Liberty University School of Divinity

Churches Working Together:
Four Keys in Serving One Community

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by

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ABSTRACT

CHURCHES SERVING ALONG SIDE OF EACH OTHER

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The growth of many small churches tends to be stunted as they lack necessary resources that encourage growth. Church elders are responsible to God for the growth of the local church. Recent conversations among local ministers in Greenbrier County have revealed that, in addition to prayer, they want to know what needs done – and what they themselves can do – in order to reach their community. Their intent is to discover the resources within their churches that can address their community's needs while also reaching and helping the unchurched. The potential value in personal ministry is their desire to see the community positively affected through promoting the gospel. This same potential must seek to connect churches in the same community regardless of theological stance. The approach is to first interview local pastors, then ask board members and church adherents to fill out an informal assessment on determining their communities' needs. This approach relies upon the ability to work together. Discovering the four keys will allow pastors to develop the necessity and functional aspect to collaborate in reaching the community as one collective body.

Abstract length: 182 words

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The community of believers each confidently believes that their Church seeks to share the authentic gospel message; however, theological differences have divided local communities so that a person looking for a church questions what the differences are. The need for many churches within a community is necessary as one local church is unable to reach out to multiple sites. People who are involved in their community and who desire to make an impact for Christ need the assistance of other local churches. The division in theological perspective has presented to laity members the challenge of finding ways to work together. The local Christians of any given community, if united, can promote the love of Christ more effectively than they can independently.

Statement of Problem

As they seek to develop a passion for worshipping a Savior, ethnic cultures view the Kingdom of God differently. Each local congregation under the direction of the leadership team provides to the community a synopsis of what the church believes about how the gospel message is perceived. Local communities are often confused about the different theological perspectives since each claims to come from the same source. The conflict of confusing observations within communities and the conflict of different theological viewpoints become the problem: why is the Kingdom of God viewed differently among the various church cultures?

The quest in this research is not to define why there are many different church denominations, but rather, to demonstrate the need to unify as one voice worshipping one Savior. The vast differences of Christianity must consider the purpose within Christ as Savior. Christ's

meaning can be found in the declaration of his love for all people. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."[1] When considering this passage as a believer in Christ, a person can see the need for love that does not limit any person's invitation to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

A closer look at the above passage may lead to the implication that a condemning nature holds to a different view than that of how love is defined. The particular beliefs of a community of people who seek salvation through Christ are what establishes their understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven. The recent struggles within certain Christian circles have challenged the reality of the gospel message. These challenges provide the format for determining the internal conflict within the Christian community. This problem is the inability to work effectively as a unified body of Christ.

The directive found within the Great Commission requires understanding the importance of reaching out to communities across the globe. Roxburgh and Boren examine conceptual ideas that churches attempt to put into practice. "The assumption of the attractional imagination is that average people outside the church are looking for a church; therefore, church leaders are creating the attractive church."[2] The concept is to alter the church to make the unchurched welcome. Making people feel welcome is important; however, when the gospel message or biblical text is altered, churches start to blur what Christ's love is. This message then challenges the belief structure of the church. It is this alteration that presents a problematic issue when churches in the community attempt to unite for a common goal.

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[1] John 3:16-17.

[2] Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott. Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 18.

Defining the problem at the smallest scope is that churches need to focus on understanding the gospel message and how it is to be applied to the local area. Each church desires to see people attend a worship service. How can churches that hold different theological application work together? The answer lies in understanding that people desire to view the church as a global entity rather than each congregation as small families. Local communities within the United States are becoming more diverse. This development will challenge local congregations to seek new inventive ways to share the same gospel message. People groups respond differently to any given message; however, it is the responsibility of the church to discover how to deliver the gospel so that people will embrace it.

Next, the leadership must determine how to encourage people to be imitators of Christ. The purpose is not to develop a hierarchy of positions, but rather, true discipleship. Patterns used may challenge some current formalities in that people will start to partner with other believers from other churches. The Gideon's organization is an example that highlights the simplicity of sharing the gospel. The common ground is that Gideon's agree in sharing the gospel message. The mission of the Gideon's Ministry is first and foremost giving the Scripture to people. "Having God's Word can and does lead people to faith in Christ, and those new Christians then grow by studying their Scriptures and even use them to share their faith with others."[3] The premise of the Gideon's is to send Bibles out for people to have. This simplistic work provides one message that is shared by all involved.

The methodology of encouraging people to gather for one mission must embrace the development of bringing people to Christ. The conflict is that churches are encouraged to

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[3] "About Us: A Unique Focus," A Unique Focus, accessed April 24, 2015, http://www.gideons.org/AboutUs/UniqueFocus.aspx.

connect only within the same fellowship organization and thereby have aided in the downfall of modern Christianity. Christ never told the church to divide into segregated groups. This challenge is overcome by using any viable recourse to lead people into the kingdom, as Christ led the disciples after his ascension. The method of presenting the gospel has one common thread, and that is the love of the Father through the Son.

The current growth of the church today is also a part of the problem. Petersen presents the modern church society with the past but challenges ministry leaders to be relevant in this time of history.[4] Adding to the issue is that particular churches are forcing only one way to present the gospel message. However, the reverse side to this same problem is that some churches are becoming politically pleasing to pacify crowds. In either case, the churches are not providing the gospel message to unreached people. When examining this element of the problem, one must accept that the essence of the message can only be Christ.

The focus tends to be solely on the gospel message in growing the church. However, it is the practical inter people skills that have become the problem in sharing the gospel message. The overall problem is getting the Christians who profess Christ to focus on the Kingdom of Heaven and not on any church over another. The focus of this project is to develop a system that enables pastors and other church leaders to promote unity. This unity is to be among other counterparts in other churches, thereby providing the gospel message, unaltered from the presentation of the Bible.

When scripture is studied, people find themselves either justifying self-promotion or experiencing the conviction that reproves one's actions. It is not the stance of this project to

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[4] Jim Petersen, Church Without Walls: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 40- 45.

suggest a better system. It is, however, to evaluate the concepts of ministry to enable local churches to focus on partnering with each other in promoting Christ. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."[5] If the churches start working together, a difference will occur. The change will occur when church leaders desire to promote Christ rather than their particular church.

A consideration of the local environment must contend with solving the problem. This understanding provides an effect that differs from different communities. The local environment of this project contends with the job market of coal and tourism. This struggle is challenging when people are not sure if a pay check will come. It effectively impacts the perception of people's expectation of the church. An extension of this consideration is geography of the land. This topography is endless supply of mountain where fear the big disaster. The highs of the mountains and depths of the valleys provide challenges for churches reaching the people lives. This concern of people reflects the ability of the church people attempt to survive. The environmental connection will shape relationships where ministry requires meaningful interaction.

Theoretical Basis

The examination of church governance that promotes evangelism establishes the need for changes to occur within a person. The self-burden of any person will develop into turning the focus to Christ. The goal of any evangelical church first and foremost is sharing the gospel. Many people will agree with the precise statement but will then add another element upon the

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[5] John 12:32.

account of justification. Thus, churches develop a purely human response by promoting church attendance. This further establishes counter productivity to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The motivation for building community relationships depends on the nature of the involvement. This involvement must declare that the purpose is to bring people together. Civic organizations draw people together to accomplish one goal. However, churches in the same community divide based on issues that split the community and sometimes even churches within the same fellowship. Here, societal issues drive the passion of the people rather than the gospel of Christ, producing a group of Christians who claim the same God but divide over who is right about the Bible. This concept is counterproductive in promoting the gospel.

The hardest challenge in bringing people together is setting aside differences for the accomplishing of one common goal. The common goal for any Christian church is promoting the gospel. Effective change in the community requires that people from the community see the collective Christian population working together. Building cross-denominational relationships is necessary and is inherent in the word *kairos*.[6] It is imperative to seek the right time for joining as one unified church as opposed to remaining a divided spectrum that challenges each other. The suggestion of building working relationships with fellow community pastors leads to the openness of working together. Communities may develop spiritually through the pastors of that city.

The question becomes whether pastors are willing to work as partners to develop community support. Developing a system in which churches can unite to promote the Kingdom of God rather than a church forces a person to consider the reality of the Great Commission and

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[6] Thomas E. Trask, Wayde I. Goodall, and Zenas J. Bicket, *The Pentecostal Pastor: A Mandate for the 21st Century* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Pub. House, 1997), 454.

the necessity of working as one body. This commission requires each pastor to aid in the promotion of another pastor's church, thus enabling each person to discover a broader concept of the body of Christ.

When considering the vast theological diversity, local Christians must consider the purpose of the gospel. Montoya's description of being called to ministry requires developing a philosophy of ministry.[7] His presentation challenges one to develop a guiding principle that "spells out exactly what we are to accomplish in ministry."[8] Understanding how ministry functions within the community is essential. Any pastor's philosophy includes evangelism. The need is to abide by a biblically developed plan that is focused on sharing the gospel. When bringing people together, the same attention must be extended to bringing the gospel to a unified body of Christ. It must be understood that Christ is the only purpose for every pastor to be in ministry.

Pastors who focus only on the congregation begin to experience stagnation in church growth which may lead to a potential struggle to keep the congregation in fellowship rather than focusing on the outside ministry to the unchurched. Barna encourages church leadership to deliberate how the gospel can be shared, which ultimately leads to how Christians live so that other people will accept the witness of Christ. "Less than one-quarter of all born-again adults consciously strive to make worship part of their lifestyle."[9] This lack compounds the problem of

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[7] John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 48.

[8] Ibid.

[9] George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook Press, 2001), 59.

sharing the gospel with the community and reduces the effectiveness of ministry within a local church.

These two elements collide, affecting how people in the community view the local church and deepens the need for pastors to work together. The community is more open to people who live as they profess. Pastors are taught to live with this understanding in their personal lives. This teaching is not meant to imply that pastors have no personal life; rather, it challenges the pastor and the church leadership to be conscious that people may stop by unannounced. This balance must show in the way the pastor's family worships and also be a witness to people who have accepted Christ. Bridges points out that the manner in which the pastor leads his family is representative of how he will lead the church.[10]

However, this leadership extends further when local pastors agree to work with each other, as the community should not see the person in the office of the pastor but rather Christ through the pastor. It does not matter who the pastor is but it matters who the pastor represents. It is essential that pastors worship closely with each other. The frequency of the worship is not the quest; rather, building teams that worship Christ is the goal. Unity in the body of Christ is a stronger witness to the community when churches work together.

The application of church evangelism is a much-studied topic that many authors have explored. However, the fact that churches need to work with each other and build together is not as well established. The need for kingdom growth must be developed through local pastors and involves teaching the need for partnering with other churches that proclaim Christ as Savior. It is important to understand that all evangelical doctrines have the foundational understanding about Christ. The premise is that all the churches are missional. "God's dream for the world is about

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[10] Trask, Pentecostal Pastor, 106.

the redemption of all creation, not just individuals getting into heaven; it is about the restoration of life as God intended it to be; it is about realigning life around God and God's ways."[11] Christ came for all. That is why all the local churches have the same mission.

The strongest effect on the community and the greatest success in each church are when all churches unite under the Savior and proclaim the same God. The interdependency is how relationships are built in the community. Bullock's perspective of connecting with community leaders relies on the appreciative quality of accepting other people. The relationships that are established with community leaders, which should include pastors, strengthen the concept of one kingdom. The focus is for pastors to develop meaningful relationships to enable unifying the churches, so the public sees one kingdom. Moore points out that, when a church multiplies, particular trends stifle the growth.[12] The lack of growth and unity limits the occurrence of future growth.

Most churches display two flags, a national flag, and a Christian flag. The latter promotes unity among Christians in the society. It represents the kingdom to which all Christians claim to be a part. The problem is the division of Christianity into smaller groups that can accept one another and interact regardless of theological perspective. Frustration enters in how the local communities view the churches' perspective. The needed change is in the myopic unification that inhibits each church from supporting another of a different perspective. This acknowledgment is seen as reversing years of tradition. No biblical passage exists that describes heaven as

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[11] Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott. Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 102.

[12] Ralph Moore, *How to Multiply Your Church: The Most Effective Way to Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2009), 56.

segregated. Therefore, people who do not attend church need to witness with their own eyes the unification of churches promoting the gospel together as children of God.

The biblical perspective requires that every person comprehend that all believers are a part of the body of Christ. The following passage emphasizes why the relationship between pastors is important. It also underscores the need for diversity among people working together for the same goal.

> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so, the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. Moreover, if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? However, in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.[13]
> A deeper connection is developing and understanding how every Christian can work. The

passage above makes clear that the body of Christ is not limited to one race or another. It is to all people that profess Christ as the risen Son of God. The mission of Christ is not to condemn people but to provide salvation. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."[14] Understanding Christ's mission encourages churches to imitate this very same love to the local communities.

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[13] 1 Cor 12:13-20.

[14] John 3:17-18.

A collection of historical data is difficult to unearth; however, Barna's research group provides some understanding of the environment in which churches minister. One selected group study recently focused on the Millennials. These statistics represent a vast difference between traditional and newer perspectives and show that Millennials are asking how Christianity is relevant.[15] Comparing these statistics to Barna's book, the similarity is that people desire a real relationship that accepts the individual as a respected person.[16]

If people need to feel accepted, and churches are to bear the image of Christ, then why is it so hard to work together? This issue is not just a contemporary issue but also an issue that has plagued history. It is necessary that people discover who they are in Christ. This understanding is central to understanding why the Church must unite in order to show unity with the local communities. It provides spectators a valid option to acknowledge that Christ's purpose is to love them.

Statement of Methodology

The method of developing the research requires the recruitment of another local pastor to aid in the study. The overall question necessitates answering what it will take for cross-denominational pastors to effectively lead their churches to evangelize the same community. The premise of this work is getting back to the directive of Christ, which he gave on the day of his ascension. It is essential to understand that Christians profess that God sent Christ, who later sent the Holy Spirit. The proclaimed theological or liturgical system is not the issue. The simplest form of understanding must be grasped: that Christ died for all people. This knowledge means

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[15] "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church," - Barna Group, accessed May 04, 2015, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/711-what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church#.VTFg3GxFbms.

[16] Comparing Barna's statistics, Growing Disciples and www.barna.org.

that all people who profess Christ as Savior are to be witnesses to other people who do not know Him as Savior.

The strategy involves discovering why division exists between the different perspectives. A theological and personal perspective will be included within the survey. The intended audience is church leaders. From various congregations, pastors, one church board member, and one influential member of the laity will be surveyed. The questionnaire will be conducted in an online format that is private and anonymous. It will not reveal any name of any person or church. The intention is to gather a balanced view between the pastorate and the laity of the church. The generated data will answer the overall question.

The research requires working together in order to bring a perspective from within the collective church interest. The hypothesis should preclude the need for evangelism but include a favoritism for one's church. It is needful to grasp the concept that there is one body of Christ working as a family to reach communities in a local area. The description will focus on research on a vast theological perspective that claims the same concept that a pastor must work with another pastor for the same common goal of the gospel. "We call on Bible-believing churches in a community to work together diligently as a reflection of our shared commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,"[17]

The next phase seeks to construct teams that realize God is in charge of leading the group. No one person can become more significant than the work of God through the people. It must be understood that the body of Christ can change the way that the non-church goers view the Christian within the local community. As the churches start working together more closely, unity will be developed for all people. Christ will be seen as Savior of all. The construction of

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[17] Trask, *Pentecostal Pastor*, 456.

teams is not to divide the communities into small regions within which each church operates. Rather, it is to promote all churches in the community that acknowledge Christ as the only way to the Father. Montoya underscores this very notion. "The Church is a redeemed community of sinners set apart to worship God in Christ."[18]

Modeling a system that fosters God's design for mankind to worship together highlights the importance of evangelizing and discipling people. Paul, as recorded in the Book of Acts, sought to not only spread the gospel message but also to develop local churches. This principle is reflective of John Maxwell's principles of leadership. It is important to understand that a person's leadership style can add to or detract from the group. Leadership is essential as it is how people learn to disciple and leads to evangelism. The need for leadership is critical for ministry at every level.

The resolution of the project must provide direction to what the church should begin to do in order to see productive change, and express what the image of the church should be. Watkins and West, desiring that God bring his creation to that place of loving him, addressed this very question about the African American Church. "We do not claim to have a crystal ball, but we do claim to have access to a God, who is pushing us to engage in a conversation about the future of African American churches."[19] The implication is for people to gain a desire that challenges growth for change. This challenge is the place where people must ask, Is it better to return to the past or to allow God to provide for the future?

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[18] MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 50.

[19] Ralph B. Watkins and Justin G. West, *The Future of the African American Church: An Invitation to Dialogue* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2014), 9.

Review of Literature

Books

John Maxwell's book, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team,* provides a basis for developing a sound team dedicated to the end goal.[20] The challenge presented to each team leader is how to establish and recruit people to focus on one concept. The team must develop closeness in the relationship. Each member is as valuable to the group as another. While Maxwell promotes the need for one of these laws over another, he nonetheless connects the need for cohesion within the group. The systematic approach to developing a team must consider the need for each law to develop. While each organization is different in design, all the principles must be applied for a team to be successful.

Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility,* establishes the need to view why service to any community is necessary, and to discover how Christians must represent Christ to people.[21] The opening section challenges the reader to consider the reality of humility and suggests that this is the image people should see outside of the church. The nature of being a servant is to be an imitator of the master who is served. This nature requires people to separate from their culture and embrace a new culture through humility.

Thomas Rainer, *Surprising Insights: From the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them,* presents a different perspective for reaching people. Every person needs to feel that his or her needs are being met. The environment within churches is not always conducive to reaching unchurched people. The concepts that Rainer presents focus on how to meet the needs of

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[20] John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001).

[21] Duane Elmer, *Cross-cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006).

unchurched people. Statistics provided raise an alarming notion that each generation is becoming more unchurched.[22] The quest for church outreach must include discovering viable means for reaching the needs of the individual.

Jim Petersen, *Church Without Walls: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries,* examines what the church has become from a historical perspective and details where the church needs to progress from its current state.[23] He establishes that the walls and pews do not bind the church.[24] It emphasizes rediscovering that the first-century church was the people. Actually, Christians must realize that they are the church and the building is not. People reflect the image that is the body of Christ which affects how unchurched people view churched people.

Robert Lewis with Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence,* offer the reader a challenge that makes Christianity appealing to other people.[25] The authors authenticate the need for churches to join with one another. The premise is that Christians must develop a connection to people who are in search of God. The concept is that the church is a bridge to connect local communities to Christ.

Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God,* is a reflective work on Paul and how today's Christians need to understand God.[26] As the book tends to be written on the personal level of the reader, the author demonstrates the need to have the direction of God in their lives. This concept is essential for the gospel to continue. The lack of understanding God's direction

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[22] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 33.

