A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development’s Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC

A Thesis Project Submitted to

the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

By

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The late Twentieth and early Twenty-first Centuries witnessed an unprecedented rise in the numbers of families moving into restricted, residential communities, seeking security, an improved quality of life, and high property values. These communities hinder traditional churches from fulfilling the Great Commission. Homeowners’ associations disallow door-to-door neighborhood evangelism. Zoning laws prevent churches from erecting buildings for church services and discipleship programs. This research studies the effectiveness of small group ministries, using non-traditional evangelism and discipleship methods, as a counter measure to these hindrances. The study results found small groups are an effective method of fulfilling the Great Commission in restricted, residential communities. Some results, which were inconclusive, identify areas for further research on small group mentoring and ministry practices. Interviews of 2 pastors with successful small groups in restricted communities provides data on effective small group evangelism and discipleship. Learning surveys sent to small group members, collect data on members understanding of rudimentary Christian theology and their level of spiritual maturity. Researcher observations of a 12-member small group in a restricted residential community coupled with planting an experimental small group, provides analysis data on the best practices of traditional churches, which successfully planted small groups in a restricted community. The research results serve a guide for those interested in replicating or using it as a model for similar research. Further, it serves as a basis for traditional churches to begin evaluating their evangelism, disciple making, and small group practices. Key words are small, groups, great, commission, restricted, and community.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Jesus Christ mandated His church to evangelize and make disciples of all nations. The church has attempted to fulfill Christ’s mandate using a variety of evangelism and disciple making methods. The church in America, which did not accomplish fully Christ’s mandate in its earlier centuries, focuses on accomplishing it in the 21st Century. The church faces many impediments to achieving this goal. One impediment is a rise in the numbers of secured, restricted, residential communities throughout the United States.

Restricted residential communities impede the church from successfully evangelizing and making disciples of their unredeemed and unchurched residents. To reach those residents, the American church, hereafter referred to as the traditional church, has had to turn from a traditional format to a non-traditional one. The traditional church consists of massive church buildings with stained glass windows, which accommodate large, passive congregations, led by professional clergy, and uses traditional evangelism methods. One non-traditional format, currently in use, consists of small groups, meeting in private homes, led by lay leaders, who lead the group members in active discipleship. The groups use innovative evangelism outreach methods to deliver the gospel message to non-Christians, and non-traditional church structures to disciple

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Christians, as an effort to fulfill Christ’s mandate. These two methodological changes have made small groups an important tool for Christ’s body in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The primary New Testament passage for discipleship is Matthew 28:18-20. The word primary suggests it is not the only passage, but one of many. However, it is the passage most referenced and applied. Further, it is perhaps the most comprehensive in terms of the command itself, who gave the command, the reason for executing it, who must execute it, and how to execute it. The other Great Commission passages are Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:8. They appear in this writing to illuminate the Matthean passage, as needed.

Matthew 28:18-20, referred to as the Great Commission, is the final post resurrection appearance by Jesus to his disciples, as recorded by the author of the Gospel According to Matthew. Whereas Jesus spoke to his disciples as a peer and friend (John 15:15) prior to his death, he appeared to them post resurrection as their Lord. He spoke to them as his servants, whom he was sending out to complete his salvation mission. Though some suggest this is an epiphany or exaltation story and not a commission passage, there is no doubt both his disciples and the early church would have understood it as the Lord’s commission for accomplishing his salvation mission post resurrection and ascension.³

Scholar Grant R. Osborne explains the commission is evident in the passage’s A-B-A construction pattern in which the A-pattern denotes the Christology surrounding the commission, the B-pattern.⁴ There is agreement⁵ this passage is the Lord’s commission to his disciples and the church. Based on those writings, there seems to be no reason to think otherwise.

³ Osborne and Clinton, Matthew, 1158.
⁴ Ibid.
Jesus, now Lord to his disciples rather than friend, proclaims he has all authority, endowed by God the Father. Jesus’ authority and power are absolute, as the enthroned Messiah, eschatological ruler, and judge. Because of this authority, he can and does commission, indeed command, his disciples and his church to disciple all people groups in all nations. This command declares a universal mission not only for Jewish audiences but all ethnicities.

The Jews separated themselves from the Gentiles by creating an artificial barrier built around circumcision. Through circumcision, the Jews saw themselves as members of God’s covenant with Abraham. They viewed the uncircumcised Gentiles as being outside God’s covenant, and therefore aliens and outcasts. The Apostle Paul declares this barrier removed in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22). Now, everyone in every generation has access to the gospel. In Matthew 28:19, as well as Acts 1:8, Jesus expands the mission from the disciples going only to the Jews (Matt. 10:1-6), to the Apostles going to all people groups of the world.

Matthew 28:19-20 explains how Christ’s disciples would execute the Great Commission. This passage states the step by step processes in the form of the imperative verb, to disciple, with its three accompanying participles, going, baptizing, and teaching. There does not seem to be any disagreement that this passage is a command. Where there does appear to be disagreement is how one should translate these words, understand their meanings, and respond to them. Grant R. Osborne indicates the words going and disciple are imperative verbs, explaining what to do

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7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

while the words baptizing and discipling, are participles explaining how to execute Christ’s command.\(^\text{10}\)

Kenneth Burchard disagrees with Osborne’s position on the participle going, as some have used this interpretation as an opportunity to leave the going to missionaries, traveling abroad with the message of salvation. Some use Osborne’s position to excuse the non-missionary, church-going Christian from obeying Christ’s command.\(^\text{11}\) Burchard writes only the word translated as disciple is the imperative verb, expressing what is to be done and the words going, baptizing, and teaching are participles explaining how all Christians are to obey Christ’s command, continuing his salvation mission as an on-going, never ending process.\(^\text{12}\)

Osborne writes the word going is a circumstantial participle followed by the main verb disciple, a common linguistic construction in Matthew, which makes the word going effectually another imperative. Thus, Burchard says translate the verse as “Go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching them.”\(^\text{13}\) He adds the two following participles, baptizing and teaching, are circumstantial, making them imperative in force though not in translation.\(^\text{14}\) The idea for Osborne is Jesus’ disciples are no longer to stay in one place. All Christians are to go out among all nations, preach the gospel, baptize converts, and teach them to obey Christ’s teachings.

