Week: Small groups focused on the importance of intercession in prayer during personal prayer time. The participants will share the experience of intercession prayer and the result due to their intercession.

    a. Small group 1 convened Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

        i. Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

        ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

        iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

            1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory prayer)

            2. Bible Text: Luke 22:31

            3. Discussion question: What does it mean that Satan had to ask permission to "sift" the disciple and tempt Peter? What is the significance that Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail?

            4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

    i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

    ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory prayer)

        2. Bible Text: Luke 22:31

        3. Discussion question: What does it mean that Satan had to ask permission to "sift" the disciple and tempt Peter? What is the significance that Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail?

        4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

9. Ninth Week: Small group 1 continued to discuss intercessory prayer. The focus was the intercession of a cooperative body of believers in prayers. The members of the small groups participated in a cooperation intercessory prayer time for the church, community, nation, and the peace of Jerusalem at the conclusion of the discussion.

a. Small group 1 convened Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

    i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

    ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory prayer-cooperative)

        2. Bible Text: Acts 12: 1–25

        3. Discussion question: What is the importance of cooperative body praying or interceding to affect results? What role did the

intercessory prayer of the local church affect the results in the

twelfth chapter of Acts?

    4. Service/discussion ends with intercessory prayer.

b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

    i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

    ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

        1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory prayer-cooperative)

        2. Bible Text: Acts 12: 1–25

        3. Discussion question: What is the importance of the cooperative

        body praying or interceding to affect results? What role did the

        intercessory prayer of the local church affect the results in the

        twelfth chapter of Acts?

        4. Service/discussion ends with intercessory prayer.

10. Tenth Week: Small groups continued discussions on intercessory prayer. The participants were afforded the opportunity during the discussion time to submit names of friends, family, neighbors, and other individuals so that the small group may intercede in prayer for the requests.

a. Small group 1 convenes Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

    i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)\

    ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

    iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory prayer-Abraham)

2. Bible Text: Genesis 18: 20–33

3. Discussion question: What are the qualities of an intercessor? What is the difference between intercessor and intercessory prayer? Explain.

4. Service/discussion ends with intercessory prayer.

b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

   i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

   ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

   iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory prayer-Abraham)

2. Bible Text: Genesis 18: 20 -33

3. Discussion question: What are the qualities of an intercessor? What is the difference between intercessor and intercessory prayer? Explain.

4. Service/discussion ends with intercessory prayer.

11. Eleventh Week: Small groups continued to study intercessory prayer as it relates to the ministry of Jesus. The prayer life of Jesus as the Great High Priest continues forever and can save to the uttermost that comes to God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for humanity.

a. Small group 1 convened Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

   i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

   ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

  iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

    1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory Prayer-Jesus)

    2. Bible Text: Hebrews 7:1–28

    3. Discussion question: How do you imagine the ongoing intercession of Christ on our behalf? What is He praying for us? What aspects of Christ's priesthood are emphasized?

    4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

 b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

  i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

  ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

  iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

    1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Intercessory Prayer-Jesus)

    2. Bible Text: Hebrews 7:1–28

    3. Discussion question: How do you imagine the ongoing intercession of Christ on our behalf? What is He praying for us? What aspect of Christ's priesthood is emphasized?

    4. Service/discussion ends with prayer.

12. Twelfth Week: Small groups continued with the study of prayer with a focus on the impact of corporate prayer in the community. The collective prayer of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost and the Advent of the Holy Spirit had profound effects on the city of Jerusalem. The miraculous was witnessed to the point that men from every nation heard the gospel in their own language. This corporate prayer brought about an anointed

presentation of Jesus by the Apostle Peter, and thousands were saved and added to the church daily.

    a. Small group 1 convened Sunday at the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

        i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

        ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

        iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

            1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Corporate Prayer- Day of Pentecost)

            2. Bible Text: Acts 2:1–47

            3. Discussion question: Why is corporate prayer so important? Why is it so important to get together as a community to pray? What are the benefits of praying together as a family (church family)?

            4. Service/Discussion ends with corporate prayer

    b. Small group 2 convened Sunday at the team leaders' residence at 6 p.m.

        i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

        ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

        iii. Discussion (30–60 minutes)

            1. Topic: Personal Prayer Life (Corporate Prayer- Day of Pentecost)

            2. Bible Text: Acts 2:1–47

            3. Discussion questions: Why is corporate prayer so important? Why is it so important to get together as a community to pray? What are the benefits of praying together as a family (church family)?

            4. Service/ discussion ends with corporate prayer.

13. Thirteenth Week: Small groups have completed the thirteen-week course of study on prayer. The small groups will reflect on the insights, experiences, relationships, interaction, fellowship, intimacy, impact, and growth both individually and collectively.

   a. Both small groups one and two met in a joint session in the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

      i. Meal, Refreshments, Fellowship (15–25 minutes)

      ii. Call to Order and Prayer (5–10 minutes)

      iii. Discussion/ reflection/sharing (30–60 minutes)

         1. Evaluation questionnaires distributed to participants

         2. Service/session ends with prayer.

Appendix B

Laity Questionnaire

Prospective Questions (Laity)

1. How long have you been attending your present church? (Check the appropriate answer):

_____ a. 1 year or less

_____ b. 1–5 years

_____ c. 5–10 years

_____ d. 10 – years plus

2. On a scale 1–10, how important do you feel regular (consistent) church attendance in our

present culture?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. How many regular worship (opportunities) services does your present church offer in a week?