[23] Jim Petersen, *Church without Walls: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992).

[24] Ibid., 18.

[25] Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2001).

[26] Gordon D. Fee, Paul, *The Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 1.

will cause a person to not fully grasp the gospel message. However, the study of Paul's life

provides useable knowledge in sharing the message of salvation with other people.

Alan Roxburgh and M. Scoot Borden, *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why
it Matters, How to Become One,* question the method and concept of the body of Christ today.[27]

They underscore the mission of sharing the gospel and highlight the concept that the body of

Christ is missional in nature.

John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus,* develops the

understanding that training people requires discipleship.[28] The essence of discipleship is the

ability to be held accountable. It provides leaders the ability to understand the impact they have

on developing new leaders who then disciple other people.

John Townsend, *Leadership Beyond Reason: How Great Leaders Succeed by Harnessing
the Power: Their Values, Feeling, and Intuition,* establishes the need for leaders to grasp the

concept of leading people.[29] The biggest concern is that leaders forget the relationships between

people being discipled. Leadership is essential in directing people to follow after the same

common goal. The ministry leader must understand the difference between the role that people

perceive versus the intentions of a leader.

Don Howell Jr., *Servant of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, develops the

concept and the formation of servanthood.[30] The author examines how some servants recorded in

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[27] Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott. Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why
It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).

[28] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003).

[29] John Townsend, *Leadership beyond Reason: How Great Leaders Succeed by Harnessing the Power of
Their Values, Feelings, and Intuition* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

[30] Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf &
Stock Publishers, 2003).

the Bible demonstrate how Christ came to serve. Each believer who professes Christ as Savior must start to become a servant who imitates the nature of Christ.

Journal Articles

Jason Wollschlager, *Church Government, and Religious Participation,* takes the approach that religion itself has eroded the very cause of the gospel.[31] This article illustrates the effect of many church congregants who just attend services. The discussion focuses on practical leadership that builds a relationship within the church and community.

Charles Zech, *The Agency Relationship in Churches: An Empirical Analysis,* examines the role of pastors as agents who relate God's message to people.[32] The examples that pastors set by how they act is reflective of the relationships that are built. Developing healthy relationships is imperative and offers a person a view of the type of relationship that a pastor should maintain.

Gaspar Colon, *Incarnational Community Based Ministry: A Leadership Model for Community Transformation*, brings insight into how Christ modeled leadership.[33] Leaders must represent the purpose or ideal of an organization. Colon emphasizes the ministry where leadership chooses to represent Christ in the community.

Daniel Rivera, *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities: The Ministry of Presence,* focuses on reaching a selected community for the purpose of leading people to

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[31] Jason Wollschleger, "Church Government and Religious Participation" *Rationality and Society* 25, no. 4 (2013).

[32] Charles Zech, "The Agency Relationship in Churches: An Empirical Analysis," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 66, no. 4 (2007).

[33] Gasper Colon, "Incarnational Community Based Ministry: A Leadership Model for Community Transformation," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, no. 6.2 (Fall 2012).

Christ.[34] The nature of this study allows the audience to consider that bringing a culture together impacts lives. It also emphasizes embracing the needs of the community, which also establishes a pattern of how to bring people together for one common goal.

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

Jay Ferguson, *Church Renewal Through Relationships*, examines a geographical district that encountered failing relationships.[35] The concept is the importance of relationships that aid unity in churches within a set denomination. This system reflects churches that minister in the local area. It further stresses the need for churches to demonstrate the love of Christ through personal relationships.

Scott McKee, *The Relationship Between Church Health and Church Growth in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, explores the relationship that is present between the health and the growth of a church.[36] The premise first establishes what church health is. It challenges conventional thinking that growth is the result of health. The stance shared is often how people view Christians.

Chang Kyu Kim, *Biblical Strategy and Shift to Spiritual Driven Church Growth,* provides the formation of the New Testament church.[37] The explanation of membership provides insight into understanding how Christians ought to live. The image of the church is witnessed by people

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[34] Daniel V. Rivera, "Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities: The Ministry of Presence," *Anglican Theological Review* 93.4 (Fall 2011).

[35] Jay Ferguson, Jr., "Church Renewal through Relationships" (DMin. thesis, Drew University, 2011).

[36] Scott McKee, "The Relationship between Church Health and Church Growth in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church" (DMin. thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003).

[37] Chang Kyu Kim, "Biblical Strategy and Shift to Spiritual Driven Church Growth" (DMin. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

from the community. This concept of living is shared by professing Christians. The details focus on developing a nature that embraces Christ.

Bible Passages

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[38] This passage establishes the need for the message of Christ to be continually preached. The gospel message is what makes the purpose of ministry relevant to all times in history. This same message provides unsaved people the opportunity to accept Christ.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."[39] Understanding is presented for why the Father sent the Son. Christians who are intently desiring to share the gospel must have a dependency for knowing the Father's love for humanity. This will provide the internal love that is shared in the gospel message.

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."[40] Paul's assertion is that he embraced people in the spiritual state in which they were. This system provides for understanding the empathy that is needed when reaching cross-culturally as well as the need to care for a person's feelings.

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[38] Matt 20:19-20.

[39] John 3:16-17.

[40] 1 Cor 9:22.

> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."[41]

Christ's discussion with Zacchaeus illustrates that salvation comes to people. This passage establishes that people must come to a sorrowful understanding of personal sins. The intention for believers is to lead people to Christ through the cross. It provides the believers with a practical example of Christ coming to a person.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."[42] This details an essential element in being prepared for evangelism - being ready to share faith. The ability to correctly understand how the Bible is applied to life enables effective witnessing.

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits."[43] Peter brings understanding to the believer about the application of the gospel message. He causes the believer to consider how to present effectively the gospel message to another person.

> Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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[41] Luke 19:8-10.

[42] 2 Tim 2:15.

[43] 1 Pet 3:18-19.

This passage presents Christ's challenging thought about how believers treat other people. This passage should cause a person to consider how to serve all people.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."[44] Paul teaches that people cannot compete about who gets to work; rather, he teaches how to demonstrate Christ's love to people. The humility that is displayed reveals Christ's image through people who embrace humility.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will."[45] This passage warns that the actions of a people speak more loudly than their proclamation of belief. People view professing Christians by the actions witnessed.

"Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."[46] People look for how great a person is; however, this verse challenges the definition of greatness in terms of being a servant. A person who practices being a servant allows Christ to receive the glory.

> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.[47]

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[44] Phil 2:3-5.

[45] Rom 12:2.

[46] Mark 10:43-44.

[47] Gen 1:26-27.

God created mankind to share his love. This understanding allows a person to grasp reason in that God created man higher than the animals. It is important in showing that God desires a personal relationship with humanity.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."[48] Paul makes the connection between creation and personal life. God's desire is to reconnect with every person. This desire is why he sent his son to be the sacrifice for all of humanity.

> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.[49]

This passage gives understanding of the different elements of ministry. People with callings bring that service to a particular ministry within the body of Christ. These different ministry operations must first and foremost share the gospel and disciple other believers to maturity.

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." [50] This is Christ's statement about denying self to find life. This directive asks a person to acknowledge Christ through salvation in order to find life. The need then becomes to lead people to discover Christ so that they, too, can find life.

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[48] Rom 1:20.

[49] Eph 4:11-13.

[50] Matt 16:24-25.

"You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance."[51] Christians from different backgrounds acknowledge that sound doctrine must be considered when discipling people and that it is essential when partnering within Christian society in order to work together.

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[51] Titus 2:1-2.

CHAPTER 2

NECESSITY FOR THESIS

The challenge for many people in choosing a church lies in the dysfunctional relationships that exist among churches. Different doctrinal statements among churches have existed from the time of Christ's ascension to the present day. The historical context must examine the function of the church in order to develop a closer understanding of what the church is supposed to be. Within this view, the concept of becoming one body produces an understanding concerning the formation of the body of believers. The church as the body of Christ challenges the reality that denominations should not exist. While different understandings were present throughout the New Testament, an understanding developed that it was one body of believers actively sharing the same gospel message.

This thesis will seek to connect the purpose given by Christ to its implementation within the local church. It is important to realize that the church will be challenged in the natural course of human interaction. The struggle is not to promote a belief system; rather, the belief system must emphasize that salvation comes only through Christ who taught the disciples that there is only one way to connect with God. Churches must collectively consider Christ's declaration: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."[1]

Churches today must consider the need to mend relationships with other churches in order to build one united body so that local communities will see the close relationship churches have with Christ; however, church history often challenges the perception people have of

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[1] John 14:6.

churches that do not work well with each other. The hindrance created by churches is not limited to only a belief system. Another challenge is the competition for the same population. When churches attempt to reach the same population with the same tactics promoted by one system versus another, it creates a struggle that drastically injures the image of the body of Christ.

Early Church

The origin of the problem of churches not working together has deep roots, beginning before the time of Christ. It has been deeply embedded in church culture since the origin of churches. The first church started within the Roman Empire and was led by first century Jews. González asserts that the first century church CE derived from the fourth century, BCE,[2] thus transferring the problem of the Jewish environment to the first-century church. It considers that various people from different Jewish and Gentile sects were accepting Christ as Messiah and were therefore forming one body, which challenges the concept of a person conforming to the image of Christ.

The same element of conflict is discovered with the disciple who questioned Christ about casting out demons. "Master, said John, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he is not one of us. Do not stop him, Jesus said, for whoever is not against you is for you."[3] Christ responds with a command that reveals that the other group was helping. While human nature may present a struggle between people working together, it is nonetheless imperative that different churches learn to work together for the common goal of spreading the gospel of Christ.

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[2] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The History of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2006), 7.

[3] Luke 9:49-50.

After Christ ascended to heaven, another conflict arose between Paul and Peter. "When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned."[4] The opposition recorded in this passage stems from differences in understanding how Gentiles were to behave once they accepted salvation. Learning what Christianity should look like was in its infancy. Carson and Moo maintain that the conflict was a result of cultural differences. "Most of the first Christians, of course, were themselves Jews. As rising numbers of Gentiles were added to the church, and as the earliest Christians reflected on what God had accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, various tensions inevitably developed among those who grappled with such issues."[5] People possess preconceived notions that they believe in the same manner. This thought process logically concludes that individuals with the same beliefs will have the same behavior patterns.

A closer examination of the Galatians passage seeks to balance the opposition discovered in Acts 15. This context asserts that Gentiles can receive salvation. However, there was a push that salvation must follow the directions of Moses. Paul took the stance that all people had access to Christ free from the Jewish law. Bruce comments: "A major Jewish objection to eating with Gentiles was that, in doing so, one would almost certainly infringe the Jewish food laws."[6] This belief challenged the culture while also examining what freedom is in Christ for the believer. To stave off a potential split within today's churches, congregations must determine how to work

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[4] Gal 2:1.

[5] D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 32.

[6] F. F. Bruce and F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 147.

with each other. Differences in a belief structure should not limit the body of Christ to be seen as separated. Rather, it should foster a desire to develop unity among believers.

The progression towards unity can be discovered through the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons whose mentor was Polycarp and who himself had been discipled by the Apostle John.[7] Irenaeus' perspective which centered on keeping the church unified sought to put personal differences aside when collectively working together as one body. He placed emphasis on maintaining the orthodoxy and catholicity aspects of the church that are universal to a central understanding of the gospel. Litfin describes the time as one of developing false interpretations in discussing Jesus.[8] It is important to have one voice about Christ. Personal experience in learning the gospel message strengthens the desire and the need to guard the original context and meaning.

Irenaeus as a church father sought to keep to the biblical text without deviating from the intended message. The gospel message was not to conform to the culture of a people group but rather to be applied to life in the culture wherein a person lived. Gonzalez calls this divinization. "Humankind is to be instructed, not only by the angels but also by the 'two hands' of God: the Word and the Holy Spirit. Led by those two hands, humans are to receive instruction and growth, always to (or 'intending to') an increasingly close communion with God."[9] This process allows humanity to grow closer to God through a relationship with him.

Just as it is important to stress that Irenaeus sought to keep the body of Christ unified, it remains of paramount importance that the modern day church body strive to act as one church

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[7] Ibid., 79.

[8] Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 77.

[9] Gonzalez, vol. 1, 69.

rather than several smaller groups attempting to appease people. The continuing conflict is the image that churches compete to produce the same result. For example, Ireneaus addressed the conflict of dating the celebration of Easter with Pope Victor I, bishop of Rome. Such cultural differences highlight the misconception people have when differences arise in the methodology and understanding of the liturgy. Humanity must contend with that which is important and not set preferences for one system being right over another.

When church leadership is unaware of the situations created through misunderstanding between churches, the resulting differences will continue to divide the people. Augustine of Hippo provided a system for examining one's love for God – whether it allowed one to live for God even though declaration of a personal relationship with God would result in certain death. Litfin describes Augustine's experience of turning from sin to becoming a devout Christian as transforming him into a passionate leader who wanted to serve.[10] His personal testimony reveals that through questioning God a personal connection develops. His later writings give understanding into the personal conflict that challenged reasoning to relent to understanding.

> And how shall I call upon my God and my Lord? For when I call on him I ask him to come into me. And what place is there in me into which my God can come? How could God, the God who made both heaven and earth, come into me? Is there anything in me, O Lord my God, that can contain Thee? Do even the heaven and the earth, which Thou hast made, and in which Thou hast made, and in which Thou didst make me, contain Thee? Is it possible that, since without Thee nothing would be which does exist, Thou didst make it so that whatever exists has some capacity to receive Thee?[11]

Leaders are challenged when leadership develops a system for people to follow. Augustine's *Confessions* reveal that God worked one way in his life while he simultaneously witnessed God working differently in other people. Thus, Augustine also witnessed and had the

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[10] Litfin, 217- 219.

[11] Augustine, *Confessions* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1999), 2.

the opportunity to embrace the genuine experiences of other people. Though the views and understanding of people may differ, they may nonetheless accept Christ and begin the lifelong journey of learning and living according to his word. In building a unified church, people must embrace the differences in personal examples when Christ has been accepted. The global church must endeavor to reach people through no other message than the gospel.

Church in the Middle Years

The split within the church body is rooted in the Reformation Period. This era saw many different movements that strained the relationship of the body of Christ and that continue to exist today. Earlier in the second century the Eastern Orthodox Church had separated from the Roman Church, followed by the Roman Catholic Church separating. The attitude development which included the assertion of being correct formed the reformation by challenging people to discover textual evidence for serving God. Examining the need to be relevant to the people became the springboard that challenged the church globally.

Only selective records of this time period were kept; however, there is enough recall of church history to verify the limitations that continue to face the church today. One modern day limitation is the quick response within churches to divide unnecessarily which undermines the body of Christ. Historically, during the Reformation era, roots were laid to develop reasoning for justifying theological differences that caused the body of Christ to split. The issue became separation when it should have been the lack in reconciling among contemporaries.

Martin Luther, the most famous of the Reformers, offered his ninety-five theses as a chance to reconcile the differences he had with the established church. Though the Reformation had already begun, it was Luther's drastic action that created communication with the church by listing the differences between their teachings and the biblical text. "A disputation of Master

Martin Luther, Theologian, for the elucidation of the virtue of the Indulgences,"[12] stated the main

difference that Luther had - the payment for sin. The gospel message clearly declares that the

remission for sin is blood and not a financial payment; however, Luther's next statement sought

to reconcile with his leadership. It is important to note that Luther was not attempting to divide

the church but rather to bring reconciliation in the practices regarding the issue of the payment

for sin.

> From a zealous desire to bring to light the truth, the following theses will be maintained at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Rvd. Fr. Martin Luther, Master of Arts, Master of Sacred Theology and official Reader therein. He therefore asks that all who are unable to be present and dispute with him verbally will do so in writing. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.[13]

Luther's bold action and stance allowed other people to question the practices and

theology of the church. Ulrich Zwingli, a notable contemporary of Luther's, developed a similar

conclusion. Though Zwingli offered valuable insight in the textual proof gained through

evaluation of the Greek writings, his preaching was mocked by the papacy. Soundly, "Zwingli

defended his preaching on the basis of Scripture, and he was allowed to continue preaching."[14]

When defending the development of theology, the application of scripture became an

essential element. Both Luther and Zwingli, along with others, questioned several practices of

the Catholic Church based on the biblical text. One area was the application of scripture. Both

reformers were challenged by the church's lack of desire to correct differences using the Bible as

the source. Another area of concern was the lack in providing the sacred text for the

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[12]Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 205-212. Martin Luther's Ninety-five thesis is provided in completed form.

[13] Bettenson and Maunder, 205. This statement is the introduction to the thesis statement.

[14] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to Present Day*, 6th ed., vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), 49.

congregation to read, thereby limiting who would be allowed to read scripture. It further limited the ability of the people to process through deduction the essence of the meaning of the text and its application to their lives. The last major challenge was the reaction of the church in silencing any person who discovered a flaw in the church's teaching. The Pope requested that individuals retract differing statements that ultimately led to being banned from the church. Ensuing action requested the Emperor to aid the enforcement of the given ban.

It is equally needful to define what the church should be and to provide a process that ensures discussion about any differences. The final authority on any issue governing the church must be the Bible. This source is more than ample to establish the principles needed for guiding the church as one unified body; however, people who seek to divide the church ignore the three concerns that the early reformers challenged. The major difference in contemporary society is that loss of life is not feared, thus allowing a person to alter the text for personal gain. Even this is rooted in the way in which England split from the Roman Church.

The use of state power to create a new and separate church from Rome was one of the accomplishments of Henry VIII of England. This separation created a pattern that people in later years would use to keep dividing the church globally. Henry VIII's motive was of a personal nature in that separating his country from the Pope's church was based on the interaction between the two men. González suggests that Henry sought people to agree with him regarding the validity of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.[15] The systemic pattern of personal motivation would cause the eventual divide with Rome. Henry had opposed Luther's challenge to the church and had even supported the church. His support demonstrated that Henry agreed theologically as long as his support of the Pope benefitted him personally; however, when the

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[15] González, vol. 2, 72.

situation changed, Henry sought to make himself the head of the church. This action provides an example for later splits within the body of Christ.