Burchard, a member of the Society of Vineyard Scholars, church planter, and pastor, writes there is only one imperative verb, the verb disciple. It is the verb, which indicates what

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\(^{10}\) Osborne and Clinton, *Matthew*, 1158.


\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
one is to do. He adds the three participles, going, baptizing, and teaching, indicate all Christ’s disciples are to disciple others, as they are going along in their daily lives. One does not do this occasionally, as circumstances present themselves, or only as missionaries out on the foreign field. As they are going about their daily routines, they are to evangelize and disciple others, who fall within their spheres of influence, by baptizing them and teaching them to do all Christ has commanded His followers to do.15 Whether one subscribes to Osborne or Burchard, Christ’s disciples, wherever they are and whatever their lifestyles may be, they are to evangelize all people groups and make them Christ’s disciples.16

Christ’s disciples are to baptize all those, whom they lead to Christ. They are to instruct those new believers in Christ’s teachings, and promote obedience to those teachings, as though those individuals are one’s students. Converts become Jesus’ disciples by responding to his call to discipleship, not by responding either to Christ’s teachings or to baptism. One undergoes baptism and obeys Jesus’ teachings, because one is Christ’s disciple, and not to become his disciple.

It is important to note at this point how the various Christian groups regard baptism, as there are some Christian sects, Orthodox and Reformed, which teach baptism is a channel for God’s saving grace rather than a response to his saving Grace.17 In other words, for these Christian sects, baptism is necessary for salvation. It appears from their writings, Osborne18 and

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16 Ibid.


18 Osborne and Clinton, Matthew, 1158.
Burchard\textsuperscript{19} they do not agree with this theology. Submitting to baptism symbolizes an individual’s response to the call to salvation in Christ and surrender to Christ’s will for their lives. This act of submission results from one’s salvation and symbolizes an obedient response to Christ’s teachings and commandments.

It seems clear those, who are Christ’s disciples, are to evangelize others at home and/or abroad as they are going about the routines of their daily lives. They are to baptize all those who profess Jesus Christ as savior and Lord. Then they are to take responsibility for them as their students, teach them all Christ has taught, teach them to obey all of Christ’s teachings, and then send them out to win and disciple others for Jesus. Thus, the traditional American church has attempted to fulfill Christ’s mandate successfully and unsuccessfully, since its colonial period.

The traditional church’s efforts to fulfill Christ’s mandate date back to American pietism of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} Centuries. American pietism began with George Whitfield’s and Jonathan Edwards’ frontier preaching in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century. It further developed later under Charles Finney’s preaching in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} Century. Because of its emphasis on disciple making over evangelism, American pietism failed to fulfill Christ’s mandate. Pietist preaching essentially focused on preaching revival to churched individuals instead of preaching salvation to non-Christians. Pietist preachers intended for Christians to be holy and live godly lives, which reflected their devotion to God.\textsuperscript{20} These revivalist, pietist preachers considered spirituality to be a perfection, resulting naturally from the salvation experience and continuing naturally from that experience.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Burchard, “Greek-Geeking the Great Commission,” n.p.


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 4.
This 18th and 19th Century pietism continued into the early and then mid-20th Century, where it changed its emphasis from disciple making to evangelism. The traditional church turned its attention to delivering the salvation message to non-Christians, and all but abandoning discipleship.22 The Charismatic Movement, which rose during the mid-20th Century, sought to rediscover and experience the spirituality left behind in the wake of the evangelistic movement.

Following World War II, the Charismatic Movement emphasized salvation coupled with holiness. This seeming return to pietism’s disciple making emphasized both the salvation of the unredeemed and their spiritual development.23 However, many evangelicals rejected the Charismatic Movement due to its emphasis on speaking in other tongues.24 The evangelical community turned its focus away from Charismatic holiness and emphasized correct doctrinal beliefs as evidence of one’s salvation.25 What one believed became the identifying mark of a Christian, and was more important than what one practiced.

Christians professed their faith through their beliefs of traditional Christianity’s doctrinal tenets and their adherence to them rather than by living out their beliefs as a profession of their faith. This resulted in lessening the importance of both spirituality and evangelism.26 As long as one professed traditional, Christian doctrinal belief, one was a Christian. Adherence to correct doctrinal beliefs, which had moved beyond spirituality and evangelism, became a defense against

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 3.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
the perceived threats of modernism and a scientific world view. Christianity developed largely into a nominal religion of mental assent without religious experiences. Consequently, there seemed to be little difference between the way evangelicals and non-evangelicals lived their lives. The traditional church had moved from pietism to evangelism, back pietism, and finally into Christian nominalism.

The late 20th and early 21st Centuries witnessed a growing desire to return to evangelism coupled with one’s deeper spiritual formation. This increased desire for spiritual formation highlighted the church’s desire to fulfill the Great Commission. However, the development and rise of isolated, private communities hampered the traditional church’s efforts to reach many non-Christians and unchurched Christians with the dual message of evangelism and discipleship. Isolated, private communities insulated and continue to insulate the unredeemed and unchurched, non-discipled Christians from the traditional church’s efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.

The numbers of Americans living in isolated, private communities, which include gated, secured, and restricted communities increased rapidly and steadily, since the late 20th Century. An article published in Forbes reports “…the number of people living in gated communities rose to almost 11 million households in 2009, up from slightly more than 7 million in 2001, though the numbers may actually be significantly higher…. These numbers continue to rise. Secured communities effectively deny entry to evangelical churches, and indeed any churches, which

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28 Ibid., 2.

29 Ibid., 3.

seek to reach their residents, using traditional evangelism methods and disciple making programs conducted in traditional church structures.

Attempting to overcome this impediment and fulfill the Great Commission, traditional churches came to employ non-traditional evangelism and disciple making methods. One non-traditional method is the use of small groups. Small groups sprout up in individual Christian’s neighborhoods, when lay believers reach out to their non-Christian neighbors.