_____ a. 1

_____ b. 2

_____ c. 3

_____ d. 4 or more

4. How many worship services offered do you regularly attend at your present church?

_____ a. 1

_____ b. 2

_____ c. 3

_____ d. 4 or more

5. On a personal or individual level, how would you describe your attendance at your local church?

_____ a. random (hit and miss)

_____ b. casual (one service a week)

_____ c. regular attendance (presence but not really involved)

_____d. connected (participate in certain events)

_____e. passionate (a priority)

6. What would you consider to be the mode of worship at your present church?

_____ a. Traditional

_____ b. Contemporary

_____ c. Hybrid

_____ d. other (specify) _____.

7. What is your attraction to your local church? (Check the appropriate response).

_____ a. Music program

_____ b. Pastor

_____ c. Family/ friends

_____d. Strong programs (children church, men's fellowship, youth program, etc.)

_____ e. Spiritual growth

_____ f. Ministry opportunities

_____ g. other (please specify): _____.

8. How would you describe the format (order of service) of the different service (s) offered at your church?

_____ a. Every service same format (Redundant)

_____ b. Varied (morning service traditional/evening service contemporary or small group, etc.)

_____ c. Other (please specify) ___see comment section_____.

9. On a scale 1–10, do you agree that the present-day church needs an upgrade in their format of worship service? If so, how? _____.

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

10. Do you feel your local church has a sense of family or community?

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

11. How satisfied are you with the feeling or family or community in your local church?

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

12. How would you rate your small group experience?

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

13. What is the highlight about the small group?

_____ a. Fellowship

_____ b. Simulating discussions

_____ c. Relevant topics

_____ d. other (please specify) __see the comment section.

14. Do you agree that small group has expanded your biblical knowledge?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

15. On a scale 1–10, Do you feel that the small groups have a sense of family and community?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

16. On a scale 1—10, Do you feel that small groups (intimacy settings) had enhanced the traditional (cooperative setting)?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

17. On a scale 1—10, Did the intimacy setting of the small group help forge a close connection with the cooperate setting of the traditional service.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

18. Do you feel that your opportunities to minister were augmented with the implementation of the small group?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

19. Do you feel that your participation has increased with the implementation of the small group?

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

20. Do you feel more involved or connected in your local assembly due to your interaction within the small group?

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

21. Do you feel that the intimate setting of the small group has strengthen you spiritually?

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

Appendix C

Clergy Questionnaire

Prospective Questions (Pastors)

1. How long have you been pastoring your present church? (Check appropriate answer)

_____ a. 1 years or less

_____ b. 1–5 years

_____ c. 6–10 years

_____ d. 11 years or more

2. How many worship opportunities does your church offer each week?

_____a. 1

_____ b. 2

_____ c. 3

_____ d. 4 or more

3. In your opinion, how effective is the hybrid model (Traditional service/ small group) to foster

a family atmosphere?

_____ a. Excellent

_____ b. Good

_____ c. Fair

_____ d. Poor

_____ e. other (please specify) _____.

4. The early Christian church considered themselves as a family, do you agree with this New

Testament sense of "family" should be a paramount goal for the local church today?

5. Do you agree that your local church displays a New Testament "family" model?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. Do you agree that the sense of family/community encourages people to forge relationships?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

7. Do you feel the New Testament way of thinking like a family provides a foundation for a

resurgence in the commitment to the local body?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

8. Does the small group experience produce a level of intimacy that translates into the cooperate

traditional setting of the church?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

9. In the small group setting, does a renewed sense of community appear to be realized in the

traditional cooperate setting?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

10. John Townsend and Henry Cloud liken the small group to a second family for people, to what extent do you agree the small group is like a second family that may be a place for restoration?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

11. In your opinion, to what degree did the Hybrid Model contribute to the commitment level in the local church? Answer in the comment section (question 22)

12. What observation have you made that the Hybrid Model has contributed to the overall Discipleship/commitment levels of the participants in small groups?

13. Do you see the involvement level of the passive spectator changing in the small group?

14. On a scale 1–10, did the small group experience help reveal the diversity of gifts that lay dormant or may go undetected in the cooperate setting?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

15. On a scale 1–10, the scriptures liken the church to a body with distinct parts performing specific functions, do you recognize the Hybrid Model (small groups and cooperate/traditional setting) in the distinct role they play in building the whole body?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

16. Would you agree that the Hybrid Model (small group-intimacy/cooperate-impact) affords new ministry opportunities in the local body?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

17. If the Hybrid model affords new front-line ministry opportunities, does this result in the transformation of inactive members into active participants?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

18. Scale 1–10, Do you agree that the small group setting has been a tool to help with discipleship of the local body?

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

19. In your opinion, to what degree would you say the Hybrid model has had an evangelistic impact in your local church? Answer in the comment section (question 22)

20. Please rank 1– 7, Where have you observed a significant impact in your local assembly due to the implementation of the Hybrid Model?

_____ a. Evangelism/new converts/members

_____ b. Discipleship/commitment

_____ c. Fellowship/ relationship/ family

_____ d. Ministry/gifts

_____ e. Spiritual growth/biblical knowledge

_____ f. Worship

_____ g. other (please specify) _____.

21. On a scale 1–10, to what degree has the Hybrid Model made a transformation to your local church?

      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

22. Comments:

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IRB Approval Letter

Liberty University
Institutional Review Board

January 26, 2022

Steven Adams and Robert Massey

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-624

Metamorphosis of the Traditional Church: The Hybrid Church Model

Dear Steven Adams and Robert Massey,

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 does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(1).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office