The split between Henry VIII and the Pope had wide ranging consequences as it also damaged personal friendships within England. The most notable of these relationships is the close friendship between Henry VIII and Sir Thomas More.[16] More, who opposed the division as well as Henry's personal choices, would not affirm the king as the head of the church, thus ending the friendship between the two men on the lawful grounds of treason. More's belief cost him his life. His final comment reveals the true nature of what he believed. "To clear his conscience, he wished it to be clear that he did not believe that a layman such as a king could be the head of the church, nor that any human being had the authority to change the laws of the church."[17]

Lack of theology based on a sound foundation along with lack of desire for reconciliation caused the division. While all fractures in the body of Christ hurt the church, the most dangerous divisions are the separations that are self motivated. Henry VIII desired the Pope to annul a marriage that could have split the Holy Roman Empire. The denial led Henry to withhold money from going to Rome until he received the decision he wanted. His action resulted in a series of events promoting the head of the church in England. Henry's schism caused his country to question why the church believed as it did, but more importantly, to question the structure of the church.

The results of division closely connect to the modern era in how churches often lose membership based on the leadership. The historical context provides additional challenges to

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[16] González, vol. 2, 73.

[17] González, vol. 2, 73.

churches today as people have more access to reading about scripture. Many individuals question why the Church has difficulty in staying together. The perception is that, by human nature, people are challenged to continually embark on a quest to be correct in personal understanding. This should provide the local church with additional incentive to work without hesitation for the benefit of the community and for the purpose of bringing the church back together.

Contemporary Church

The church's previous history provides a convincing reason for concern about the current condition of the church. People will unite when a common goal is to be achieved. This can often be seen when a personal way of life inhibits a personal belief regarding sin. It can also be a motivation for a political cause. One challenge that faces the church today is how to work together to promote the gospel regardless of theological perspective. Several reasons have developed from history that limit the ability of the body of Christ. Some of these reasons have challenged denominational sects from working within their own theological perspective. For positive change to happen, healing must occur in the relational aspect of the people. It is important for the people who claim to be a part of the body of Christ to unite collectively.

Modern day human interactivity within the church has become intertwined with a problem that started in the first century church. Revelation 2 and 3 effectively warn the church of the dangerous effects when Christ is removed from leading the church. Yoo identifies certain struggles within this context, including concern about the judgment of the unrepentant. "Consequently, for the unrepentant, there is the promise of positive judgment, both temporal and

eternal. One theme that one begins to see is the great love that Christ has for His churches and His servants."[18] It is this love that the body of Christ must exemplify to the world.

How unbelievers view the modern church today should be a major concern. When unbelievers see the church, are they seeing the body of Christ? This question can be very daunting when comparing the perception to the reality. The church must understand the image that people outside the church have about the body of Christ. Rainer establishes that the unchurched people are rising at a steady and alarming rate.[19] He asserts that churches need to have a strong concern regarding their ability to share the gospel. "America is clearly becoming less Christian, less evangelized, and less churched. Too many of those in our churches seem oblivious to this reality."[20]

The clearly established function of the church is to make disciples. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Moreover, surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[21] Rainer emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the church to take the gospel message beyond the walls of the building to where the people are. This responsibility must bring the churches together in order to reach the same community as one unified body.

Reid summarizes the lack in working collectively as the lack of dependence. "As has already been shown, the impact of churches on the surrounding cultures has become increasingly

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[18] Kichun Yoo, A Strategy of Promoting Health in the Local Church, DMin. Thesis, Liberty University, 2010, 26.

[19] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 33.

[20] Ibid., 34.

[21] Matt. 28:18-20.

ineffective over the years. The brilliance of the light of the world has become hazy. To add to

this problem, each younger generation seems to be increasingly less interested in the church."[22]

This is not an issue over tradition but rather a matter of relevance for being in a church. The

conflict demands an examination of what the church should be as opposed to what it has become.

People who are seeking for a church in which to belong are looking to be a part of the unified

body of Christ.

The portrait of the current body of Christ is trivial to outsiders. At times, the view can

even be clouded to the people within the body of Christ. In more recent church history, church

splits have damaged the reputation of the body of Christ. If people cannot and will not allow for

healing in personal differences or understanding, how then can new people desire to be a part of

a church? Splits within the body of Christ impact the population in the community.

The historical perspective impacts the current day church. There are differences in the

church as humanity attempts to seek for a leader. Different challenges occur within the local

body that have nothing to do with theology or doctrine. The devastating result is that the body of

Christ becomes hurt from within which then influences how people choose to interact with each

other. Time must be allotted for people to heal over their differences in understanding in order to

produce a healthy atmosphere. This action allows for people outside the church to observe and to

realize that the body of Christ desires to be one unified body.

One crucial element for consideration is that the body of Christ is supposed to work in

partnership. The divisions discovered in church history have limited the ability to effectively

work collectively. History cannot change; however, the actions of the modern day church need to

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[22] J. David Reid, Combating Church Tradition: Freeing the Church to Reach Their Community for Christ, (DMin. Thesis, Liberty University), 2014, 2.

change. Leadership within local churches must construct relationships that can foster a new image. What do the people from outside the church need to witness in the body of Christ? Though the answer is simple, it nonetheless requires a human complex in working together. Frank explains this in his thesis on encouraging churches of the same association to work collectively. "These cooperative endeavors have several churches working together, joint funding, and a sense of cooperation; however, after the event or project, there is little continued cooperation or planning for additional endeavors."[23] The image portrayed by Christians must become an efficient system that fosters conductivity within all churches. This image is where the body of Christ begins to collectively produce an image that relates to Christ.

What the Body of Christ Is

The ability to effectively worship together has become a challenge in today's society as a connection must be made in understanding what the church should be versus what it has become. This observation is verified in the echoes of church members who repeat the sayings of the pastor and who begin to incorporate his actions into their lives; however, one must first determine what exactly the body of Christ is. An effective answer would include every person who accepts Christ. The problem is that theology has limited the perspective of how one can receive the gospel message. The discussion must contend with the reality of so many churches attempting to proclaim the same gospel while hurting one another, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The result is an ineffective relationship between the body of Christ and the community of unbelievers.

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[23] John Timothy Frank, Cooperation: Churches Working Together Through the Local Baptist Association for Maximum Kingdom Ministry, DMin. Thesis, Liberty University, 2012, 62.

An Image in the Modern Era

The response of the modern environment towards the church has been to progressively seek to destroy the faith by using appealing dialogue. This tactic is not a new phenomenon to the human race. The extreme aspects of a small group requiring secure protection or awareness using this propaganda system should be alarming to the church. The utilization of this tactic can first be seen through the scope of the Garden of Eden. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"[24] This exchange caused doubt and confusion. The same challenge that faced Eve when she spoke with the serpent also confronts today's church. If the church is going to survive, it must exert energy into examining the environmental surroundings so as to better disciple people in order to reach the unsaved people.

One consideration is the rise of evolutionary advancement which is becoming the new normal system in the contemporary environment. Some people claim that this produces scholarly changes in people with a higher intellectual comprehension. This opinion limits the ability of people to become less involved with their surroundings. There is a vital need for the church to disciple people in a manner that encourages involvement beyond personal comfort. Bush makes an observation about faith and the global processes that face the church today. "Our age is not what it used to be. We are living in an age of advancement. The Christian consensus no longer dominates Western civilization. We have grown so used to the new as being the best solution to

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[24] Gen 3:1.

whatever the problem is that we can hardly appreciate the past anymore, and it is very difficult to recognize or evaluate what is significant."[25]

For the local church, the answer to the advancement image is to develop and rediscover what it means to bear the image of Christ. It must realize that human influence has created a challenge to the actuality of biblical text. The church must consistently represent why Christ came for humanity. Success depends upon certain elements, such as the fruit of the Spirit. It is important that people from the community discover that Christians truly desire to be a representation of Christ. The ethics that a church utilizes establishes opportunities for sharing the gospel.

Bush asserts that all people are of one blood,[26] which establishes and reiterates that humanity was created in the image of God. It also provides a starting point in which to discover that God has always, since the creation of man, loved humanity.

> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.[27]

This passage emphasizes the desire that God had for humanity. His desire was, and still is, to have a personal relationship with every human. It is the responsibility of every Christian to demonstrate this passion to other people.

The goal of the church must therefore become a connecting point where other people can receive Christ. This relational aspect is the foundational element through which the gospel

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[25] L. Russ Bush, *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), ix.

[26] *Ibid.*, 31.

[27] Gen 1:26-27.

message is shared. Beck concludes that Paul changes through salvation but extends that change into personal growth towards God.[28] After personal conversion, growth must occur, thus allowing a person to connect to God through Christ.

His Image in Man

Paul's personal experience recorded in scripture provides an example that allows readers today to understand that change in a person must enable his or her transformation from a sinful nature to a child of God. His image for humanity is the acceptance of His son. Scripture reveals the result of acceptance of Christ in one's life. It further shows in missional context that Christ did not come to condemn any person but rather to offer salvation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."[29]

Spiritual formation in a person develops the desire to confess and profess what God has done on a personal level. "Gratitude for what God has done for us in the past can also motivate us to trust him in the present for what he is going to do in the future."[30] The church can only be truly represented and built by the people who are embarking on the journey of drawing closer to God through a personal relationship. This collective connection establishes a platform for understanding that all Christians are bound to support one another through the Holy Spirit.

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[28] James R. Beck, *The Psychology of Paul: A Fresh Look at His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 159.

[29] John 3:16-17.

[30] Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 137.

His Image in the Church

Individuals are challenged to become one body. That challenge rivals the humanistic

nature of people. Boa emphasizes that, after salvation, a person should seek to draw closer to

God.[31] This same concept must develop in the local churches; however, one must first identify

what the body of Christ should be. The success of the global church depends on local churches

becoming one united body within their community. Therefore, all churches need to support one

another.

The textual basis is found in the New Testament and begins with the connection of Christ

to the Father. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."[32] This establishes the

relationship from the Father to the Son. The passage continues by describing the connection of

the disciples who would become the leaders of the church. "I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."[33]

The relationship of the vine to the branches is the provision to sustain the church through the

ages. Christ remains the vine from whom the leaders have a source of life. There cannot be any

life in the church without Christ. This establishes the platform that leading people to Christ

should be the primary focus. It further extends to churches supporting each other in building the

body of Christ.

Churches struggle with the biblical image that describes the desired relationship between

the body of believers and Christ. "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of

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[31] Boa, 111.

[32] John 15:1.

[33] John 15:5.

the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."[34] Carson and Moo assert that the church is the

bride.[35] The word image limits understanding as it is first necessary to understand the culture of

Paul's time. Paul emphasizes that this passage is about Christ and the church.[36] Church leaders

should not attempt to be the definitive leaders but rather the key agents for the Holy Spirit to

utilize in participating in the Great Commission.

The final passage to examine underscores the powerful and dynamic connection of all

believers who identify with the same savior in Christ. "Do not conform to the pattern of this

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and

approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."[37] People seeking for salvation

and looking for a church home should question the church's ability to conform to the savior. As

it is not God's will for his church to be so divided, the church must be determined and consistent

in pointing to one savior. Churches would then be seen, and indeed be, united by the same spirit

of the gospel.

These passages underscore that people should focus on the same gospel message

regardless of the church. While people do not possess perfect ability in presenting the gospel,

there is nonetheless no excuse for not wanting to get along with one another in order to reach the

same community. Local church leadership must focus on working collectively to support each

other. Bruce states that it is through the Spirit that the mind is renewed, and it is the same Spirit

who brings unity to the body.[38] Local churches gathering together develop unity within the

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[34] Eph 5:23.

[35] Carson and Moo, 483.

[36] See Eph 5:32.

[37] Rom 12:2.

[38] Bruce, 200.

community. As there are many different styles of worship, they must guard against liturgy becoming a divisive issue. Pastors must diligently focus on sharing the gospel as this will effectively build the body of Christ.

Greenbrier Setting

Every housing development, community, town, and county has a different assessment to examine; however, the county as a whole brings an exclusive development to the direction of spiritual care for the people. The church must embrace the focus of the community and the needs of the locality. Currently, the residents of both sides of Greenbrier County in West Virginia are concerned about the political, educational, and financial splits within the county.[39] This division has caused a rift that limits the ability of the churches in the county to work effectively as one team. If Christ is going to be collectively promoted, then the rift dividing the county must be dealt with in a manner that first promotes healing among the local pastors.

Spiritual Background

The desire to work collectively as one body is of paramount importance. One pastor questioned, "How can we come together as one body until both sides of the county can start to agree to get along? Both sides of the county have different needs while people are unwilling to change their current thought processes based on their personal interaction with the system in the county."[40] This question highlights the necessity to consider the conflict within the local churches. That people are purposely splitting the church globally has impacted the church

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[39] Interview with sixth pastor.

[40] Interview with seventh pastor.

locally. This county has witnessed numerous church splits resulting in devastation within the churches and the local communities.

Churches in the county have suffered greatly as a result of being unable to connect spiritually and sometimes personally. This has been true across denominational lines as well as within churches of the same denomination. This turmoil breaks down the ability to present the gospel message. Pastors preach the message of unity, but they are hindered by the lack of unity among the local people. Society around the church addresses the connection to present Christ to the community. Estep and Kim make the distinction that collectivism is the key element of delivery to the person who is receiving the message of salvation.[41] This understanding considers what people from outside the body of Christ think about people who claim to be Christians.

The humanistic desire to be right causes individuals in the Greenbrier area to respond negatively about the church. Churches have internal challenges; however, the manner in which a challenge is handled may limit its ability to grow and may also come between families and friends. It further destroys the ability of local churches to collectively share the gospel message. Pastors are discovering that they spend more time talking to each other about problems regarding people professing to be Christians than being able to disciple or evangelize the local community.

Another concern that affects the spirituality of the church is the group of transient people who habitually drift between churches. This population provides two main considerations. First, they desire to belong to a church family with whom they may worship. This group provided

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[41] James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds*., Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 277.

pastors with feedback about inconsistencies and inadequacies observed within the church.[42] It supplied the insight that people are seeking to find a church that promotes the gospel rather than a religious show. Second, there is a lack of connection to the church beyond political motivations. Local churches will rally around a common element when there is a shared interest concerning a basic social concern. This unity is a positive element in that it provides common ground upon which to open dialogue. The consequences of social concern inhibit the potential for people to understand one another. To reach this county, pastors must allow for healing to come and must foster forgiveness among the people that will enable the churches to reflect the image of the body of Christ to their communities.

<div align="center">East West Divide</div>

There is strong opposition and divisiveness within the county created by the monetary system. People on the west side of the county feel slighted when coal severance money is not evenly distributed. This money is often used by the county to fix roads in high traffic areas.[43] Additionally, there is lack in education in the coal region. A smaller percentage of graduates from the high school on the west side continue on to higher education. Furthermore, the east side exhibits more progressive growth than the west side. These harsh differences challenge the churches to come together as a unified body of believers. It is depressing when the actions of the political environment dictate the ability of the churches to collectively share the gospel message.

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[42] During the interview with the local pastors several mentioned this discovery. This element was not intended to be discovered in the study. It provides a connection to the aspect that people are searching for a church to reach out into the community rather than attempting to copy each other by trying to offer the same service.

[43] Greenbrier County Board of Commissioners, County Records, Meeting Minutes (Lewisburg, WV, 1986-2016).

This division creates an unsavory view to the unsaved regarding the churches' influence. People who are examining the church question why a profession of faith does not result in sharing Christ's love, which then limits a relational connection with other churches. Leadership must consider how the view of people from outside of the church compares to the living standard found within the biblical context. When the church limits or alters the definition of Christ's love, it effectively erodes the possibility to share the purpose of Christ. People within the church often struggle with bridging the gap between theological perspectives and local communities that are not being evangelized. Estep and Kim raise the question, "What makes spiritual formation Christian?"[44] The function of the church to the local community must be considered. Likewise, the role of individuals on a personal level to the churches within the community must also be considered.

<div align="center">Solving the Internal Conflict</div>

Assessment of Greenbrier County could easily be compared to other communities when discussing the internal challenges that churches face. For local churches to work together they must first examine the different conflicts that have risen in the county. These altercations have driven people within the body of Christ to disconnect from one another. The practical aspect of this thesis will address the formation of the body of Christ in the relational dimension of the churches in this selected county. Further examination will seek to bring unity among people in the churches for the purpose of working collectively. Relationship established through healing will offer church leaders the opportunity to realize that each church is needed.

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[44] Estep and Kim, 38.

The connection that the community sees in the people of the church must be emphasized. The effect of moral development in relationship to one another must also be considered. "Morality is not a monodimensional concept but rather is multidimensional."[45] The world judges the church by the proclamations made by the church then illuminates the problems within the claimed profession. This is not a flaw with scripture but rather the attempt of church people to incorporate the living word into their lives. The presentation of biblical concepts requires that scripture be applied on a personal level. The challenge to the body of Christ is to not cause unreached people to feel forced into discovering Christ. Personal connection comes through personal acceptance of Christ. This experience cannot be imparted by one person to another. It can only be developed through a personal acceptance of Christ. When a person starts the process of being a disciple, life habits begin to change.

The ability to overcome division is rooted in conforming to a principle that fosters love through Christ. It is the direct connection that local Christians must exhibit in order for the community to witness a unified church body. Unity begins with an individual accepting God's plan through his son. The application of this plan requires understanding that "whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."[46] Cole and Hefner firmly emphasize that the death referred to in this passage is to self.[47] This challenges the mindset of the church to foster a loving atmosphere and to minister as Christ taught the disciples to minister. It is the responsibility of the church to make this distinction in leading in the community.

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[45] *Ibid.*, 136.

[46] Matt 10:39.

[47] Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically -- From the Inside Out* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 71.

Churches need insight when reaching into the community. Change is often the goal but what change and in what direction must be determined. The Greenbrier County churches need to lead in this endeavor; however, the church collectively must examine the nature of reaching the lost from that of the perspective of unchurched people. Rainer summarizes that the relational need develops a personal connection to accepting a person.[48] Different issues within churches may reverse the relationship between people who are attempting to reach the same population. Partnering churches together conveys a spirit of unity so that the unreached should be able to witness the same passion and the same genuine spirit in all churches.

Consideration of the practical and historical perspectives of church history challenges the ideals of the past. This assessment requires the local churches to focus on the local community as one unified body of Christ. Unchurched people who are seeking for a savior are looking for people in a church who are genuine in belief and practice. Relationships within the body must mimic the relationship of Christ to the disciples. Church leaders need to consider how to unify and advance the gospel in a modern context.

Bush challenges the church to move the gospel forward in the evolutionary age.[49] This forces local pastors to work together collectively in reaching the same community. The nature of relationships constructs the desire and ability to support each other. The challenge to advance the gospel must allow pastors and their staff to build unity through relationships. This practice of unity will transform the image of people who are criticizing the church. When believers assemble and unify, the Holy Spirit will strengthen the relational bonds in partnering with each other.

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[48] Rainer, 70.

[49] Bush, 12-17.