Small groups spring up in private communities, meeting in believers’ homes and multiplying themselves by evangelizing others within their circles of influence. They seek out relationships with the unredeemed and unchurched to influence and invite them to become Christ’s followers. As the groups form and grow, they become disciple making groups. They develop into centers for evangelistic outreach, which result in the expansion of the church and its influence. Small groups, which use non-traditional methods to fulfill the Great Commission, have become an important part of church ministry in restricted, isolated residential communities.

**Ministry Context**

**Location and Setting**

The Cane Bay Plantation residential community is a suburb of the City of Summerville, Berkeley County, South Carolina. It is the 17th fastest growing county in the country. Cane Bay

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32 Ibid., 107.

33 Ibid.

Plantation is a 4,500-acre development of eleven restricted communities or subsections. Each is a self-contained community of single-family homes. Each has its own community pool, children’s playground, collection of mailboxes, community bulletin board, and online social network pages such as Facebook and a private, online subsection community bulletin board.

Trees and ponds further isolate the subsections from each other. The homeowner’s association stocks each pond with game fish to provide recreation for their respective subsection anglers. A single main road, running through the center of the development, connects the eleven subsections to the nearest state highway and Interstate, and the development’s shopping plaza.

Two, 25-mile forest-like walking trails border the main road, running through the plantation. The walking trails accommodate bicyclists and walking and jogging enthusiasts. The two trails also link the 11 subsections with the development’s schools.

The plantation has one entrance where the main road intersects with the local state highway. The development’s secondary school borders the entrance on one side and the development’s shopping center, and middle and elementary schools border it on the other side. The shopping center is a full-service center, consisting of several medical service offices, a supermarket, restaurants, sundry specialty stores, a bank, and a gasoline service center.

Demographics

Several builders developed the Cane Bay Plantation after the 2010 United States Census. There is no census demographic data currently available for the development. Therefore,

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36 Ibid.
demographic data came from data published by the Public-School Review for the Cane Bay High School, local newspapers, local realtors, and 2010 US Census data for the City of Summerville.

The Cane Bay Plantation’s 11 diverse subsections contain single-family homes. One of the subsections is for senior citizens. Together, the 11 developments contain a total of 10,000 homes, with an estimated population of 30,000 residents. Secondary school demographic data published by the Public-School Review reports the Cane Bay High School population is 1% Asian, 5% Two or More Races, 10% Hispanic, 25% Black, and 59% White.

Summerville’s population is 47,919. Its population density is 2,480 per square mile. The median age is 36, 8% lower than the South Carolina average of 39. Fifty-six percent is over the age of 15 and married. Forty-eight percent of families have children under 18 years old. Ninety-four percent of the population speaks English, 4% speaks Spanish, and 2% speak languages other than English. Seventy-four percent of the population is White, approximately 19% is Black or African American, and approximately 1% is Asian. Forty-four percent of the population were born in South Carolina, 49% were born out of state, 2% were Americans born outside the United States, and 5% were foreign born. The annual median household income is $55,290.00.

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Based on the above background information and demographic data, the selected target group is non-Christian and unchurched Christian adults of any race or ethnicity. They are married, partnered, or single, under the age of 40, either the parents or primary caregivers of children ages birth to eighteen years old, and English Language speakers. The target group lives in The Oaks subsection of the Cane Bay Plantation residential development.

Situation

Three churches meet weekly in the Cane Bay Plantation shopping center and middle school areas. One is a Southern Baptist Convention church, the Church at Cane Bay. The Church at Cane Bay’s congregation has been meeting for nine years. Not owning its own building, the church rents space at the Cane Bay Pre-school Day Care Academy. The church’s website reports its mission is evangelism both domestically and internationally.\(^{42}\)

The second church, Saint Timothy’s Church, is a traditional, Episcopalian Church. It also meets at the shopping center complex. Saint Timothy’s is a branch of its main church by the same name, located in the Berkeley county seat.\(^{43}\) These two churches meet on the outskirts of the development’s residential subsections, as does the third church, the Cane Bay Presbyterian Church.

The Cane Bay Presbyterian Church opened in 2013. It meets in the development’s middle school. It is a multi-generational church focused on community outreach and missions. The church is an open Communion, which employs both male and female clergy, operates a


children’s church, and conducts traditional worship, which includes liturgy and a range of music styles.44

Ministry Need

There appears to be a limited, proactive Christian witness in the Cane Bay Plantation Development for evangelism outreach to non-Christians and disciple making for unchurched Christians. There are several reasons for this seeming limited Christian witness. First, each subsection allows only single-family homes. This design does not accommodate the construction of either commercial or industrial buildings, including traditional church buildings.

Secondly, none of the churches in Cane Bay seems to be conducting an evangelism outreach to the unchurched Cane Bay residents in any apparent, identifiable manner, outside of Sunday services. The churches do not appear to conduct any public, social activities to attract and introduce the residents to the churches. St. Timothy’s has a charity outreach program, but it is does not appear to advertise the outreach, outside of its website.

Thirdly, the Cane Bay Plantation’s subsections, as restricted communities, come under the regulation of Homeowners Associations. The Homeowners Associations do not allow solicitation in any of their neighborhoods. This prohibition, which includes door-to-door solicitation, as well as the distribution of flyers and handbills, prevents churches from openly and actively conducting evangelistic outreach in the plantation’s 11 subsections.

Finally, the Church at Cane Bay has 9 church-sponsored small groups meeting in some of the plantation’s subsections. However, they seem neither to be well publicized nor openly

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engaged in public evangelism outreach. This seemingly limited evangelism witness in Cane Bay Plantation and the inability of traditional churches to engage in traditional forms of disciple making suggest the need for a non-traditional methods of evangelism outreach and disciple making to reach the development’s non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents.