CHAPTER 3

LOCAL PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

Bringing unity requires examining the construct of the existing relationships among local pastors. It is the development of the relationships that produces the struggle of whether to contend for ministry or for numbers. Recent books on building churches leave pastors and other ministry leaders with the idea that statistics prove that the Holy Spirit is operating within the church. This concept is challenged when a pastor leaves a rather large church as the transition often leads to a dwindling in attendance at that church. Another challenge is the rapid growth of churches produced by the migrating crowd. This group tends to bring the biggest show and the greatest possibility for involvement opportunities; however, this movement hurts the church as pride can spring up, thereby causing rivalry as smaller churches work hard to reach a community or two while the larger churches already have the vast resources, thus arriving at a bigger area with greater statistical evidence.

One must consider the impact if larger churches would support local smaller churches in building the kingdom of God, thereby strongly emphasing how the body of Christ should interact with each other. Building a functional system where churches of same like faith, preaching salvation through Christ, allows for congregations to work together within the local community. Lewis and Wilkins ask, "What impact is the church having on the community?"[1] This question links with the concept of one body of believers working collectively and demonstrating the love received from Christ.

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[1] Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 25.

What is the church? This must be defined in order to consider the implied need of the collective church to change so that it comes more in line with the context of Scripture. Defining the church also challenges all ministry leaders with the purpose for developing disciples. This ministry further examines the image people outside of the church should perceive in people proclaiming the gospel. Beck's examination of the Apostle Paul's ministry provides an understanding that guides a viable concept for working in ministry.

> The change on which he (Paul) focused, however, was not restricted to change that comes from a conversion experience; he was also committed to fostering change in the lives of believers who needed to mature, to strengthen their weak faith, to improve their interpersonal functioning within the church, or to cease living according to the works of the flesh.[2]

This description of Paul's ministry must become a reality in the present day church in order to foster growth among church leadership.

Consideration of this element within this thesis is for the purpose of connecting the local pastors in Greenbrier County by providing an opportunity to work collectively. Revealed will be several aspects of how pastors can work closely together in order to bring healing to this county. It will further examine various interviews across the spectrum of Christianity. The information gathered does not attempt to prove or disprove the need for working collectively. It does, however, establish the ability and willingness to work collectively. This interaction challenges the capacity to work peaceably and productively with each other. The following passage highlights a personal experience being shared from scripture so that fellow believers would understand the need for a community concept of churches working collectively. "It was for the

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[2] James R. Beck, *The Psychology of Paul: A Fresh Look at His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 159.

sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought, therefore, to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth."[3]

As the Great Commission is the passion of the pastors, church leaders in Greenbrier County developed a better relationship that is visible to people within their congregations. People inside and outside of the church need to see that the clergy share the same passion for all people in the county. This enables the building of good relationships between the churches so that all share their abilities in helping one another. Local church leadership must contend with a few inter-church problems before any viable proof of a unified front is evident in presenting the gospel message to the community. These issues emphasize that fostering healing is of the utmost importance so that unification may occur. Resolving the issues also brings a closer connection among the people attending the churches, thus enhancing their desire to work for the same purpose.

Community considerations require vision. Developing a vision requires a clear understanding of what leadership needs to be in the context of ministry. It is also true that an understanding of people groups is necessary for developing the vision into a mission. The series of questions presented to the lead and senior pastors provide the basis for developing community-based goals. If churches begin to work together to meet the assessed goals, then the community connection will be easier to develop. Barna describes this as understanding how to apply the vision. "In every case I have studied, the vision entrusted to the leader was not a simple matter of God paving the way to do what came naturally or easily to the leader."[4] One focus of

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[3] 3 John 1:7-8.

[4] George Barna, *The Power of Vision: Discover and Apply God's Plan for Your Life and Ministry*, 3rd ed. (Ventra, CA: Regal, 2009), 22.

pastors must include examining each other's vision as a connection in working to bring the gospel to the same community.

Another consideration in the questions presented to the pastors is that of a changing environment. Every pastor enjoys seeing people visit his or her church as the prelude to becoming members of the church. This joyous event brings encouragement to the pastor as the vision and mission are functioning for the glory of God. The relational aspect is vital in reaching unchurched people. Rainer describes a personal experience wherein he saw that the church had the right intentions but lacked the ability to connect.[5] Intentions that produce action must be evident in working as one unit. The image unchurched people need to see is a group of Christians who desire to see their community impacted by the gospel. It implies that pastors need to work together and that relationships must be developed with people. Through these personal relationships, people experience the believers' ability to connect with others.

Community's Biggest Needs

The impact on the community is dependent upon the effect the pastors have in leading churches to interact with one another. A revolutionary concept, it is nonetheless one that is drawn from the biblical text. It is important to understand that the church was never meant to be separated with many different people attempting to reach a select few within the community. This acknowledgment captures the focus of churches working effectively to reach every area of the community. Ministry context here is not about right or wrong interpretations but rather the ability to work as one body. Paul instructs the community to unify as a group of believers in Christ.

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[5] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 87-88.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross![6]

The challenge becomes how to get pastors who profess to have obtained the vision to reach the same community by the same means. Within smaller communities, this presents a problematic issue to the local churches as well as to the community. Several questions arise from the unchurched people looking to choose a local church in Greenbrier County. The first question is whether anyone cares about personal problems. The second question is why the churches look like they are competing. The third question rightly wonders why churches that say they proclaim the same message cannot seem to work together.[7] These issues do not seek to destroy the church; however, the community needs to see the viable action of local believers acting as a profession of faith.

Before solving any community problem, one distinctive issue must be addressed – that is the ability of the local clergy to work together. Senior pastors tend to use position to lead. From within this gathering of people, the challenge is choosing the leader. Clergy must guard against negative interaction and stay focused on the need to bring people to Christ. Each pastor and pastors of similar theological persuasion desire to utilize a certain pattern. When their expected

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[6] Phil 2:1-8.

[7] The questions were developed from the pastors interviewed. These are the shared observations of the pastors. Each pastor is searching to solve the issue of how to unify in presenting the Gospel as one local body of believers.

plan is not used, pastors who do not agree with the leader tend to walk away from the reason for working together. Dale and Dale describe this scenario as "Christianity coated in external and religious norms."[8] Leaders who focus only on their plan of activity struggle with accepting and comprehending direction from another leader. This in turn focuses attention on local pastors challenging the biblical image of one bride of Christ.

A few of the older pastors reminisced about a time in history when pastors desired to work together for the community.[9] This interaction did not seek to alter the community but rather to build a collective community atmosphere. Each pastor understood that the community needed every pastor to connect through one focus the gospel. These pastors shared the need for each pastor to desire to become involved with a local ministerial meeting. Historically, the meetings uncovered the different challenges that faced the local community and county. Through these meetings, each church was offered the opportunity to support ministry in an atmosphere of fellowship.

A change in the attitudes of churches from the past to the present has gradually evolved. This may not reflect every place in the United States, but this local area has seen a great change in the last fifty years as the culture changed. This challenges pastors to encourage and to exhibit a particular type of relationship – the kind that demands that pastors focus on the creation of gospel-centered relationships. A struggle develops in attempting to lead people without this focus. It can also be said that this same relational aspect is needed between local clergy.[10]

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[8] Tony Dale and Felicity Dale, *Simply Church* (Austin, TX: Karis Pub., 2002), 23.

[9] Interviews 1 and 6.

[10] Interviews 2, 3 and 8.

The attitudes of the local clergy become reflective in the body of believers. Greear places special attention to the need for a gospel-centered relationship. "It is impossible to actually experience the grace of the gospel and not be transformed into a person of kindness, generosity, and love."[11] The need for people being relational creates a context for control in the relationship. The purpose is to have a leader who is moving people in a direction for results. A gospel relationship utilizes the work done in a person by experiencing grace and forgiveness. Pastors who lead in such fashion demonstrate that leading people is most effective through the gospel.

Every interview conducted stressed that the local pastors need to be more considerate in the relationship built within the community. There was deep realization that no attempt to bring people together is going to work unless the clergy first develop a relationship. Pastors refusing to cooperate can quickly segregate the local community. Each pastor should discover that his or her local community is bigger than one person's vision. It takes a collection of pastors aiding each other's vision. The context of the relationship must understand that the root of all the vision is the Great Commission. This comprehension fosters the dependence of needing each pastor to work to build the Kingdom of God rather than to build a population in a building.

Perspective of the Body of Christ

It is essential to establish a theological perspective of what a body of believers is. Defining the body of Christ can be challenged by the ideology of perception of scripture. A few different assumptions that people hold construct a limited view of which church is the true church. In determining what the body of Christ is, some pastors started with their denominational tenets; however, discussion of the areas where several pastors can influence relationships in the

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[11] J. D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 109.

local community painted a sudden blurring of the denominational lines as it relates to the local

ministerial associations.

Paul writes in several places in his letters about the importance of working together for

the glory of God, the one who unifies all people claiming a relationship with Christ. So what is

the body of Christ and how is it to function? The vivid answers from scripture establish how to

depend on each Christian in the advancement of the gospel.

> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul; another, I follow Apollos; another, I follow Cephas; still another, I follow Christ."[12]

The challenge Paul presents to the reader is that it does not matter who disciples whom.

The division found within the quarrel is that of people attempting to limit which disciple maker

is correct. The reality is that each individual listed in the passage above leads to one person –

Christ. Bruce emphasizes the connection of each individual named in the passage.[13] This

enlightenment allows for understanding that each pastor must raise up the same person, Christ. It

makes the necessary connection that the gospel needs to be the central element in building a

healthy relationship between churches.

The manner in which Christ greeted people provides the deeper understanding as it

highlights the nature of God's purpose for Christ. One must consider the action of Christ

balanced with that of being accepting of people. "For God did not send his Son into the world to

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[12] 1 Cor 1:10-12

[13] F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 256-259.

condemn the world, but to save the world through him."[14] Particular attention to this passage is imperative in determining upon what image the church should collectively focus. "The struggle of unchurched people tends to become confused when there is a lack of relationship bonding local church bodies believing together."[15] This consideration challenges John 3:17. Christ must yet be represented in this current era of history. One pastor found in his church an understanding that judgment will not be passed.[16] The core of the gospel is to enable people to experience the love of Christ.

The churches in Greenbrier County also have to contend with the frustration of broken relationships between the two halves of the county. The following question seeks to aid the healing process between the distinctly different areas: What can the pastors do to teach people to forgive so healing can begin in the county?[17] This problem runs deeper than the church; it is in every aspect of the county. There has to be open communication among the churches in order to come together for the purpose of unifying. Pastors must build connections with other churches and must also begin to work collectively to reach the local community and the county.

Further discussion through the pastor interviews allowed the interviewees to share comments from visitor cards pertaining to the experience of people searching for a church. One pastor revealed that, in the last three months, the most common comment was interest in whether the church would do more in the community.[18] This pastor admitted that he finds it challenging to work with churches in his denomination let alone with other local churches. Another pastor

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[14] John 3:17.

[15] Interview 1.

[16] Interview 4.

[17] Interview 3.

[18] Interview 6.

admitted to facing similar circumstances in the church's current ministry. This challenge stresses having a willingness to work purposefully to aid the community. A platform for presenting the gospel must not present any limitations for working with each other.

One discovery was that local ministerial associations predominantly met for the purpose of having fellowship with one another; however, limitations were created by the theological standing of churches that are closely related, such as Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Calvinistic. This separation severely divides the Kingdom of God. It further promotes that Christianity segregates itself by belief system rather than cooperating through desire to unify. An unchurched person seeking to find a church will question whether the local church or body of believers fully believe in the complete or partial context of scripture.

People are seeking to belong to a church. They desire to experience the relational aspect with the members of the local church. Greear asserts that through experience in accepting Christ a transformation occurs. "When we experience the generosity of the gospel, we will naturally extend that generosity to others."[19] This implies that every person accepting Christ is bound to share their faith by sharing generosity. Therefore, the gospel must remain the central purpose for reaching the community that every church claims to want to reach with the gospel. Examining what the body of Christ is, as referred to by the Apostle Paul in several of his writings, further extends to believers developing support for one another.

In determining what the collective body of believers is one must also embrace the kingdom concept. The Dales provide a simple concept for understanding the relationship between church and kingdom. "Even creation, we are told in Romans 8, waits for its redemption

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[19] Greear, 109.

along with the children of God."[20] This broadens the scope of God's kingdom yet simultaneously declares that it is all His. This enlightenment should develop in each person a passion for sharing the gospel. The body of believers is comprised of people who desire to share Christ's commitment to humanity. This action is transformational to a person seeking a relationship with God.

So what is the body of believers to do? They are to become a people who desire to be involved with the Great Commission. Greear asks, "Can you imagine the kind of witness hundreds of people living gospel-centered lives together in a local church might have in a community?"[21] People desiring to do service for God with the purpose of being focused only on Christ is the starting point that ultimately leads to churches developing the desire to work with each other for the same purpose. Nowhere in Scripture is it stated or implied that there is to be a division among the church. Collectively all the churches should be seen as one unified body celebrating the grace given to each person on a personal level. This jubilation connects all people through salvation by accepting Christ and is where Christians need to connect as a family.

The Ability to Work Together

People within different churches must connect in order to collectively reach the same community. It is vital for people who profess salvation through Christ to unify within the local community and to be challenged to work together to reach the community. This also allows for a better community environment where unchurched people may see the children of God desiring to be active witnesses. When Christians begin to desire to see Christ glorified, the community

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[20] Dale and Dale, 33.

[21] Greear, 221.

becomes transformed from within the population as opposed to forcing an influence. The desire

to share the gospel is more important than pushing a particular form of worship.

Interviews with half of the pastors elicited some attitudes that provided an understanding

as to why churches struggle to work collectively. Various comments revealed that pastors

struggle with the will to encourage people to work collectively with only one central human

leader. Facial expressions also registered confusion and concern. The combined verbal responses

and facial expressions made it clear that churches need to overcome a more practical inability to

work together. Quick answers were given by most pastors while the others pondered the

possibility of the positive and purposeful interaction and community results Christians could

have if people were enabled and encouraged to work for the same purpose.

One pastor discussed how area churches work together during certain times of the year,

such as Easter, Christmas, and National Day of Prayer.[22] The interviewer's response to this

pastor was to agree that those weeks of cooperation are a good starting point; however, what

about the rest of the year? It is very limiting in effectively and consistently sharing the gospel

when churches are leading people to work collectively only at certain times while ignoring the

remainder of the year. This challenge was met with resistance by each pastor ministering within

a geographical location that overlaps other pastors within the same area. It was evident that some

pastors mark their physical area of ministry which creates a limitation for working with pastors

locally.

The following response came from three pastors who were puzzled as to whether

churches could realistically work together. "If churches did work together, who would be the

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[22] Interview 6.

leader?"[23] This question adds support to the fact that some pastors declined to participate in the interview. It also underscores that human nature is beginning to take control of allowing the Holy Spirit to lead the church through the pastor; however, a stronger consideration is whether there needs to be a leader to oversee churches working together, or whether pastors need to allow the Holy Spirit to be the missing link in uniting local churches. It is far too easy to get churches from other areas to work in a missional aspect within a community. Churches located in the same county struggle to work together. This was an almost volatile issue resulting in responses too extensive to list or describe; however, the only solution is allowing God to heal relationships.

Tabbernee forces the connection of the church in Christ by questioning the relationship between theological perspective and unity in the body of Christ.[24] This point of view examines Tabbernee's experience with the disgruntled interaction of another member within theological discussion. The interaction was vehemently passionate for belief.[25] Human nature's unrelenting quest is to be correct. In discussing how to unify the church, the challenge of perspective rivaled the intention of that meeting. A very real problem is stressed in Tabbernee's experience. If people professing Christ passionately oppose each other, then unity cannot be achieved. Unity must come through healing by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead through the pastors.

The following passage provides the reason why pastors of different theological backgrounds must unify to collectively reach their local communities. Paul addresses the concern in the early church as people were troubled by who could receive salvation.

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[23] Interviews 3,5, and 7.

[24] William Tabbernee, "Interpreting the Scriptures Together: Seeking the Visible Unity of the Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43, no. 3 (Summer 2008), 269.

[25] *Ibid.*, 297.

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.[26]

This passage broadens the scope between Jews and Gentiles being eligible to receive

salvation. The connection to Greenbrier County is that if churches cannot begin working

together, then the indifference concerning to whom salvation belonged in the first century church

will pillage the current church. This same passage should challenge pastors to clearly understand

the calling to ministry. Other pastors are led to the same area to reach people for God because

these pastors are led by the same Spirit.

The reality facing local pastors is that people from different churches within the local

community work and play together through their various employment, community volunteering,

or entertainment activities. With this in mind, pastors along with church leadership need to focus

on building relationships that foster the ability to embrace the Great Commission. The capacity

to reach people is dependent upon local pastors allowing the Holy Spirit to work through them.

Relationships between pastors are vital in modeling to congregations how to work as one body

and not as several different smaller groups competing to reach the selected population.

Sharing Vision and Mission

Every pastor and church should develop a mission and vision for the church to follow in

reaching the local community. Several books have made this claim, however, there is a lack of

research to complement the vision and mission of other churches. Yet, Christ provides, and Paul

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[26] Rom 11:11-16.

urges all believers to participate in sharing faith through the gospel. This realization urges the modern churches to use the Great Commission when writing a mission statement. It is acknowledged that each pastor has a different vision in reaching the community where he or she may serve. Is it possible for pastors in the same local area to share vision and mission in the same community?

While each pastor has a vivid direction in reaching the community, he or she must also consider the different dynamics in each community when witnessing for Christ. Whether local pastors can share the same vision and mission is a serious matter that can develop more questions about the type of influence that local Christians can have in impacting the local community. The interviewees were perplexed by this question. An example was provided: If one pastor's church oversaw a crisis pregnancy center and another pastor's church offered a food bank, could they support each other? This provoking thought challenged the manner in which ministry currently is done in Greenbrier County. This example revealed the need to consider the strengths of each church in the community in aiding each other.

Amidst a variety of mixed emotions answers were provided. The varied responses established the need for the gospel message but limited the manner and extent to which pastors are willing to work with each other. One pastor questioned, "How can pastors from different backgrounds work together beyond special events?"[27] If pastors are following the leading of the Holy Spirit, then they should be able to cooperate to better the community. Leading churches together meets the needs of the community; however, there is a struggle between pastors leading change and human nature interfering with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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[27] Interview 1.