**Problem Presented**

The problem this project will address is traditional churches are unable to fulfill the Great Commission in the Cane Bay Plantation residential development’s subsections, using either traditional evangelism methods to evangelize the unchurched, or erecting traditional church structures to disciple the unchurched Christian residents. The first reason for this inability is the list of regulations imposed by the homeowner’s associations. In addition to prohibiting soliciting in their respective subsections, each homeowner’s association restricts visitor access. Residents’ visitors may move throughout a subsection and use its facilities, if accompanied by their resident hosts. Consequently, traditional churches may not send individuals to employ traditional evangelism methods such as door to door evangelism or the distribution of flyers, handbills, gospel tracts, and other religious material artifacts.45

The second impediment is the Cane Bay Plantation’s single-family home zoning. The zoning prevents construction of commercial buildings in any of the residential subsections. As they are commercial buildings,46 churches may not erect buildings in any of the residential subsections for the purpose of conducting worship services and disciple making programs.

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Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to determine if traditional churches, using a small group ministry with lay leadership, and employing non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, will be able to evangelize and disciple the non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted, residential communities. The project will examine a small group’s effectiveness in evangelizing and discipling the community’s target group, and its ability to multiply, while operating within the parameters of the plantation’s zoning and homeowner’s association’s restrictions. The project will examine the small group ministry’s effectiveness in discipling its members in living godly, Christ-centered lives, while preparing them to impact their communities for Christ through evangelism and the practice of Christian spiritual disciplines.

Basic Assumptions

Small group ministries, which use non-traditional evangelism and disciple making methods will succeed in fulfilling the Great Commission in restricted communities where traditional churches likely will fail. Small group ministries can evangelize residential areas closed to traditional evangelism, if they use non-traditional, innovative evangelism methods. Small groups can use several non-traditional church facilities including private homes, restaurants, libraries, and coffee shops to disciple new and long-standing, unchurched Christians.

Ten of the plantation’s 11 subsections have young families. While the target area, The Oaks, is not representative of the whole Cane Bay Plantation, it represents a significant number of the plantation’s residents to warrant being the focus of this project. If a non-traditional small groups ministry planted in The Oaks subsection is successful, then it should be able to replicate
itself in the other primarily family populated subsections, thereby accomplishing the Great Commission.

**Definitions**

A plantation is a housing development of well-planned and self-contained private residential communities. The plantation provides its residents with services and facilities such as schools, which are exclusively for the residents’ use. The plantation may provide other services and facilities, which it makes available to its residents as well as the residents of the greater area, such as a shopping center on the plantation’s outskirts, open to the public.

The Law Insider website defines a private residential community as a restricted community within a larger housing development. Such communities may have either private homes or condominiums. They may not have commercial businesses and industrial facilities. Each community provides services and facilities solely for the use of its residents and their guests.

A restricted community is one over which a homeowner’s association imposes restrictions in the form of rules. Community residents own their property and have sole access to its use. However, they must use their property in compliance with the homeowner’s association’s rules, which also direct how the residents are to maintain their property, including how they are to make repairs and alterations to it.

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A homeowner’s association is a managing board elected by the community’s residents. Homeowners fall under the homeowner’s association’s authority automatically when they purchase their homes. An association may be lenient or severe in applying and enforcing the association’s restrictions.\(^{50}\)

Rev. Charles Andrew Stanley, founder of the worldwide North Point Ministries, defines the unchurched as individuals, who are not affiliated with any church and have not attended a church for five years or longer.\(^{51}\) For the purposes of this thesis project, the unchurched are individuals, both Christians and non-Christians, who have purchased a home in the target area but have not attended a church within the past twelve months.

This project uses The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s definition of a Christian. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association defines a Christian as “…a person who is born again by the Spirit of God as he or she wholeheartedly trusts in Jesus Christ and seeks to follow Him in obedience.” \(^{52}\)

The Traditional Church, according to Earley’s and Dempsey’s book *Disciple Making Is* ..., has one pastor, who does most of the church ministry. The church conducts its activities in and around the church building and its related structures. The church seldom engages in evangelism outside its congregation. There is little discipleship in the church and few emerging

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leaders in the congregation. The church gives spiritual gifts little, if any, prominent place. The church conducts weekly Sunday morning worship services and mid-week prayer meetings.\textsuperscript{53}

An individual’s sphere of influence is a group of people upon which one has some influence, because the individual knows them. An individual’s sphere of influence includes but not limited to family, friends, those with whom one works or does business, and fellow organization or club members.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{Limitations}

The target area homeowner’s association places movement limits on non-residents, who would come into the subsection and evangelize the target population. The prohibition against soliciting also prevents residents from conducting either door-to-door evangelism at private residences or one-on-one evangelism in the subsections’ community areas. The prohibition includes tracts and handbills distribution on the streets and in community areas.

Non-residents may come into the area if they visit residents. Otherwise, they are trespassing. Visitors’ hosts must accompany them on the subsection’s streets and community areas. Even if accompanied by their hosts, the rule prohibiting soliciting would prevent visitors from engaging in the type of traditional evangelism methods described above.

Additionally, the homeowner’s association’s rules limit the researcher’s ability to conduct research among the target population. Because of the no soliciting rules, the researcher

\textsuperscript{53} Earley and Dempsey, \textit{Disciple Making Is . . .}, 230-231.

may not conduct door to door interviews to collect data for the thesis project. This prohibition limits the researcher’s ability to recruit and involve the target area residents in the research.

The target area’s builders sold residents their homes from 2015 to 2019. This excluded the target population’s data from the 2010 United States Census. This exclusion compelled the researcher to consult other data sources, which provides limited and perhaps less accurate data than the United States Census would have provided. Consequently, the selected target group, as described above, is a limited, approximate reflection of the target area population.

The project concludes when the thesis writing process ends. This may limit the time needed to conduct the research adequately. This may diminish reader confidence regarding the project’s rigor and trustworthiness. It may even eliminate the possibility the reader will choose to replicate or utilize the project’s findings in the reader’s context.

**Delimitations**

This project focuses on a small group ministry, which employs non-traditional evangelism and disciple making to reach those, living in a restricted residential community. The project focuses on small group ministries used either in place of or as an extension of traditional churches. It excludes any other form of ministry model that is not a small group model.

As the project targets only one Cane Bay Plantation subsection, it excludes ten other subsections. The project also excludes several groups of individuals from the research. The project excludes married or partnered childless couples, childless single adults, middle-aged adults, the elderly, minors, and non-English Language speakers.