Local ministry partners in Greenbrier County have a real need to consider working in a missional context. Stetzer develops the concept of becoming an agent of change. He challenges his readers to consider that Christ brought change by modeling the change he desired his disciples to enact and to teach as ambassadors for his kingdom.[28]

Before pastors can support one another, an understanding of vision must be understood. The missional aspect to the community is directly dependent upon each pastor being able to support one another. Barna offers the distinction that vision is the direction. "Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based on an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances."[29] This definition allows each pastor to have a clear vision to lead a church in impacting the community. It is also important to realize that each pastor's vision extends to the particular population in the community. Understanding Barna's definition can direct pastors to focus on one or two problems in reaching the community.

The direct connection to Greenbrier County is that the majority of churches are small, with less than fifty, and are unable to function in conducting outreach as compared to larger churches. This understanding is where the first challenge in doing outreach or missional work is hindered by limited resources. Another challenge is the ability to encourage people to identify with the gospel in discipling other people. One pastor asserted that this manner of leading people clearly creates a struggle to his vision.[30] The effectiveness of vision is dependent upon people in

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[28] Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishers, 2012), 9.

[29] Barna, 26.

[30] Interview 1.

the church desiring to work within the vision. People desire to be involved but need clear instruction.

Building relationships dissolves how people outside the church may negatively view the churches ability to work together. This requires each pastor to have a clear vision and a clear path in leading the congregation. How the church today appears to the unchurched people is important. The image of the church must be examined so the missing roots may be reestablished in order to change the view that people outside of the local churches have. Hirsch and Ferguson offer an example that suggests moving missional work into an apostolic context.[31] This reinstitutes an essential element of the church which is the apostolic connection to the early church. One suggestion is to redefine what the church is by altering the paradigm through which a person views the church. This emphasizes the need for pastors to lead a group of people who can function in the ministry of the local area.

The need for the apostolic approach requires that local churches continue to be missional. This combination refers to the model that Christ gave to the disciples so that they could function according to his example. The local pastors can lead by partnering the vision and mission collectively. It is the ability to manage people in progressing in faith that enables people to discover how the gospel can transform the focus of ministry. Another pastor shared that if pastors would witness to the community together it would aid in leading local believers to see that, through the gospel, the local churches are unified in Christ.[32] The differences among pastors working collectively reveals the need to reexamine the text in order to understand the motivation of the early church and to effectively employ it today.

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[31] Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 24-26.

[32] Interview 2.

Other Churches Willing Aid

The content in this section was very insightful about encouraging people from other churches to work collectively. Each pastor has the vision to grow the church, but the limit in resources challenges the ability. The discussion of the pastors revealed that more unity was desired in Greenbrier County but they were unsure how bringing people together for the same cause could be valid across theological perspectives. This challenge brings acknowledgment and desire for change but resists until a trust factor can be established between the pastors. It is the relationship between the pastors that becomes vital in reaching into the community.

The size of the church does not matter in this case as each churches' pastor claims to preach and disciple through the gospel message. People who proclaim the gospel of Christ are leading new people into devotion to Christ. The obligation of every believer in Christ is sharing in the Great Commission. It is necessary to acknowledge that if the gospel is being used to lead people to Christ then it does not matter which church gets a new member in Christ. The focus of leading people to Christ is about building the Kingdom of God, rather than building one theological perspective over another. Therefore, the relationship between pastors becomes vital in understanding the vision each pastor possesses. It further extends into developing trust so that people desiring to work within a specialized ministry can do so in the local community. The reality then becomes that the churches in this county need each other to reach out to the community.

Churches working together manifest an authentic collective influence that is directly connected to the relationships between pastors, churches, and the community. "A growing sense

of isolation and powerlessness pervades much of the contemporary church."[33] Connecting

churches together relies on the formative character of the relationships built. This ability implies

that pastors become willing to see how each person can aid each other's vision. It is necessary to

lead a group of individuals to be active in the Great Commission while simultaneously partnering

with other churches who are fulfilling this requirement of the church.

Three of the interviewees were deeply moved to understand how they could aid other

pastors in the mission of the church. One example provided was that of three small churches

working together to meet the needs of the same community. Church 1 would lead a food bank;

church 2 would lead a crisis pregnancy center; and, church 3 would lead an alcohol abuse center.

Each of these churches has under fifty members; however, people in the churches desire to work

in another ministry that their church will oversee. If pastors would encourage and allow members

to aid ministry at other churches, unity would develop. A major trust factor involved is members

not leaving their home church. This example fosters the need to consider the impact that

churches who work together could have.

The response of these three pastors was confusion. Each questioned, "Is this even

possible?"[34] Their inquisitive natures pondered several "what if" topics about churches working

together. These considerations emphasized the need for pastors to trust each other to not recruit

membership from another church. This hindrance is rooted in the fact that, when spring revivals

begin, so too does church migration. Another complex problem for these pastors was the need to

lead their congregations at all times. Allowing people to help in a ministry at another church was

a radical idea. Local believers working together can create an environment that is accepting of all

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[33] Lewis and Wilkins, 23.

[34] Interviews 2, 5, and 7.

people in the community. This acknowledgment highlights that every person needs to have the opportunity to hear the gospel.

The challenges the pastors shared stirred within them a desire to determine the pivotal purpose for churches working together collectively. The quick response is to share the gospel. While this is true, a better response is seeing the Christians from different churches working together for one single purpose – sharing the love Christ. Thompson details this as the purpose God desires to fulfill through each believer in His Son. "The reason God leaves you in this clay house as long as he does is so that he can reach down to you and through you and reveal himself to the world."[35] This thought provides a fundamental element in the process of enabling people to be active in ministry. It promotes the assessment that churches working together will have a better impact on the community.

Only one pastor answered differently than the others. "To have one body of believers is to have only one church in the community. This church here is the only one that can supply workers for the ministry."[36] The challenge is that this large, 400-member church is starting to take a business approach to management. This pastor's reflection in part agrees that unification is needed; however, it limits the ability for any progress in working together unless this pastor and his church are the designated leaders. The damage is that unchurched people create a view of churches being right and wrong. This view sadly contends with how people consider the reality of the proclamation of the gospel presented. The manner in which this pastor operates accounts for his longevity and community connections; however, his actions limit the other pastors' ability to become involved in the local community. The need to include this church is pivotal for county

[35] W. Oscar Thompson, Carilyn Thompson. Ritzmann, and Claude V. King, *Concentric Circles of Concern: Seven Stages for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 153.

[36] Interview 3.

churches working within the community. This inclusion would allow for opportunity for the other pastors to love him, thereby setting an example for other people that pastors are also creating meaningful relationships.

Impact of Pastors Working Collectively

The following question was presented to all of the interviewees: "If local churches worked closely together, what impact could this have in your community?"[37] Collectively, everyone answered yes, the church could work together. While some pastors started to put limitations on why it would most likely fail, the interviewer commented that if the churches do not unify then the gospel message will be lost to the surrounding community. This interaction proved that agreement was needed, but consideration of the people expanded the context of Christians allowing theological perspective to determine involvement.

The environment in Greenbrier County among pastors needs to change. This change must mimic the example found in the book of Acts, which is to allow the Holy Spirit to direct the leadership. "Each pastor needs to be willing to submit to the Holy Spirit in leading the given vision. This might require outside support but most definitely needs prayer."[38] This pastor's assessment shows that he realizes that all the pastors serving in the area are called to be spiritual leaders. Each pastor in the area needs each other in building relationships with the community, thus fostering a support group in which prayer becomes an important connection. It is the working relationships that aid pastors in finding the support to work collectively.

Each pastor has a level of connection to the community and each pastor has been called to reach into a different aspect of the community. The purpose of each calling overlaps the

[37] Last interview question asked to all pastors.

[38] Interview 8.

population being reached by the pastors in Greenbrier County. This construction of pastors provides great ability in coming to the community. Wallis makes a strong connection to the community that believers must understand. "God welcomes all of our human tribes and asks us to welcome the outsiders."[39] The local body of believers embracing the love God has for people influences the desire to aid their pastors. At times, this might mean supporting other ministries in the community.

Pastors who are willing to gather and aid each other's vision will wield greater influence and impact the county for Christ. Recent events in the county have proved that pastors possess the capability to work with each other as well as across the county's East-West divide. One event that demonstrated this ability was the flood that affected both sides of the county on the same day.[40] The devastation of the flood showed that pastors and other church leaders could connect with the community to provide the necessary support. It also indicated that pastors are focused collectively on meeting the needs of the community by modeling compassion to each person affected. This is the Lewis principle of "not alone" that, when enacted, showed that these pastors could function as one body of believers preaching the gospel.[41]

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[39] Jim Wallis, *On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 110.

[40] This flood occurred June 23, 2016. It was considered to be a 1000 year flood in Greenbrier County.

[41] Lewis, 157.

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNITY REFLECTION

As people work, play, and serve in the same community, there must also be a desire to partner together in sharing the gospel as a unified kingdom representing God's passion for humanity. Several books have been written to assist building churches by focusing on the relational aspect. As people value relationships, that same emphasis is needed when connecting to the community. These relationships necessitate that churches band together in the local community in order to present a collective and consistent image as they introduce the community to the gospel.

Churches must consider the type of image that they want to present to the community. It is dynamically important for the community to see the churches represent Christ together. The attitude that God desired from Israel during the dedication of the temple is the same attitude needed in reaching local communities in the present age; however, the following passage highlights the cause and effect when the believer does not act in an acceptable manner in reflecting the gospel message to the community.

> When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.[1]

People who proclaim to serve the living God but allow their humanity to develop a negative attitude concerning another person or church do more damage to the Kingdom of God

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[1] 2 Chr 7:13-15.

than sharing the gospel can improve. Thus, development of unity must be defined. To have unity of the churches means to assemble people who believe in salvation through Christ. This simple definition forces a solid theological perspective; otherwise, scripture is redefined. It provides the basis in which Christians can allow working relationships to develop among believers in the same community. The hindrance in sharing the gospel together is the lack of accepting the personal perspective. The manner in which the gospel is presented is very important. Doug Munton explains that the integrity of one's testimony is as important as the desire to witness. "In other words, integrity matters in the fulfillment of the Lord's task."[2] The unchurched population will view integrity as the authenticity in the presentation of the gospel to them.

 Another issue that arises is the willingness to work together in a unified manner. The examination of biblical text declares that the gospel must be preached. There is no limitation within a theological perspective that only a select group can work with that same group; however, churches must further examine how they can collectively and successfully work together in being a part of the Great Commission. Greenbrier County ministers and churches need to connect with their common desire to present the gospel message, thereby working in a unified manner, thus allowing the community to witness a viable connection to Christ.

Assessing how people view the atmosphere of the county is important. One must consider how the gospel can affect the county and must acknowledge that the Gospel message is transforming. "The gospel is to be the foundation for how we think about all of life."[3] This foundation is the most important element in reaching the community. Any community outreach

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[2] Larry S. McDonald and Matt Queen, eds., *A Passion for the Great Commission* (Greer, SC: Towering Oaks, 2013), 4.

[3] Matt Perman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 73.

that lacks the Gospel is simply another social event that creates a limitation in reaching people with any effectiveness. It disconnects the church from the gospel.

Determining what people at different levels in the church community view as the current reality was the focus of the assessment. It further examined the desire and willingness of people to allow for unity among Christians within the local community. The assessment did not seek to establish one church but rather to unify the community of believers. Robert Lewis asserts that understanding the community by connecting the local story through assessment will lead to providing the right services to the people in need.[4] This understanding provides valuable information that aids pastors and other church leadership in establishing an adequate ministry. The different community assessments establish a context for creating unity in providing the proper collective ministry.

Aspect of Relationship Among Churches

Evaluating Greenbrier County involved inviting people to participate who represented a spectrum of theological churches where the gospel is central to the belief structure. It was understood within the invitation process that the gospel message was the main element in seeking churches to participate. The chart to the right provides the sample of willing participants in the second part of this study.[5] Some pastors who were involved in the pastoral interview declined to participate in this assessment while other pastors refused to be interviewed as they decided that the online assessment would be more to their comfort. This response emphasizes that willingness and comfort levels apply in developing the extent of involvement. If Christians

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[4] Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 190.

[5] Online assessment question 3.

are unwilling to work together, then the witness to the local community is limited. One element that the graph clearly presents is that church members and attendees were more willing to be involved in the research. This data reveals that people in a non leadership position could be more open to being involved with the local community.

Figure 4.1 Church Position

The relationship of the divided groups to the community must be examined. Interviewees were asked, "Are you willing to partner with other churches to share the gospel?"[6] One hundred percent of the respondents answered with a resounding yes. The intent was to discover the basic interest in working with other people. It is the nature of individuals to desire to see the common good accomplished, which provides a positive outlook in determining that a relationship can develop. Churches that decide to work together to benefit the community must allow for one focus. They must formulate and maintain these relationships even if leadership changes.

Relationships are important when sharing the gospel. People who do not know Christ as Savior observe the relational aspect on several levels. It is the viable evidence that provides a

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[6] This is the fourth question in the online assessment.

realistic connection for unchurched people to consider. The church depends on the community

seeing the bond between Christians along with their level of commitment to Christ as this is what

provides viable validity. It is the perception of what people see between Christians that creates a

believable image. The mental picture of what is perceived is more believable to the observer than

the intentions of the church. The following passage reveals the importance of listening and acting

as a believer in Christ.

> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it they will be blessed in what they do.[7]

This passage requires that one consider the type of witness the Church is within the local

community by all the Christians in that community. The building of community relationships

must consider the relevance of the gift Christ gave to humanity, for salvation is an essential

element in faith. This alone should motivate pastors to connect for the sole purpose of preaching

the gospel message. Followers of Christ can and should bridge the gap between churches. To do

so, unity must be developed. Relationships between churches offer the opportunity to develop

the nature that promotes Christ and his kingdom rather than promoting whose church is deemed

best.

Unity is the only option that will bring churches together. The challenge is that people

from the different churches must collaborate within the community. If these people would

partner in prayer and support, then the beginnings of unity would start. This perception then

changes the reality of what other people see. "When Jesus said that all the commandments could

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[7] Jas 1:22-25.

be summed up in loving God and loving neighbors, he was on to something."[8] There is a set

image that people must be able to see in all churches that proclaim the gospel. This picture must

be reflective of the Holy Spirit urging all believers to show love in the same manner as Christ.

Determining the current relationship among the churches in Greenbrier County was a

primary necessity. Pastoral interviews indicated that all shared a desire to support one another

but felt limited by different variables in ministry. The fifth question in the survey sought the

perceptional reason as to whether people are willing to work alongside other churches. One

response provided a view from within the church by the local attendee. "It would take churches

to realize the love that Jesus would have for our community and be willing to sacrifice our

differences to present the gospel message to our community."[9] If this image is to be known, then

there must be a change in how churches relate. It should not be limited to pastors who are

buddies but rather include people of faith who are allowing the Holy Spirit to direct them in the

community. Before relationship between the spiritual and individual communities can be

achieved, there must be unity among the churches.

Relationship Between the Churches and the Community

Many churches have a direct connection with people who are willing to serve the local

community if there is an opportunity of interest. One area to explore is the countywide fire

system. Greenbrier County has no fully paid fire departments and only one combination

department. The combination department has a few paid employees who rely on volunteers to

complete the fire crew. Thus, the rest of the county is volunteer. The connection between the

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[8] Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 29.

[9] This is the 15th response from online survey, see Appendix B.

church and fire departments is that people belong to both organizations which provides a

platform for churches to develop an influence while representing a unified relationship among

the churches.

The timely and persistent need is to understand the reality that when churches share a

witness, they bring Glory to God. David Wheeler and Vernon Whaley challenge people to model

sharing the gospel so that churches can evangelize the community together. Their claim of

rapidly declining statistics captures the disconnect between faith and the believers'

surroundings.[10] This disconnect on the personal level is reflective of the churches lack of

influence within the community. Yet, it is the basis that Christians need in partnering with each

other. The development of this question must then contend with how to embrace leading people
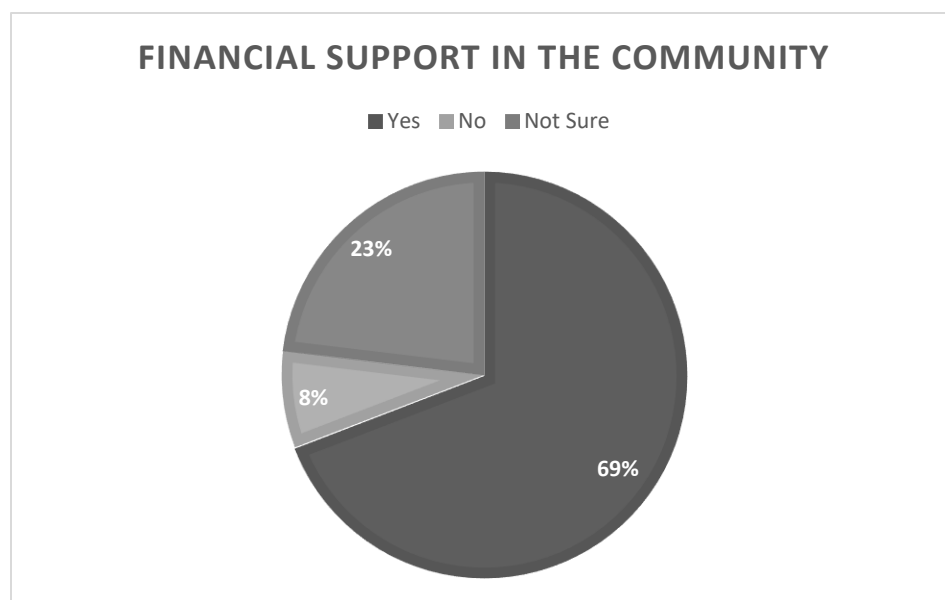

Figure 4.2 Financial Support in the Community

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[10] David A. Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-based Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2011), 7.

in the community to Christ, which leads to the formation of Great Commission Worshipping. "This model thus serves as a guideline for what all Great Commission worship should accomplish in the hearts of believers."[11]

It is important to explore the development of community relationship. Lewis's discussion of the Great Chasm questions the impact to the community.[12] The focus must now contend with how a church can have a positive influence within the community. It relies upon people becoming involved within the community. As with the county firemen, people who already attend churches are also involved in their communities. These people fill the gap in representing Christ in their specific social group. It is the relationship that church members have with the different organizations that provides opportunity to witness.[13]

The process should examine the need to support people in these community relationships. They are the representation of Christ to that organization. Therefore, when church people become involved within the community the church should be helpful and supportive. While it is possible to have more than one church involved in a social organization, there should be a strong emphasis from the churches to work collectively in order to reach the unchurched within the organization. Data shows that most of the sample size strongly agree with the question, "Does your church financially support any community mission or outreach in your community?"[14] The content appears to support that churches can work together.

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[11] *Ibid.*, 49.