**Thesis Statement**
If traditional churches use a small group ministry with lay leadership, and employ non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, then they will be able to evangelize and disciple the non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted, residential communities.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The absence of traditional churches coupled with the Homeowners Associations’ no soliciting rules present obstacles to evangelizing and discipling the residents of the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Community, the designated target area. One method for surmounting this these obstacles is the implementation of small groups. The literature suggests small groups, led by lay team leaders, guided by clearly stated values, and vision and mission statements, and focused on a specific target group may be an effective means for evangelizing and discipling the residents of the target area. While the literature supports the use of small groups, they are not without significant challenges to their success. If these challenges remain unaddressed, they may prevent a small group from gaining a foothold and attaining anticipated success with the target group population.

The Church as Effective Small Groups with Lay Leaders

The literature suggests the church can operate effectively as small groups rather than large, traditional churches by planting small groups in areas where traditional churches cannot go. This is a main reason for choosing the small group methodology over the traditional church with its methods. Daniel R. Basile writes the natural result of fulfilling the Great Commission, is church planting.55 There is ample support for small-group ministry strategies in church

55 Basile, “A Strategy to Plant a Missional, Multiplying Church,” 106.
planting. Harley Atkinson offers support by providing an example of a large church, which owe its growth to thousands of home cell groups. However, not all church planting small groups are successful. Some church plants failed by misusing small-group ministry strategies. They failed to recognize and address the cultural differences between the church planter and the target group. Steffen addresses this challenge by offering a solution to counter this challenge. His solution comes under discussion in the section immediately following. Nevertheless, small group, properly used, can fulfill the Great Commission and plant churches.

Neil Cole finds the traditional church ill equipped to meet the challenging and varied opportunities of the present much less those of the future. His position seems to apply to the project’s target area. Traditional churches would use traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, such as door-to-door solicitation and erecting houses of worship to reach the target population. The target area by virtue of its design precludes these methods. Cole writes a small group ministry can meet those challenges, where the traditional church fails. By going places traditional churches cannot go and doing what they cannot do, small groups can replace traditional churches successfully.


57 Ibid.


59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 413.

61 Loc. Cit., 71.


63 Ibid., 24.
individuals in restricted communities closed to traditional churches, and disciple them into Christ’s disciples. Small groups of only two or three members can transform and challenge believers to live authentic spiritual lives as Christ’s disciples.\textsuperscript{64}

Further, Cole writes unchurched individuals are more likely to attend a small group than a traditional church, which is another reason supporting the use of the small group model. This gives lay members of small groups the advantage of being able to reach the unsaved and unchurched in their local communities, who fall within their spheres of influence.\textsuperscript{65} The intimacy of the small group environment attracts those, who would not attend traditional churches, and enables group members to build meaningful relationships with each other and provide accountability for each other in Christian living.\textsuperscript{66}

The literature further supports small groups as an alternative to the traditional church for discipleship formation and active mission.\textsuperscript{67} Religious activities held in traditional churches can be carried out in small groups, including water baptism and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{68} Small groups offer the convenience of being established in unconventional locations,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Cole, \textit{Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future}, 27-28.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 103.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 104-105.
\end{itemize}
such as a coffeehouse, public library, university student center, one’s home, and one’s workplace, enabling them to attract and evangelize the unsaved and disciple unchurched Christians.

Anyone, who chooses to engage in ministry and start a small group, may plant a small group in his own community and practice ministry activities long held by the traditional church setting. Atkinson and Comiskey offer further support for the use of small groups by proposing laity may perform activities practiced by Christ and professional clergy. Laity may share the gospel, disciple others, and expand Christ’s kingdom.

Small Group Values, and Vision and Mission Statements

Values

For a small group ministry to begin, one needs an action plan. Successful group action plans begin with well-defined values. The values include a contextualized biblical theology and a concept of the church to change established culture. Successful groups grow in a context, where they express themselves through the principles of listening, serving, and disciple making, appropriately for their given contexts.

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69 Atkinson and Comiskey, “Lessons from the Early House Church,” 84.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.


Pat Sikora identifies nine New Testament based values small groups and their members need to adopt and practice in order for the group to be unified, healthy, and successful.\textsuperscript{76} The nine values include group members’ mutual concern for each other, mutual love, encouragement, confession, prayer, forgiveness, support, submission, and service for others, and successively build on each other. Sikora indicates group leaders and their members can monitor the group’s progress and each member’s spiritual development, using this progression of values.\textsuperscript{77}

Sikora intends for his nine values to bring small group members into the experience of true biblical community by unifying them around their mutual *agape* love for each other.\textsuperscript{78} The group’s love-centered unity results in fruitful evangelism, healthy groups, and healthy churches. It serves as the foundation for believers to be the body of Christ, as they imitate Christ’s lifestyle.

Steadman’s position on group dynamics supports Sikora’s position. The group members’ unifying, mutual love, serves to build up each member, monitor each one’s progress, and illustrate God’s love to the world.\textsuperscript{79} Sikora writes it is the group leader’s responsibility to model and reinforce the practice of these values among group members.\textsuperscript{80} The assumption seems to be group members are unlikely to live out these values without prompting from the group leader. Therefore, the group leader’s failure to teach, model, and reinforce these practices results in failed groups. No discernable research exists to support or refute Sikora’s or Steadman’s


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{80} Loc. Cit.
positions or the assumption groups fail without leadership modeling of the values, exposing a potential gap in the research.

Group members caring for one another is the first of the nine values. One form of mutual care is group members identifying theirs’ and each other’s spiritual gifts and supporting the use of those gifts. The presumption is each group member, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, or other position, has at least one spiritual gift to use for the good of the body of Christ. Steadman, Body Life, 83. The members help and encourage each other in identifying and using their spiritual gifts. Group leaders need to model the desired behavior of mutual concern among group members without favoritism towards any group or position, if the group is to function well. Ibid. This was a common, successful practice among Methodists, where group leaders supported their members and encouraged mutual support without regard to their status.