[12] Lewis and Wilkins, 25.

[13] Collective results of Question 6.

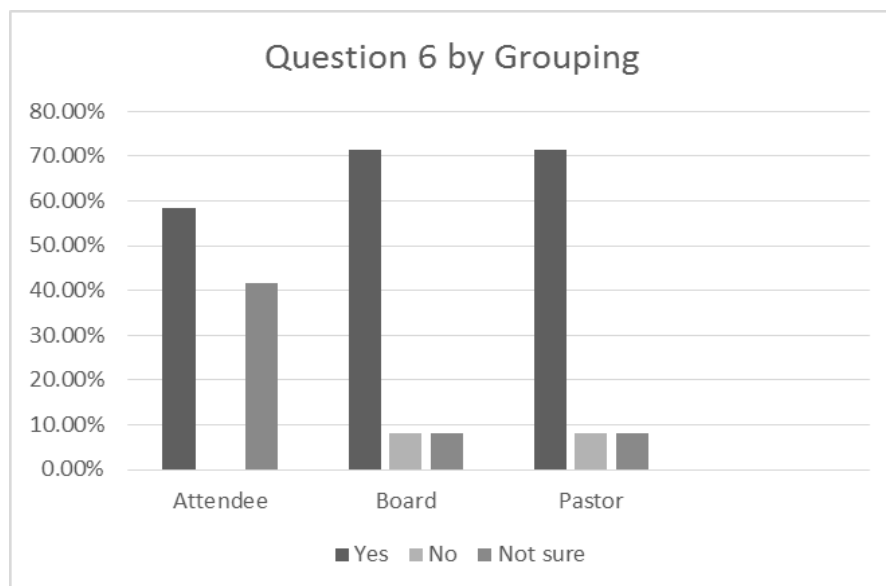[14] Question 6 from the online survey.

Figure 4.3 Question 6 by Grouping

How the different subject groups answered this question must be considered. It was clear

that one group was not reflective of the leadership. However, when the examination is broken

down by group type a difference occurs in that one select group does not share the understanding

of how money is spent on missional operations. Therefore, the general church attendance may

not fully understand the message conveyed by the pastor. Nonetheless, this assessment reveals

that pastor and board members reflect one another.

The follow up question in the survey seeks to assess whether there is a willingness to

partner with other churches. Clearly evident was how splintered the church has become.

However, there is a desire by some to see unity among Christians. The intent of this issue is to

discover at what level people are willing to partner with other churches. Hence, the question,

"Does your church currently partner with other local churches to provide local missional

labor?"[15] These puzzling results revealed that 50% would, while 30.8% were unsure.[16] This

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[15] Question 7 from the online survey.

[16] See the results in Appendix B.

underscores the uncertainty that people have as to whether there is involvement between churches. It also indicates that 19.2% are unaware of any involvement with other churches supporting each other.

Question 7 by Grouping
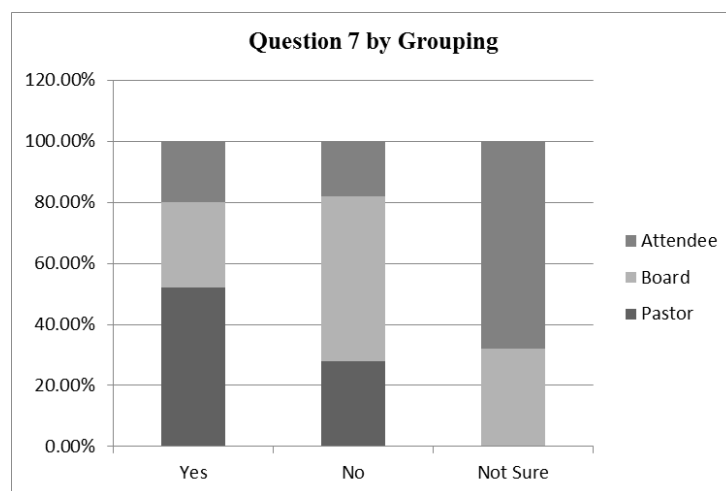
Figure 4.4 Question 7 by Grouping

A closer look at the data by strands indicates that, while the group of pastors clearly assert that their respective churches support other churches, the remaining groups are quite uncertain. The conflict is that lack of understanding among the board members and attendees creates a limitation for the pastor. This information vividly underscores the confusion in understanding whether a local church could productively work with another church. By extension, that confusion transfers into understanding whether people within the churches could work together.

Another revelation is that non leaders are confused about understanding the importance of working collectively. The reason is that, if the people are unsure, how then can they embrace working with people from other churches? Paul writes, "In your relationships with one another,

have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."[17] The setting of this passage, as stated in the opening of

the epistle, was to all believers in Philippi. It encourages development of relationships that focus

on modeling Christ to other people. It is this concept that must be developed between churches.

The central focus is modeling Christ. If people profess a belief but act differently, then there is

no credibility. Without credibility, people outside of the church will not see the need for a close

relationship with Christ.

Developing a Purpose

Getting the entire church involved in ministry requires that the three different groups act

in the same manner as Christ; therefore, building relationships among local churches is a

necessity. The shared community needs more than one selected group of people. It needs people

who can and will assemble together to work for the same goal. The goal should not be the self

promotion of a church but rather the building of kingdom purpose. Sharing the gospel provides

the common platform for working together to meet the needs of the community. It then resolves

to work together as one local body of believers rather than as several small entities, in order to

achieve the same purpose.

People tend to have their own opinions in determining the most important problem facing

the community. Personal desire to see a particular problem addressed will motivate people to

seek the opportunity to help individuals who meet that specified content. This action develops

the concept of outward and externally focused churches. "No single denomination has the inside

track on external impact."[18] The people who seek to model the image of Christ will have a better

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[17] Phlm 2:5

[18] Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub., 2004), 23.

opportunity to experience an impact on the community; however, how to develop a purpose for service to the community must be considered.

"What do you consider to be your community's greatest concern?"[19] The answers to this question revealed four areas that need to be addressed, however, the rest of the choices varied between five and twenty percent. It is important to understand that this question is based solely on people's understanding of the local community. The survey clearly shows that population areas need some form of real ministry. It also indicates that each person is passionate about seeing some element of ministry within the community. This information provides church leaders with viable opportunities for partnering with other churches in building relationships that focus on the gospel. The challenge lies in persuading people from different churches to share the same burden for the community.

When churches desire to work collectively in sharing the gospel the focus then becomes developing unity. Which people might need ministry? One reality is that every person needs ministry; however, this generalization does not address the specific needs that people face. The needs facing people often provide an opportunity for Christians to demonstrate the love of Christ. Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon list several scenarios that potentially surround any church or individual in the church.[20] The situations in Greenbrier County are reflective of this list.; however, there must also be a reflection of utilizing the churches local resources to meet these needs.

Smaller churches that struggle to provide ministry to people and keep their doors open will benefit from unifying together to reach the community. Partnering together fosters a new

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[19] Question 8 is from the online survey.

[20] Pathak & Runyon, 15-18.

perceived image in the community. Lewis details the need to gather current data while brainstorming to see different possibilities for meeting and solving the discovered needs.[21] This provision allows the spiritual leaders the prospect of discovering the resources in the church and the people who could be connected in focusing on a given opportunity. One example would be three people who work to feed the hungry, but the food bank is located at another church where space is available. Another element would involve a referral process to this group of people. Simultaneously, another group of people would work to find ways to provide clothing for people. Achieving the goal of small churches working together then makes it possible to meet the needs discovered within the community. It also limits every church in trying to decide what ministry should be the focus for that month. Additionally, working together offers church attendees the opportunity to serve in a capacity that they desire.

A similar process was followed in Toronto by the Taproot movement. The function of the group was to connect the spiritual community to the general population. "It is considered by many to be the key motivating factor that guides people to engage in social justice work and to influence social policy. A source of hope and promise in social change can be found in small faith communities."[22] The group sought to bring change to social issues from within the spiritual community. It was acknowledged that the community may not be spiritual but rather tangible in nature for the people seeking aid. This consideration tends to look for the Good Samaritan effect. It is the actions of the church in aiding people who are receiving assistance that provide an opportunity to share one's personal faith with those who are seeking.

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[21] Lewis and Walkins, 191.

[22] Judy Cerny, "Social Change and Spirituality: Planting Seeds of Hope and Promise from Spiritual Roots," *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, no. 54 (Fall 2004): 135.

The Taproot initiative attempted to plant gospel seeds through action as a way to enhance social justice.[23] This action reveals that people of different theological perspectives can have the same goal in promoting a cause through the catalyst of the gospel. The same plan can also be reproduced in meeting the physical needs of the community. It is through meeting these needs that the church can plant gospel seeds that challenge the receiver to consider the reality of a creator who desires a personal connection with him or her. As a group of people believing in the gospel, the local churches can encourage people to plant seeds with other Christians in the local community. This unity provides a new image.

Ability to Work Together

Constructing how the relationship between churches can develop is the next phase. People evaluate the directive to share the gospel with a personal willingness to work with other churches; however, this challenge must examine more than willingness. The focus becomes how people in the local churches view what the body of Christ is. Transitioning from small groups into one body of believers creates a perceptual change that Greenbrier County currently struggles with in understanding one another. The challenge increases with the limitation of understanding that prohibits churches from working together for the community. The difference in functioning selectively within the community rather than working for the community implies an attitude of serving.

The body of believers must model for the community the image that Christ demonstrated to the disciples. Their learning process, revealed through Acts, showed that the early church embraced serving people with one goal: leading people to Christ so they could have a personal

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[23] Ibid., 137.

relationship with him. This same purpose should be the motivation to serve people who do not

know Christ. The disciples learned the difference between serving and a person who is opposed

or unwilling to serve a person.

> You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.[24]

If churches worked together for the common purpose of serving the community, what

would be the impact? Society has certain expectations from the modern church. Thomas Rainer

suggests that preaching from the pulpit must be as true for the unchurched as it is for people

serving in the church. "A challenge for pastors of evangelistic churches is to preach both

expositional and with life application."[25] Christians in the community need to be consistent with

their actions towards all people. When the community observes consistent behavior among

Christians, they will also discover a valid reason to attend church.

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[24] Mark 10:42-45.

[25] Thom S. Rainer, Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 59.

A series of questions was asked to gauge the belief and the extent to which people think

the church could work together. The results revealed that churches should work together but also

acknowledged certain limitations.[26] This revelation shows a consistency in agreement with the

negative impact among the people who completed the online survey. Churches have dangerously

divided themselves because of their doubt that they can effectively work with each other.

"Should churches be more willing to help each other?"[27] garnered a positive response; however,

some respondents then detailed reasons as to why churches are challenged in working together.

Their comments validate the responses of the people who took the assessment while also

allowing for understanding the perception of how people in the church view the ability to work

together.

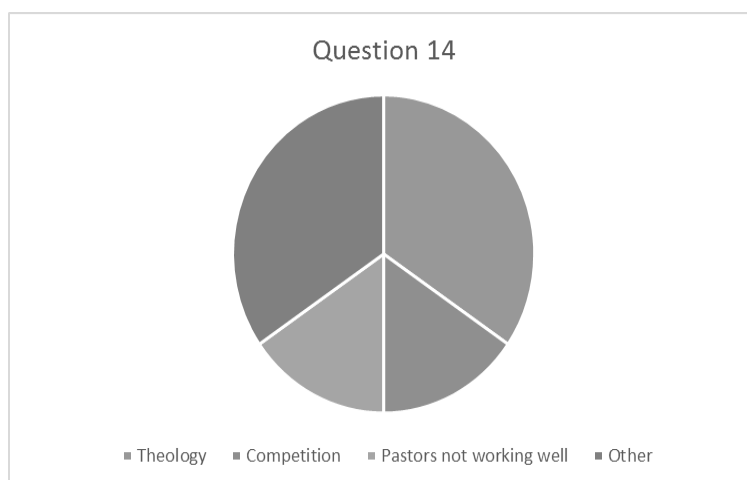
Figure 4.5 Question 14

One quote underscored the challenge that faces some churches. "Yes! We have reached

out on many occasions to invite other churches to participate with us in events or projects with

zero response. If we would come together in unity with a common purpose, we could be so

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[26] See the results in Appendix B for questions 9-12.

[27] Question 9 of the online survey.

much more effective."[28] The acknowledgment and desire in this reply show clearly how the churches in this area respond to one another.

Another quote exposes a challenge in the complexity of unity among the churches. "In theory, absolutely, but in practice, it is tough to get people to serve together regarding spiritual activities. It is much easier to get participation for social needs."[29] That it is simpler to gather people together for a social event but not for the intention of ministry sadly challenges the purpose of seeing the Great Commission enacted in the local area. The purpose of all local believers is to reach people within the community for Christ. It should not be overlooked, however, that social connections can provide a viable means to achieving that greater goal.

Respondents clearly revealed their belief that churches should work together but also acknowledged the existence of limitations. "What keeps churches from working together?"[30] became the follow-up question. As figure 5 shows, respondents indicated that "theology" and "other" were the strongest limitations.[31] Another hindrance was that pastors are too busy leading their churches to work with other churches. This is unsettling as the people are acknowledging the division with local Christians. Through division the church represents itself in a negative way, thereby creating a struggle for the unchurched in the community.

There are clearly challenges for the church in understanding how the body of believers works together. Paul writes the following passage concerning division in the church.

> The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.

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[28] Response from question 9.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Question 14 from the online survey.

[31] Based on the responses from question 14 d.

> And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.[32]

Is there room in the local body of Christ for division? The answer is simply no. This division has built an image of a dysfunctional family. This picture needs to change in order for the church to be reflective of the gospel. It is vital that churches reflect the gospel message in every aspect.

Rebuilding Image with the County

The churches of Greenbrier County need to discover a way to unite. The data confirms that people representing the three different levels desire to see unity within the county. This challenges the perception that the local churches hold concerning the body of Christ. Further, it needs to contend with the interrelationships that currently exist. The focus of all the churches is proclaiming the gospel. Each pastor interviewed commented that the gospel needs to be more vibrant in the approach to the community. Examination of the manner in which that image should be fostered now becomes the focus. It is important that local ministry leadership disciple people to seek God in order to transform their personal lives.

The image on a personal level needs to transfer from all local believers to a community level. It is the nature of humanity to create division based on emotions. This is contrary to the image that is needed. Scripture provides the practical application for being a living witness: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will."[33] Each believer has the responsibility to live a transformed life among people who need salvation.

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[32] 1 Cor 12:21-26.

[33] Rom 12:2.

It is through this image that the unchurched people discover a strong difference between Christians and non-Christians.

There is a certain image that the community should see in the church. It is important to consider the current environment and the changes required to improve this image. The image needs to be viable for people to see a transformation that brings the love of Christ to the community. Unification is the only development that can rebuild the image of the local body of believers. A plan of action must be formed that will cause the churches to overcome competition. Early and Wheeler make the distinction that people are to be pursued by believers.[34] It is God's nature that he loves all people. Therefore, anyone proclaiming to be one of his children is obligated to share his love through their life. The impact of the gospel is greater than a single person. God desires his children to model his love to the rest of the population.

Building unity requires all church leaders to work in a manner that encourages a desire to see the gospel shared throughout the community. Three key elements require the pastors and other church leaders to make the development purposeful, thereby allowing people to see their dedication to a savior. Prayer is the catalyst that provides the ability to allow faith to become active. This ability should gather believers in developing an atmosphere that seeks to share the gospel. Partner relations between churches enables opportunities for working for the same purpose. The ability to work collectively establishes the desire to connect beyond one church in seeking to reach the community. It is important to provide the community with an example of service that allows the unchurched to see a clear difference between religious attitude and a personal relationship. These three elements develop the foundation that sets the opportunity to

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[34] Dave Earley and David A. Wheeler, *Evangelism Is--: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 37.

evangelize and disciple the community with one purpose: allowing the gospel to be preached through the lives of the believers.

The focus for local pastors must be to become willing to allow the Holy Spirit to direct them together in order to have a greater impact on the community. This focused impact is one unanimous voice calling the lost. Spiritual leaders in the community need to accept people without any preconceived judgments. "There are biblical imperatives for breaking down the culture barriers that divide humanity, especially in the new community that forms around Jesus."[35] The emphasis must be that Jesus is the only one who can be proclaimed through the gospel. This message should never seek to divide the body of believers but rather to bring unity in reaching into every aspect of any given community.

The theology of different churches needs to question the reality of the unchurched people. Rainer's studies have proven that theological background matters to the unchurched.[36] This again raises the question concerning what is believed by the church. His research reveals that people are more interested in the genuine relationship to the savior in belief.[37] Figure 5 highlights that theology is a big problem for the church in being able to work together. If the image of the county is going to change then a reflection of the theological perspective of salvation needs to be identical and according to scripture.

Pastors need to encourage people to evangelize the community with other people from different churches. This fosters unity because churches are then connecting members to work in aiding the community. While a smaller connection, it is nonetheless linked to a specific element.

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[35] Jim Wallis, *On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 110.

[36] Rainer, 126.

[37] Ibid.

Darrel Robinson makes the distinction that church life is directly related to the movement of the

Holy Spirit in that church. "A church can go nowhere if its spirit is not right. The fullness, work,

and guidance of the Holy Spirit are essential for a local church to function."[38] While this

statement is true for each church regardless of theological perspective, it is also important that

community see the same Holy Spirit working in each church. This critical observation provides a

strong connection to the churches that are serving the same savior and not an independent

collection of saviors based on different theology.

People need to see local Christians reflecting the savior whom they profess. Pathak and

Runyon detail the importance of connecting a relationship.[39] The process reflects the image that

Christ modeled to the disciples. It is the process whereby strangers begin to embrace another

person who is genuinely representing a personal belief. This belief for Christians is the gospel.

The image of local believers is directly connected to the directive Christ gave, to make disciples.

When unchurched people see a Christian, they should be able to see Christ's love in that person.

This is right for the church as it is the reflection of Christ from the body of believers that

unchurched people must discover within the church.

Impact of Churches Working Together

The benefit of the local churches coming together is that they impact the local community

for one purpose. This impact stems from the focus that the gospel unites all believers for one

purpose, the gospel. The direction of the local community directly connects to the effectiveness

of the spiritual leaders in that community. Building unity in the local community develops a

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[38] Darrell W. Robinson, *Total Church Life: How to Be a First Century Church in a 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 121.

[39] Pathak and Runyon, 78- 81.

connection that is more significant than any one church. The relationship between the churches directly impacts the perception the community maintains. It is the perceived image of whether an unchurched person views being a Christian as worth the value of personal time.