Sikora’s second value, the love group members have for one another, is foundational, for the remaining seven values, as it fulfills Jesus’ command to love one another (John 13:34-35). Sikora, “9 Values Your Small Group Needs to Adopt,” n.p. It is the self-sacrificing agape love, referenced above. Issler supports the position believers naturally should love, care for, and pray for each other. Leaders should encourage members to love one another by teaching and modeling Christ’s examples of tangible actions illustrative of agape love, even if those examples may be inconvenient and costly. Group member’s personal

81 Steadman, Body Life, 83.
82 Ibid.
85 Klaus Issler, Living into the Life of Jesus, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 200.
problems and financial needs may require sacrificial giving by other group members. *Agape* love gives impetus to group members meeting each other’s needs without consideration for personal sacrifice.

Sikora says the third value naturally flows from *agape* love. It is the value, of group members encouraging and building up each another in living a Christlike lifestyle. Sikora references the word for “build up” used in I Thessalonians 5:11, which describes the construction of a house or other building.\(^87\) As contractors build a house from the bottom up, group members and leaders must begin building up one another, beginning with their current level of spiritual maturity. Issler supports Sikora position. He points out believers help one another grow by deepening their spiritual relationships with God in Christ through modeling and supporting building up others.\(^88\) Small groups have an advantage over large churches in this practice, Sikora, because of the level of intimacy among group members, which enables them to understand each other and bring out God’s best in one another.\(^89\)

The fourth value is confession. Group members need to confess their sins to each another. Sikora does not suggest confessing one’s sins to obtain absolution. He suggests group members confess their sins to one another as a reminder of God's forgiveness and as an invitation to other members to assist them in their spiritual growth struggles.\(^90\) This requires members to be open and vulnerable, a practice the members will learn, as the group leader models it.


\(^{88}\) Ibid.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
The practice of confessing one’s sins to the group for spiritual growth and encouragement was a well-established practice among the Wesleyans. Listening to one another’s confessions and encouraging others in their spiritual growth was a common Methodist practice. It requires members making intercessory prayer for one another, Sikora’s fifth value.

Walton informs his readers small group members connect their faith to everyday events and issues in others’ lives. One means of making faith connections in the lives of other group members, is through intercessory prayer. Group members must be willing to intercede regularly on behalf of one another. Members need to pray persistently for each other’s specific requests, until they receive answers to those requests. Intercessory prayer results in growth and healing among all group members, when leaders model and reinforce it among those practicing it.

Loving one another, the sixth group value is members forgiving one another. Referring to Ephesians 4:32 when explaining the sixth value, Sikora notes long standing groups inevitably experience instances of hurts caused by one member to another member. Basile says small groups are only as effective as the leaders, who lead them. Leaders of effective, long term small groups can set the group tone for openness, accountability, and forgiveness, by encouraging aggrieved members to be open about their grievances and forgive those, who hurt them. Openness holds those accountable, who hurt other group members. The aggrieved

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91 Henderson, John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples, 97-98.


94 Ibid.

95 Basile, “A Strategy to Plant a Missional, Multiplying Church,” 108.
members need to show the same compassion and forgiveness towards those, who have offended them, they received from God, who compassionately forgave them.96

Being compassionate towards one another, the seventh value, results in bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), as well as forgiving one another. Small group members should be quick to help one another, when group members experience serious needs like illness, death, job loss, emotional loss, and financial setbacks.97 As it states in the second value, members are to love one another, even if it is inconvenient and costly. Bearing one another’s inconvenient and costly burdens demonstrates members’ agape love for each other.

Some might argue each one must bear his own burdens (Gal. 6:5). Sikora points out the difference between bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2) and each one bearing his own burdens (Gal. 6:5). Burdens, in Galatians 6:5 refers to one’s daily responsibilities, as opposed to the heavy load of critical events one may experience, as it states in Galatians 6:2.98 Being responsible for meeting one’s daily duties does not absolve one person from showing compassion towards another person by bearing the individual’s burdens.

Comiskey writes one models what it means to love God and people by personal example.99 As one goes about managing one’s daily responsibilities, one can model God’s love for others by helping them bear their burdens. By following Christ’s example, Christians encourage, and support others burdened by a devastating experience or suffering a great loss without thought to personal inconvenience or loss.100


97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.


100 Ibid.
Submitting to one another is Sikora’s eighth value. He uses the military example from Ephesians 5:21 to illustrate submission. Submission means to line up under someone else, as if preparing for war.\textsuperscript{101} Group members must be willing to come under someone else’s authority and direction, as a matter of preserving group order and maintaining accountability.

Cole supports Sikora’s position, noting group members need to have a high degree of accountability to one another in how they live and conduct themselves, as part of the group,\textsuperscript{102} including leaders being accountable to the group. Sikora gives examples of leaders modeling submission and accountability, which include sensitivity about what members want to study, the pace they want to study it, when they want to meet, and when to add new members to the group.\textsuperscript{103}

Submitting to one another leads to Sikora’s ninth value, serving one another. Sikora gives concrete examples, of service, which include providing members with needed childcare, assisting others when moving, preparing meals and home care for those unable to care for themselves, and meeting one another’s financial needs.\textsuperscript{104} Like its preceding values, this ninth value to proclaim Christ in one’s actions of caring for one another without considering inconvenience or costliness of service motivated by their sacrificial love.

\textbf{Vision Statement}

\textsuperscript{101} Sikora, “9 Values Your Small Group Needs to Adopt,” n.p.


\textsuperscript{103} Loc. Cit.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
Dave Earley offers a group vision, which has a members-oriented approach, focused on producing spiritually healthy and numerically growing members, who ultimately plant and lead more groups. Each element of the group’s vision focuses on individual member’s spiritual development and ministry. Conversely, Daniel R. Basile’s group vision has a group-oriented approach. His approach emphasizes the group’s purpose, focus, and goal, with the group members focused on achieving them. Choosing one of these requires thoughtfulness on the part of a small group planter, as both have merit. Additionally, there is a third, practical approach, which may assist group leaders and their teams in creating their groups’ visions.