Relationships among the churches must focus on connecting for the promoting of the gospel. Christ commanded that believers share the gospel throughout the entire world. This includes local areas surrounding all local churches. Lewis makes the distinction that relationships need to be continually built. He questions the amount of help each church needs. "So how does a church with a biblical vision of irresistible influence reach a whole city? The answer is, not alone."[40] Every church needs the other local churches bringing the gospel message to the local area.

How can churches from different theological perspectives work together? This question looms over many of the local communities in Greenbrier County. The answer develops out of understanding how the gospel works to transform people. When people have been transformed, they then transform the community through the impact of participating in sharing the gospel. Matt Perman challenges the thinking process of efficiency.[41] The rationale of his description implies that it is more important to be effective than efficient. This understanding establishes the need to consider if the local churches are effective or efficient in sharing the gospel. The outcome of the ministry is only as effective as the manner in which the churches are willing to work together. A constant division among local churches severely damages the effectiveness in sharing the gospel.

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[40] Lewis, 157.

[41] Perman, 43-49.

One consideration to the image that the local area maintains is the need for churches to combine nonfinancial resources. The following question was asked on the online survey. "What do you consider to be your community's biggest needs?"[42] The collected results reveal two key elements. The first is a vast difference recognized in problems facing the county. The second is the realization that churches face a significant opportunity to serve Greenbrier County. Four answers stood out as an issue while the rest of the answers were relatively close in percentage. The problems with this local area are too overwhelming for only one or two churches to attempt to address; however, all churches uniting together can meet the needs of the community.

Several authors write concerning the need to focus on providing service to the community. The importance of this is to be effective in providing for the needs of the people in the community. Pathak and Runyon emphasize the need to love people.[43] This is the very essence that should unite churches together in providing to the community. This unity develops a new image that the community can witness within God's people. Service given to the community now becomes a means to an opportunity to share the gospel with people. It is through love that unchurched people will discover that the county's churches stand united.

The construction of this image must focus on the essence of what being a believer represents to the world. Paul writes, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."[44] Developing a positive community image mandates working together in order to meet the weak as Paul did. Church leaders need to embrace this concept. There can be no unity if leaders appear to the

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[42] See Appendix B.

[43] Pathak and Runyon, 29.

[44] 1 Cor 9:22.

community to be in competition. The strength of the unity among the local pastors and other

church leaders is working for the same purpose - making disciples.

CHAPTER 5

DEVELOPING KINGDOM PURPOSE

The development of unity in Greenbrier County is enabling pastors to foster meaningful relationships that transcend beyond any boundary created by human nature. Observations gained from recent events enabled local pastors to prove that working together can encourage healthier relationships between spiritual and community leaders. It was through these events that some pastors were spurred to take the initiative in focusing on the outward elements that would allow them to connect together with the community. This influence is also connecting local churches in becoming more involved with sharing the gospel in the County. Additionally, it is causing people in the churches to realize the need for working together. It is having an impact as unity is proving that people from different theological perspectives can share the gospel together.

The biggest struggle for the community is to see that every church has something of value to offer. Robert Lewis suggests that influence is the ability to see the vision. "A spiritual bridge always involves a physical reality. People need to see to believe."[1] His comment places special focus on the relationships that need to be built between churches. God's children desire to share his passion for humanity. The interdependence required for churches to work collectively brings the community closer through this unity. Importantly, it emphasizes the reality that the Holy Spirit leads people to make new disciples.

As local churches unify, they must exemplify the example of a New Testament church. As two distinct elements developed in Greenbrier County, this unity must be examined. The first

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[1] Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 71.

distinction was that pastors long to support each other. The recent flood in Greenbrier County challenged pastors to bring in resources from various organizations. While each pastor and church provided supplies, opportunities arose to place people together in order to hand out water, to clean houses, and to perform other tasks as needed. The second distinction was a function of leadership as it offered the hurt communities opportunity to see a vivid model of each pastor and spiritual leader facing the unique challenges needing solved while laboring together to help their neighbors.

The lessons learned from the flood have proven that churches can come together for the same purpose. People not connected to different civic groups relied on the leadership of the local churches; however, when establishing the premise that churches need to unify, examination of the capability of working together must also be included. Collective effort brings harmony among the churches. If a person made a list of all the problems in Greenbrier County, no church in the county would be able to handle the problems. If a church attempted to, the leadership and attendees would quickly become overwhelmed; however, if each church supported one another by each taking ownership for the solving of one problem, then each issue would become manageable. The core action is support.

The cultural impact is comparative to the parable of the Good Samaritan.[2] Every Christian needs to be reflective of this image as it presents a clear distinction to people who do not know God that his love is real. It does not matter where one's social environment places an individual, as God desires to love each person. This realization enables an understanding that God made a provision for humanity to be redeemed. It is the essence of the gospel that Jesus came as a sacrifice. Every action of the local spiritual leadership challenges the commitment

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[2] Luke 10:25-37.

level of the person. Unchurched people will examine the spiritual environment by how the churches present Christ's love to the local community. It is the responsibility of the leadership, pastors, and board members to disciple churches in order to present a unified family through the gospel.

Pastoral Roll Collectively

Nowhere in the Great Commission does it limit which churches may be part of the Great Commission. When churches work independently, the perception is that local Christians cannot get along.[3] Meeting the communal needs appears to be a competition. The hardest challenge to overcome in getting the churches to work together cooperatively is the pastor's competitive spirit. That competitiveness fosters various frustrations that ultimately lead to separations within the body of believers. These separations create more challenges which hinder church growth. People outside of the church question this image as they evaluate the relationship and communication of the people within the local body of believers. The pastors are the only group who can encourage local believers to gather for one purpose.

John Frank makes a bold observation, "Many churches tend to operate as independent churches with a suspicion of cooperation with any outside entity. This can be a major hindrance to cooperation."[4] While he discusses getting one theological group to work together, there must also be consideration that all churches should be the representation of one body. The focus then moves from a limited perspective to one that is more global.

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[3] Thomas E. Trask, Wayde I. Goodall, and Zenas J. Bicket, *The Pentecostal Pastor: A Mandate for the 21st Century* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Pub. House, 1997), 454.

[4] John Timothy Frank, Cooperation: Churches Working Together Through the Local Baptist Association for Maximum Kingdom Ministry, (DMin. Thesis, Liberty University), 2012, 49.

Can the community see a genuine difference between churches? Should they? In the relationships between pastors, it is imperative that people see the spirit in each pastor. Don Argue comments that there is a need for repentance by the churches regarding 2nd Chronicles 7:14.[5] The comparison between the Old Testament church and the modern view of the New Testament church creates the fracture among denominations. The major difference is that, in the Old Testament, there was one body and it was considered family whereas today, there are many different sects of Christianity. Even among Evangelicals, there is a broad spectrum.

The complication among local pastors then becomes not a theological one but rather one of limitations, whether private, denominational, or within the local church. One irony is that local churches profess the same gospel of the same Savior. This acknowledgment alone should cause pastors to realize that they need to work together to build the kingdom rather than the church. Gordon Fee discusses the revelation of the Spirit that Jews and Gentiles have been given the same redemptive plan from God,[6] which emphasizes that the body of believers was never intended to divide but to unify.

Humility is an important characteristic that people should be able to observe in the local pastors. John Dickerson challenges leadership to develop an attitude that is reflective of the Holy Spirit. Dickerson asserts, "We are shaped by what we love."[7] A humble spirit allows the Holy Spirit to be reflective in one's personal life. Henry and Richard Blackaby share this same belief

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[5] Trask, 455.

[6] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 79-83.

[7] John P. Dickson, *Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 174.

but present a more concrete understanding: humility is a way of life that regards others through influence.[8] This reminds leadership to consider what the lost community sees in local pastors.

Paul describes ministerial influence that develops out of responsibility. Scripture highlights the importance of ministers in discipling people while also emphasizing the need for unity as one body. "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."[9] The pastoral role then becomes a collective effort in service to the same Savior. It becomes the functional development that brings Christians together, assembling under one name for the same purpose. Therefore, pastors must learn how to lead in a way that reflects Christ's desire that all of his followers unify as one body. Hence, they must add focus to discipling new converts and current believers, thereby empowering them to share their personal testimony.

Leadership for the Community

Local pastors must develop a system whereby they provide support and assistance to each church's mission and vision. The overall mission must be considered. Kyu asserts, "Jesus gave us a mission for evangelism and church growth, and also emphasizes that we should put our energy into evangelism."[10] The focus of the Great Commission is that every believer in Christ should be reaching out to share the gospel. This provides the connection with leadership

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[8] Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 175-177.

[9] Eph 4:11-13.

[10] Chang Kyu Kim, "Biblical Strategy and Shift to Spiritual Driven Church Growth" (DMin. Thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 25.

development for the community. If pastors were to work collectively, what impacting change would the local community experience? This question brings more than a request for change; it asks for the realization that unity among the pastors in the local area facilitates a greater positive impact within the community.

Leadership cannot happen if another person does not desire to follow. The process of leading must also include training people to become leaders. It is the desire of many leaders that their ministry or work continue after they have completed their time. Addressing the after effects of the flood in Greenbrier County will come to completion; however, will the spiritual leadership be sustained? This question challenges every spiritual leader's ability to adjust while training other people to be capable and effective leaders. James Bryant and Mac Brunson assert that the world currently suffers from the lack of leadership.[11] This observation challenges the current work of pastors. While pastors need to focus on leading their churches, they also need to work with developing leaders who can impact the community.

The development of a strategic plan is another aspect of pastoral ministry to the community. This plan must connect a vision and mission to a doable, seeable outcome. "The answer to the problem of church decline is to start a new S-curve."[12] An S-curve pattern is the life pattern of a church's growth. When applied to the spiritual community, the S-curve challenges how Christians see each other in the local area. Restarting an S-curve that encompasses the effort from all Christians is unity. A strategic plan among the local pastors provides a process for evaluating growth based on the Great Commission in aiding each other.

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[11] James W. Bryant and Mac Brunson, *The New Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub. Group, 2007), 70.

[12] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 15.

Responses to one question from the online survey revealed that people have different opinions about which community issues are most important. This realization strengthens the importance of personal motivation for action that is often limited by various factors within a local church. One such factor is how the church has been limited by its perception of the mission. Kinnamon clearly reveals the conflict facing local believers: "Beyond that, church is now associated, for many persons, with exclusion, not gracious welcome, with an inward focus, not expansive care for the poor or for creation, with corporate-like structures and staid rituals, not passionate worship and difference-making mission, with cover-up of abusive behavior, not concern for those who are abused."[13] The perception of the church should be that it reflects one distinct element, Christ's love. The needs of the community are extensive but if the churches unite together it is possible to meet the needs.

Fear of failing is an invasive challenge that faces the local body of believers and often halts the strategic plan. John Maxwell regards failure as the ability to relearn by connecting mistakes for success.[14] Success depends on the capacity to learn from all mistakes. Errors allow for change. The struggle then becomes determining how to lead. Fear of failure limits people in attempting to move beyond merely learning to application. Maxwell states, "There is a huge gap between the birth of a dream and the achievement of that dream."[15] Pastors develop dreams with God; however, those dreams need to be shared with the key people in the church who are willing to use failure by keeping the vision alive in order to achieve success.

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[13] Michael Kinnamon, "What Can the Churches Say Together About the Church?," *Ecclesiology* 8, no. 3 (2012): 291.

[14] John C. Maxwell, *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping-stones for Success* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 194.

[15] John C. Maxwell, *Put Your Dream to the Test: 10 Questions That Will Help You See It and Seize It* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 186.

Leading the community requires different examples that emphasize the need for unity. Hyunsun Choi posits that churches can train people for business through the church. "Due to these important changes in urban demographics, contemporary community development needs to illuminate the role of social capital and religious institutions in this new context. It is necessary to investigate how religious institutions are propelling and shaping community economic development."[16] Choi challenges the churches to aid people who need some form of employment. The practices of the church must incorporate training people for a purpose so they are prepared for viable opportunities that not only build community but also foster its positive growth.

Aiding youth who have been involved in crime is another example that offers individuals the opportunity to develop effective community outreach skills. It is not enough to try current reforming practices through various community programs that become court ordered; however, a practical experience of love requires local believers to be actively involved in the Great Commission. Alan Stockton suggests getting youth involved with some form of civic group.[17] His assertion is that if the church trains adults to lead and release youth for leadership, then a better system develops that encourages and fosters improvement in children. While his concept has merit, it nonetheless is dependent upon turnover of the adults seeking to lead the youth. This form of ministry requires stability in leadership. In this context, relationships built with youth offer the opportunity to belong, and in some situations, to be loved by someone. This concept assumes that if young people are involved with an organization, then they will not choose crime.

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[16] H. Choi, "Religious Institutions and Ethnic Entrepreneurship: The Korean Ethnic Church as a Small Business Incubator," *Economic Development* Quarterly 24, no. 4 (2010): 372.

[17] Alan B. Stockon, Uniting Churches for Outreach Ministry to Address Teen Crime, (DMin. thesis, United Theological Seminary), 2001, 11-12.

People from other countries moving into an area provide another example of church ministry. Charles Zech presents this as a challenge for churches as the pastor must determine what type of relationship to have between the church and the community. "Whether the pastor is viewed as an agent of the congregation or the denomination, one would expect the agency relationship characterized by issues of moral hazard, observability and measurement, goal displacement, and risk aversion."[18] Charles Lewis Jr. and Harold Tucker build on this concept by describing the relationship of the pastor in some cases as that of a social worker.[19] The focus remains on the relational development with the community. David Ley states that ethnic churches need a pastor to aid the people in utilizing local resources so they may receive the necessary assistance.[20]

This type of ministry focuses on supporting people who need assistance with the various transitional elements. It is the relationship that some people from the community need to experience when pastors lead through the Great Commission. Leading through the Great Commission provides direction to the people so that they may achieve the intended purpose and reach the desired goal. "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."[21]

The character of the leader is reflected in the way in which he interacts in leading others in the community. One's personal habits reflect character patterns. Every personal action that can

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[18] Charles Zech, "The Agency Relationship in Churches: An Empirical Analysis," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 66, no. 4 (2007): 729.

[19] Charles Lewis and Harold Trulear, "Rethinking the Role of African American Churches as Social Service Providers," *Black Theology* 6, no. 3 (2008): 344.

[20] D. Ley, "The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub," *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (2008): 2058.

[21] Phil 3:20-21.

be witnessed by another individual has some form of impact that determines the value of a

leader. This interaction must be reflective of Christ if the church is going to lead people in the

community. Joseph Stowell clarifies that personal character is reflective of the type person.[22] It is

how people perceive a leader's qualifications. It is very practical for spiritual leaders to be

reflective of Christ in leading people in the community.

Community leadership needs people of distinction; therefore, exemplary personal

character is vital. The connection between the church and local community provides opportunity

for people to discover Christ. It is the basis for how unchurched people make decisions about the

local churches. Unity among area pastors presents the most positive image of Christ. This

concept aids the local community in realizing Christ's love through the leadership.

Developing People to Lead

It has been established that ministry leaders must train people who believe in Christ to

work in the ministry. This connects with the Great Commission as it is essential to develop skills

in other people so that they may also become leaders. Discipleship becomes the challenge and

the struggle as it can either foster growth or divide a church. For discipleship to work, leaders

must pray for the spiritual growth of the people they are leading. Discipleship is a directive

mandated through the Great Commission. It is not a program that promotes a person from one

rank to the next. Discipleship aids a person's quest for spiritual growth towards God.

Effective communication from leadership is vitally important as it provides clear

directions for people to understand and to follow. If there is a lack of direction, no person can

adequately follow. Leading people in the community requires viable examples that people may

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[22] Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership: Character-driven Habits of Effective Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 48-49.

observe and follow. Therefore, spiritual leaders must focus on presenting a truthful Christian image that followers can emulate. Andy Stanley makes the distinction that different scenarios in the ministry of one leader will aid in the building of the next leader.[23] The unwritten, unspoken actions of one leader are the communication that provide understanding to the next leader. It should be a goal of the current leader to disciple new leaders in order to continue the ministry when the current leader is no longer available. This understanding mandates discipleship training with the continuation of the ministry as the ever-present focus.

Connecting leaders to the community requires a special understanding of how a person can impact the local community. Training is essential in developing individuals with a purpose to effectively serve other people. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey provide this definition of leadership: "A Christian leader is a person of influence. He or she follows God's will for their lives and influences others to follow God's plan for their lives."[24] This underscores the importance of understanding what discipleship does. Discipleship influences others. Christians must live the Great Commission, not simply act religious. The influence on another person's life is reflective of personal values. These values impact other people.

Discipleship must ultimately lead people closer to Christ in a personal relationship. Neil Cole and Phil Helfer use death to stress this point. "Death is more than just an important idea for discipleship; it is essential."[25] The struggle in disciplining people is that each disciple must realize that dying to self fosters growth. Believing this concept is vital if one is to accept

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[23] Andy Stanley, *The Next Generation Leader: 5 Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 147.

[24] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, 201.

[25] Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically -- From the Inside Out* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 70.

guidance in understanding God's purpose. People cannot be led closer to Christ when there is an obstruction. One's private character should not become a stumbling block to the discipleship of another. The command of Christ requires the development of love which then allows the generation of spiritual growth.

Regarding the acceptance of Christ, John the Baptist stated, "He must become greater; I must become less."[26] This declaration challenges the nature of humanity while emphasizing that John the Baptist realized his absolute dependence upon Christ. George Barna asserts, "Discipleship is not a program. It is not a ministry. It is a lifelong commitment to a lifestyle."[27] This enlightenment transfers the discipleship paradigm from methodology to necessity. It is involvement with a way of life that makes a difference. Life as a believer requires this difference in order for unchurched people to see a noticeable, desirable difference. As people from the community examine the locale, it should be clear that Christ is evident in a person's life.

A deeper connection of discipleship for the local community is the interaction of training people to make disciples. All people are called to make disciples. This requires diligent effort to live with a purpose. It is the ability to follow Jesus that brings relevant evidence. The evidence must reflect God's standards. As Koessler affirms, "God's standard for the disciple's life, then, is no less than Christ."[28] This specification provides a connection to personal testimony that describes Christ's love from personal experience. It is through a personal testimony that people in the modern era begin to consider local churches.

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[26] John 3:30.

[27] George Barna, *The Power of Vision: Discover and Apply God's Plan for Your Life and Ministry*, 3rd ed. (Ventra, CA: Regal, 2009), 19.

[28] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 41.

Spiritual leaders who disciple people who will themselves become disciple makers offer

the community the ability to see valid evidence that Christ's love is ongoing and never ending.

This relational aspect connects to the Great Commission. A continually maturing relationship

with Christ enables his reflection to be seen by others. The missional aspect of the church needs

to consider discipleship as the only process for training people to become productive in ministry.

This consideration does not argue for or against a system; rather, it acknowledges that the

method used by any leader is developed through prayer. Every community is different; therefore,

copying practices from other churches will not produce the same results.[29]

Discipleship is the process of training people to grow towards Christ. At some point, the

individual must discover the ability to share Christ. This ability is not the same as a passion but

rather the effective communication in describing the Savior. It is important to learn to avoid

telling people a list of restrictions; instead, one must become a person who reveals the love that

is only experienced through Christ. Discipleship in this manner lays a foundation for people from

the local churches to work together collectively. It becomes easier to train someone after he or

she discovers the purpose and intent of discipleship. This concept then transfers into teaching

people to share the gospel.

Evangelism Together

Embracing the purpose of leadership and discipleship inevitably leads to learning how to

evangelize. Evangelism must be a strong component of any church's vision and mission

statement. Each church independently can only do so much as each is limited by the resources in

that church; however, when local churches decide to reach the community together, it brings

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[29] Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 63.

access to greater resources that smaller congregations would not otherwise have. It creates an

opportunity for people in different churches to become involved with a ministry in which they

can excel in sharing the gospel, which then provides the community with the opportunity to see

all believers as a united local body of believers.

The biggest challenge is the focal shift from working to fill small churches individually

as separate entities to embracing the community to reach people for kingdom purpose. Reaching

out into the community becomes paramount. The image of each church attempting to evangelize

independently confuses the unchurched about which church is correct. Changing this image

requires church leaders to rediscover the necessity of churches working together. Each

evangelical church professes Christ as Savior. This image must be unified and can only be done

through exhibiting Christ as Savior. In reflecting on the Great Commission, Gaspar Colon asks

the following questions about community leadership.

> Is the church, as the body of Christ, content to live on the sidelines as passive victims of
> the entropy of humanism and its resulting post-Christianity? Does the church even
> perceive itself as an incarnational entity through which Christ showers His blessings to a
> world filled with self-centeredness, suffering, and pain? Does the church strive to earn
> social capital and trust by reflecting the ministry of Jesus?[30]

In addressing these concerns, Colon makes a valid point as to how unchurched people view the

actions of the church. This perception should cause the local body of believers to contend with

whether the image they present in the community is the same image discovered throughout the

New Testament.

Productive community evangelism requires spiritual leadership to train people to become

involved in the Great Commission. Discipleship is the process of training people; however,

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[30] Gasper Colon, "Incarnational Community Based Ministry: A Leadership Model for Community
Transformation," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, no. 6.2 (Fall 2012), 10.

engaging people in ministry requires a new level of involvement that necessarily includes participation. Louie Giglio maintains that the focus of evangelism is God.[31] He is the one who calls people to Him. This understanding, combined with Christ's direction to make disciples, requires understanding the personal connection of each Christian. When a person accepts Christ as Savior, God begins to give a vision to that person through His Spirit which leads to a process of change.[32] The resulting transformation is the genesis of a personal testimony.

Understanding the transformation on a personal level encourages a person to share Christ's love with others. A person must comprehend the gospel in order to be able to share the salvation message with someone else. William Fay and Linda Shepherd discuss the sin of silence. Their discussion captures why people choose not to witness.[33] This lack of interaction causes people to miss the opportunity to participate in the Great Commission. This same lack is also true about witnessing as a body of believers. When local churches do not work collectively, the community sees the body of believers actively embracing the sin of silence. This image creates barriers that churches need to destroy.

There are several examples in Scripture concerning evangelism. Each brings out a different aspect in leading people to Christ. It is important that every case be discussed when teaching and discipling people. Scripture asserts, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."[34] Every time people engage in evangelism, it is this aspect that allows the Holy Spirit to

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[31] John Piper and David Mathis, eds., *Finish the Mission; Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 32.

[32] Ibid.

[33] William Fay and Linda E. Shepherd, *Share Jesus Without Fear* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 6-9.

[34] 2 Tim 2:15.

direct a person to share the gospel. Through this identity, the commitment to share the gospel is developed.[35]

Many writers explain evangelism and mission work from a personal and church perspective; however, evangelism needs to become the connecting point of churches working as one body and not as separate groups. Robert Coleman states, "Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of this world."[36] The intention was not to bring division but rather to lead people to salvation. Collectively, churches must rediscover viable options for reaching into the community. The needs of the community are greater than any single church can solve independently. When the churches start to collaborate, opportunity arises to solve given issues. The image that Christ gave to his disciples was to reproduce with every new believer. Pastors and other spiritual leaders need to embrace seeing all parts of the local body reach the community.

Within Greenbrier County different churches connected in order to extend aid as a result of the recent floods. It is a challenge for some people to work alongside people from various churches. The county is discovering that the gospel is more than preaching from a pulpit; it is also the action of individuals desiring to share the same love as Christ gave to them. Local pastor interviews and the online survey, recorded in Chapters Three and Four, support the concept that churches can work together. Some comments stressed the need to cooperate; however, there is a struggle that limits cooperation. The barriers that hinder churches from working together damage the image of Christ in the county.

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[35] Dutch Sheets, *Becoming Who You Are: Embracing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 171-176.

[36] Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2006), 89.

Through local ministerial associations the pastors are exploring how to collaborate for the best impact to the community. The first element is prayer. The time spent preparing through prayer allows the Holy Spirit to operate among leadership. It is praying together that opens the door for the creation of unity. This interaction as one team brings cohesion. Developing unity provides viable proof that leaders desire to work as one unit. Maxwell describes the need for a group effect. "The belief that one person can do something great is a myth."[37] This concept is also true of churches desiring to reach the community. It will take all churches working collectively to reach the local community.

The second element is planning. This phase considers the different mission and vision statements of the various churches in order to ascertain which church is best equipped for which ministry. The most challenging element is trusting other pastors to aid each other in ministry. Different pastoral ministry requirements rely on each other utilizing the strengths of each pastor to influence the community. An example would be if one pastor excels in counseling while another excels at developing community relationships. If these two pastors support each other, then both strengths will benefit both churches while also achieving the goal of reaching the community. When other pastors join their support, the workload allows each pastor to effectively train people in his or her church, thereby producing additional effective workers for ministering within the community. If a pastor is leading a specific ministry in the community, that pastor should be encouraged to train people from other churches for that ministry; however, the people receiving training should maintain their primary discipleship at their church. The purpose of churches cross training and working together is to build the Kingdom of God in the community.

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[37] John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001), 2.

The third element is execution. While training should be ongoing, leaders must lead and work together. This provision considers the cultural aspect of the local community. Many youth become involved with sports while others enjoy scouting. These two different groups need different leaders. These are cultural aspects of the community that need Christ's influence. The personal actions of people who proclaim Christ as Savior provide an image to the community. The image must be reflective of Christ, of being a servant who lives humbly for Christ's purpose.[38]

The combination of these three elements combined with developing a strategic plan as a team will connect churches within a community. It is vital that pastors agree that God has called them to a community to teach the church to serve. This connection should then move to influence the community with the love of Christ. Each church should be an influence. This passion develops into a desire to serve other people as Christ served people. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[39] Christ's example of service leads to his life given as a ransom. Evangelism through serving people brings them to the same ransom for salvation.

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[38] Duane Elmer, *Cross-cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 13.

[39] Mark 10:45.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Joint evangelism does not limit any one church in the community, nor should it lead to churches in the community copying each other. It is every church's responsibility to reach the same community. This involvement requires spiritual leadership where a shared vision and mission to the community can lead to building all churches. The removal of barriers takes away any limitations when pastors begin to focus on working together. This acknowledgment enables pastors to discover resources that might not be available in their church for ministry. It is this connection that aids smaller churches. The ability to work collectively provides local pastors the opportunity to assist one another in meeting their given vision.

Greenbrier County is now starting to discover that, with many small churches, the pastors need to work with each other. One example is that pastors agreed to support the mission and vision. One pastor is starting a crisis pregnancy center, while another is commencing a discipleship group for those struggling with addiction. Yet another pastor is focusing on providing clothing for people. The principle of aiding each other is allowing pastors to provide ministry connection in areas that their church is equipped to function. This system is starting small but it seems to be building a stronger relationship among the churches. The needs are too great for any one church to solve alone. The partnership is proving that pastors can collectively embrace the people God has called to the local area. Together they are working for one purpose - to share the gospel in Greenbrier County.

The information collected from different levels of the church consistently stipulated a need for churches to work together. This development of evangelism in the community requires that spiritual leaders consider the issues facing the community. These problems should not be

confused with issues facing the church; however, they should provide a clear direction. This direction is Christ who requires believers to show acceptance of people by allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in them. Different components have been discussed, yet the most important remains presenting Christ uniformly. This begins building unity among the churches.

The culture of a community may be depicted differently within other local areas. The cultural differences are not a reason to divide the community. Rather, it should provide for the acknowledgment that Christ is for all people. "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."[1] This passage makes clear that salvation is not limited to just one people group but is for all people. It is the responsibility of the believer to share the gospel. The local body of believers need to reflect Christ. The unsaved people desire to know that the local believers share such love.

One realization about every community is that the gospel must be preached as a part of the Great Commission. This consideration can only be accomplished if the local body of believers are taught to follow Christ. "Jesus was always building his ministry for the time when his disciples would have to take over his work and go out into the world with the gospel. This plan was progressively made clear as they followed him"[2] Christ trained his disciples to do the work of the ministry; pastors and other key church leaders must train people to continue this same ministry. This training must foster the ability for partnering with other churches for one purpose, the Great Commission.

The purpose for reaching out is the desire to share Christ. There must be a system to train people for evangelism. This is incentive for personal evangelism and churches working

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[1] Acts 13:47.

[2] Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2006), 71.

collectively. Therefore, existing barriers, whether concrete or perceptual, must be leveled. "Unseen barriers are real and powerful."[3] One of these obstacles is the lack of unity in the local community. When pastors of different theological perspective begin to work and pray together then unity starts to build. This allows the community to discover that, while churches may differ in leadership, they nonetheless share the same goal – reaching people for Christ. When the leaders work to support each other, it becomes easier to train people to collaborate with people from other churches.

Leadership development begins to embrace the entire body of believers. Paul wrote, "He (Christ) is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy."[4] The church is one body. When churches do not work together, this context becomes altered, even distorted. It was never intended for the church to divide into separate entities but to be one people united through salvation seeking to make disciples through the gospel. Each congregation that holds to the belief that Christ is the head of the church should then acknowledge that there is support from other believers in the same area. This action will provide support to one another.

For leadership to move forward it is necessary to disciple people to work cooperatively with each other. This allows for rebuilding relationships that have a deeper meaning than that of acquaintance. Rather, they are people who belong to the same family. The image of relationship presents mental pictures of significant people that impacted a person's life.[5] A Christ like

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[3] Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 190.

[4] Col 1:18.

[5] John Townsend, *Leadership Beyond Reason: How Great Leaders Succeed by Harnessing the Power of Their Values, Feelings, and Intuition* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 109.

reflection from a believer to the community brings attention to Christ rather than to self promotion. All discipleship based on biblical standards draws believers closer to Christ through a personal relationship. This example is the reflection that the community must see in the local body of believers.

Discipleship makers come in different forms - as pastors, teachers, and parents. Augustine Bishop of Hippo had mentors. His book of confessions describes several people who influenced his life. Edward Smither presents proof that Augustine's mother mentored him.[6] This historical example of discipleship underscores the affect on a person of influence years later. Her dedication emphasizes the need to present sound doctrine to live by.[7] This dedication provides a common focus towards the community. If people lived as an example for Christ, a transformation would occur where unchurched people would see that Christ loves them. This interaction is the element that attracts people to ask about a personal commitment to Christ. Discipling a person reveals the image that another person develops to share with the community.

History is sometimes challenged as there has been so much division within Christianity. People who are not connected with a church judge the local body of believers by the perception created through their experiences. Considering the historical divisions, it becomes difficult to defend the various religious forms of Christianity. Every time there is a division in the church people are hurt. Disagreements have led to different processes of theology agreeing on some points of emphasis while bitterly finding fault in other elements. The different divisions have provided an opportunity for other areas of society to imitate the church based on the ideals of a

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[6] Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2008), 95.

[7] Ibid., 97

Christian society. These divisions have kept local communities confused about what is authentic

in the church. It should be the church's focus to be the example of Christ.

Christ stated, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to

myself."[8] The unsaved people do not need a theological process; they need to feel the love of

Christ. Every believer must consider this the highest priority of evangelism. J. Packer defines

evangelism in a set of agreeable terms supported by Scripture. His resolve is, "According to the

New Testament, evangelism is just preaching the gospel, the evangel."[9] This is a simple focus;

however, when defining Christ's purpose for evangelism, one must never lose sight of the fact

that love lifts Jesus up.

The pure experience of love has a stronger appeal to people. People desire to be identified

with Christ but cannot locate an acceptable church to attend due to seeing the division and

competition. This struggle requires that all Christian leaders learn to lead through forgiveness. In

order to effectively disciple people, spiritual leadership must be the example of Christ's love to

people. It is love that will promote unity among the churches. This same love offers unchurched

people the opportunity to see a reflection of Christ in the local body of believers. It is the

example from the believer's personal lives by which the community evaluates whether the

personal proclamation is valid.

The gathering of the spiritual leaders in a specific community brings different talents and

passion for serving the local people. Unity is required to provide the unreached people with the

opportunity to discover Christ. The ability to work together requires each member to support one

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[8] John 12:32.

[9] J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 45.

another through each's personal strengths.[10] This connection challenges the church to come

together to reach the same community as one local body. Each pastor supporting each other

allows for the development of unity. It is through unity that the community will find forgiveness.

It is not every church attempting to work individually that succeeds; rather, it is the love and

forgiveness in the community that will bring more opportunity to reach the local area for Jesus.

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[10] John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001), 46.

APPENDIX A

Pastor's Questions

Questions asked to the local senior and lead pastors.

1. What is your community's biggest needs?

2. What is your perspective of the body of Christ?

3. Do you think churches have the ability to work together?

4. In what manner can other churches assist your church's vision and mission?

5. Are you willing to assist other churches?

6. If local churches worked closely together, what impact could this have in your community?

APPENDIX B

Online Survey Questions

The following questions were asked in order to discover how church people view the

missional aspect as it pertains to churches working together collectively. The results follow the

responses.

1) Are you willing to participate in a survey that is examining how churches can work better together? You will not be asked personal identifying information. The following question is the basis for this research: What impact might churches have on the community if they work together in building unity? By clicking yes, you agree to participate in this survey.

    a. Yes   100%
    b. No

2) Do you live in Greenbrier County?

    a. Yes   61.5%
    b. No   38.5%

3) Select the appropriate church position that you currently hold.

    a. Pastor/ staff pastor   30.8%
    b. Board member or Executive leader   26.9%
    c. Attendee   42.3%

4) Are you willing to partner with other churches to share the gospel message?

    a. Yes   100%
    b. No

5) How are you willing to work with people from different churches to present the gospel message to your community? What would it take for churches to desire to work together? (Please explain below) A few selected answers are provided.

    a. We partner with local ministries in our community by volunteering for them and providing supplies for them. Also raising support financially. I believe as people are asking God what He wants them to do they will be willing to work with others in their own church family to love the community, but relationships with people first does help to get people more on board to teaming up and working together.

    b. I think the love of God should be more prevalent in the local churches and more people willing to help each other no matter the background. There could be more food banks, people with skills could help others that need those skills or talents. Showing love I think is more important.

c. I would be willing to do a mission effort such as helping someone with home repairs or cleaning. I would be willing to participate in community services. It would take churches to realize the love that Jesus would have for our community and be willing to sacrifice our differences of opinions in order to present the gospel message to our community.

d. For churches to desire to work together, it unfortunately takes a disaster, such as the recent flooding.

e. I would work with other churches in helping to advertise special services that are focused on reaching souls for Christ, and not just adding numbers to that local body. I would recommend churches to those looking for a church to attend.

f. Pastors would have to lay aside their pride and their desire to build their own kingdom to see the Kingdom of God advanced and souls saved. I am willing to work with other churches in any projects that show the love of Jesus to the world.

6) Does your church financially support any community mission or outreach in your community?

    a. Yes   69.2%
    b. No   7.7%
    c. Not Sure   23.1%

7) Does you church currently partner with other local churches to provide local missional labor?

    a. Yes   50.0%
    b. No   19.2%
    c. Not Sure   30.8%

8) What do you consider to be your community's greatest concern? (select up to 3)

    a. Drug traffic   76.9%
    b. After school programs   11.5%
    c. Teen support   38.5%
    d. Academic support   3.8%
    e. Poverty   34.6%
    f. Other   15.4%
    g. Homelessness   11.5%
    h. Child Fitness   3.8%
    i. Lack of Jobs   65.4%
    j. Hunger   11.5%
    k. Transportation   19.2%
    l. Murder   0.0%
    m. Burglary   7.7%
    n. Local Politics   11.5%

9) Do you think local churches could work together to provide aid to the local community?

    a. Yes   96.2%
    b. No   0.0%
    c. Not Sure   3.8%

10) Should churches be more willing to help each other?

    a. Yes   100%
    b. No   0%

11) Can churches of different theological backgrounds work together?

    a. Yes   92.3%
    b. No   7.7%

12) What does the phrase "one body of believers" mean to you?

    a. One bride of Christ   96.2%
    b. Many separate churches   3.8%
    c. Only one true church and it is the one I attend   00.0%

13) Do you have friends who attend a church similar to your church in the same community?

    a. Yes   84.6%
    b. No   7.7%
    c. Not Sure   7.7%

14) Are you willing to work with people from different churches to present the gospel message to your community? What would it take for churches to desire to work together?

    a. Please explain

15) What keeps churches from working together?

    a. Theology   34.6%
    b. Competition   15.4%
    c. Pastor's do not work well together   15.4%
    d. Other (please specify)   34.6%

16) Can churches that believe in the Salvation message work together?

    a. Yes   96.2%
    b. No   0.0%
    c. Not Sure   3.8%

17) If churches start working together to better your community, what impact would your community encounter?
    a. None
    b. Little impact
    c. Some impact at first but then fizzle out
    d. Some impact but more support after a positive encounter   19.2%
    e. Moderate impact   19.2%
    f. Great impact   61.6%

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          http://www.gideons.org/AboutUs/UniqueFocus.aspx.

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APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 24, 2016

John Parks
IRB Exemption 2447.032416: Churches Working Together: Working as One Body for One
Community

Dear John,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.   This means you may begin
your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no
further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement),
> survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
> (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly
> or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses
> outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be
> damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes
to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption
status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application
to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible
changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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