The practical approach to creating a vision begins by understanding one’s context. Bill Search, the author of Simple Small Groups, writes a small group vision considers both the church’s context and culture. Any small group, as an outgrowth of a church, reflects the church’s ministry philosophy, which is in turn reflected and promoted by the small group planter. The small group planter needs to recognize and reflect church’s philosophy in the group’s vision, if the group is to be a viable part of the parent church.

Further, the planter needs to consider the church’s context and what the church’s members need, when creating a small group vision. The church’s context is the ministry heritage, which shaped the church. The vision must reflect the heritage, while meeting members’ needs.

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106 Basile, “A Strategy to Plant a Missional, Multiplying Church in Pulaski County, Kentucky,” 56.


108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.
There is no discernable literature defending or refuting any one of these three approaches to creating a small group vision. It appears the decision of which approach to choose lies either with the small group planting team, if the small group is independent of any traditional church, or with the traditional church with which the group is associated. Any small group associated with a traditional church, will need to adhere to the church’s vision. This may be detrimental to the success of a group compelled to build its vision on traditional values and methodologies unsuitable to evangelizing and making disciples in restricted communities.

If a group planting team chooses to follow Basile’s group-centered vision, then one wonders how the group will incorporate Sikora’s nine people-centered values easily into its vision. One might argue individual group members, striving to achieve the group’s goals and live out its values, will realize the biblical community Sikora’s values intend to achieve. However, it appears choosing to combine Sikora’s people-centered values with a group-centered approach might result in forcing an adaptation of the two methods. It may benefit a group to adopt Earley’s member-centered approach, as Sikora’s people-centered values would be easier to achieve in such a group. For this reason, this project adopted a members-centered approach, seeking to develop each member as individual disciples of Christ, able to function in a biblical community.

Mission Statement

A group’s mission statement is a blueprint, by which the group intends to achieve its vision. Stetzer and Im write a group will succeed, if the mission is contextualized to the needs of the individuals in the target group. For this to happen, Basile writes the leader must guide

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110 Basile, “A Strategy to Plant a Missional, Multiplying Church in Pulaski County, Kentucky,” 55.

the group planting team into making a long-term commitment to achieving the small group’s mission, without deviation.\textsuperscript{112}

Jay Ebben, a consultant to small and new businesses, reinforces a people-centered approach. He indicates a successful mission statement identifies the firm’s customers, their expectations, and what the firm needs to do to fulfill its client-focused mission."\textsuperscript{113} By contextualizing Ebben’s approach to a small group ministry, the small group team mission statement would identify the target group, the target group’s interests and needs, and what the small group would need to do to satisfy those interests and needs. The group should write its mission statement as a concise statement of strategy, developed from the target group’s perspective, and designed to fit in with the vision.\textsuperscript{114} Such a design would necessitate a people-centered vision.

The mission statement like the vision statement should guide and not lockstep the group’s activities. Therefore, group leaders and their teams need to revisit both statements periodically and revise them in accordance with demographic changes of the target group and its changing interests.\textsuperscript{115} Having identified and written its values, and vision and mission statements, the small group may begin ministry to its target group.

Target Groups, Evangelism, and Discipleship

\textbf{Target Groups}

\textsuperscript{112} Basile, “A Strategy to Plant a Missional, Multiplying Church in Pulaski County, Kentucky,” 55.


\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
Before identifying its values and writing its vision and mission statements, the small group team needs to identify its target group. Americans have a wide range of spiritual interests, needing many different churches to meet those varied interests. Following the logic of tailoring the group’s vision and mission statements to the individual needs of the target group members, it is more important to identify the target group’s needs, as a means for reaching the community, than it is important to know the group’s age, organizational affiliation, or other demographic information. However, Stetzer and Im write most small groups erroneously choose their target group by using a wide-scoped regional effort rather than using data to identify a specific target group and its needs. Once the small group team correctly uses data to identify its target group, the team can determine how to proclaim the gospel to the target group so it corresponds with the target group’s cultural context. Knowing the target group’s cultural context will guide the small group in shaping its approach to evangelism.

**Evangelism**

The literature reveals traditional churches follow a traditional evangelism model. The traditional evangelism model expects individuals to believe as other church members believe. Churches expect new converts to believe and behave as the church’s other members behave to belong to the church group. Such a method is as ineffective as it is unbiblical and contextually irrelevant.

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117 Ibid., 6.

118 Stetzer and Im, *Planting Missional Churches*, 147.

119 Ibid.

A new and non-traditional evangelism practice, which Henry Neufeld writes Christ modeled, is having individuals first belong to the group and behave, as the group behaves, and then having them believe as the group believes. This model brings the unsaved into a biblical community, where members of the body of Christ can minister to them, by contextualizing their faith to the needs of the unsaved. Through this method, Christians, using their spiritual gifts and expressing the agape love to the unsaved will more likely introduce them to Christ than will the traditional model.\textsuperscript{121} Contextualizing one’s faith in this manner supports the new evangelism practice by making one’s faith culturally relevant to unbelievers in the target group, and meets with greater success.

This new evangelism practice, writes Cole, succeeds because it reaches individuals in the context of their daily lives.\textsuperscript{122} The growth of large churches in Asia, having experienced extraordinary growth due to small group ministry strategies, supports Cole’s position.\textsuperscript{123} The members of those small groups multiplied their numbers by sharing their faith, as they connected their faith to the concerns and issues in unbelievers’ lives.\textsuperscript{124} Their contextualized faith became relevant to family, friends, and neighbors, in the believers’ spheres of influence.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} Neufeld, “Believe Behave Belong,” 5.


\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 100-101.

Further, this new method of evangelism complements Relational Evangelism. Individuals, engaging in relational evangelism, develop relationships with non-Christians in their fields of influence, through which they live out their lives as a Christian witness. Through their relationships, they express agape love and concern for the unsaved, focus their efforts on caring for them, and introduce them to their biblical community.

**Discipleship**

In addition to supporting individual-centered values, vision and mission statements, and evangelism methods, the literature supports individual-centered disciple making. According to the literature, a group member’s influence extends into the area of disciple making by building relationships with those new believers they have led to Christ, not as a set of controlling rules, but as a relationship with Christ. Disciple making, as a small group value, deepens one’s knowledge of God, builds relationships among believers and non-believers, and provides accountability for Christian living. As believers and unbelievers come into the small group, they experience a Christian biblical community, learn Scripture through study and conversation, learn to love and care for others, and learn how to evangelize and serve family, friends, and members in their local community. The small group model with its individual-centered approach and non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making is not without challenges to its success.

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127 Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 68.

128 Ibid., 102.


130 Ibid., 104-105.
Challenges to Effective Small Groups

Not all small groups experience positive outcomes. Some small groups experience negative outcomes, as a poor success rate or failure and eventual closure, resulting from resistance by the dominant, traditional church culture. Conversely, other small groups experience negative outcomes by practicing resistance against the dominant, traditional church culture. By resisting the dominant, traditional church culture, small groups undermine traditional congregational life in the churches with which they are affiliated.¹³¹

Small groups, as indicated by the literature, may experience negative outcomes by contributing unwittingly to the breakdown of traditional moral values by trying to cope with secular values rather than confronting them.¹³² By coping with secular values rather than confronting them, small groups enable the secular values to infiltrate group members’ lifestyles.¹³³ The secular values then become part of the norm of the disciple’s lifestyle. The result is Christians living a lifestyle characterized by secular and biblical values with either one having the potential for shaping a Christian’s response to any given circumstance.

Small groups may orient themselves towards members’ issues by introducing coping skills to enable one to live with one’s issues rather than orienting them away from those issues and towards a Christian mindset and lifestyle. Group members give each other mutual support, either when addressing personal issues over which they seem to have little or no control, or during times when individuals face crises.¹³⁴ However, the reality is the process of orienting


¹³² Ibid., 107.

¹³³ Ibid., 107.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 112.
towards issues by teaching them how to cope with those issues orients members away from dealing with those issues effectively.\textsuperscript{135} Members learn to cope with issues rather than solve them and moving forward in their Christian lifestyle.

Stetzer and Im say small groups experience resistance from the traditional church with a wide evangelistic vision. Such churches object to the small group practice of selecting a single target group at the expense of other potential target groups. The traditional church insists small groups focus on all unbelievers in each community. They believe selecting one target group is an exclusionary process. As a result, small groups supported by a traditional church loses the support of the church.\textsuperscript{136}

Leadership accountability results in negative outcomes for some small groups. Male and Weston show small groups can positively influence the inclusion of laity in the traditional church. Small groups include both genders in leadership, resulting in many lay leaders eventually attaining ordination.\textsuperscript{137} The negative outcome, however, comes with the difficulty of the traditional church ensuring effective accountability for lay leaders without hampering them with traditional training methods and formalized accountability structures.\textsuperscript{138} Without traditional training and accountability structures, traditional churches may not be able to guarantee the beliefs held by lay leaders, who pass through small group training on their way to ordination.

Lastly, there is a flaw in small group evangelism, which produces unsuccessful outreach results. Steffen points out all cultures value the concepts of innocence and guilt, honor and

\textsuperscript{135} Walton, “Disciples Together: The Small Group,” 112.

\textsuperscript{136} Stetzer and Im, \textit{Planting Missional Churches}, 145.

\textsuperscript{137} Male and Weston, “What Does the Development of Fresh Expressions,” 288.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 289.
shame, and power and fear, although not equally. He identified confusion in communicating the gospel in the context of these values, resulting in target groups misunderstanding the gospel.\textsuperscript{139} There is a solution to overcome this confusion.

To overcome the confusion, small group planters and members can incorporate all three values in their gospel presentations with varying emphases on the three types of values. The emphases on these values vary, depending on the cultural context of the target group.\textsuperscript{140} Although Steffen identified the concept of confusion as occurring in the context of international missions, Bishop Graham argues this problem also exists in the domestic arena. He asserts it is possible to apply this solution as successfully domestically as it is internationally.\textsuperscript{141}

There appears to be a gap in the literature. There does not seem to be literature pertaining to solutions to the above challenges. Moreover, the small challenges discussed above apply generally to all small groups. There is a variety of small group models, each with its own set of advantages and challenges or disadvantages. It would seem from the literature the best option to small group planting teams is to choose a small group model with the greatest number of advantages coupled with the least number of disadvantages. The following section discusses some of those small group models, and their specific advantages and disadvantages.

\textbf{Varieties of Small Group Models, Advantages and Disadvantages}

Christianity Today printed an article, “Small Group Models”, as part of a resource site for church small groups.\textsuperscript{142} The article covers a range of topics, including the reasons for having

\textsuperscript{139} Steffen, “Minimizing Cross-cultural Evangelism Noise,” 413.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 414.

\textsuperscript{141} Graham, “On Not Knowing the End at the Beginning,” 3.

small groups, building a small group team, and organizing, launching, and sustaining small
groups. The article covers ten small group models, Open Small Groups, Closed Small Groups,
Cell Groups, Free-Market Groups, Neighborhood Groups, Purpose-Driven Groups, Sermon-
Based Groups, Organic Small Groups, House Churches, and Host Groups, and discusses each
group’s organization, function, advantages, and disadvantages.

The open small group welcomes new members and affords the potential for small group
multiplication through group growth. An advantage is the group issuing an open invitation to all
interested parties to join and participate in the group. A significant disadvantage is members may
not have a high level of commitment to this group. Without a commitment to the group,
members may not be depended upon to become the seed membership of a potential church and
stay with the church until it takes root and becomes established.

The closed small group model does not issue an open invitation for membership.
Committed members introduce new members into the group, because of evangelism and other
active recruitment. Members in this group have a high expectation for discipleship and spiritual
growth. However, this group’s disadvantage is its tendency to be inward-focused, which can
result in cliques, the lack of group multiplication, and the inability for the group to grow.

The cell group seems to offer a solution to the challenges of the former two groups, as it
is the basic unit of a church congregation. This model conducts some of the primary functions of
a church, worship, edification, relational evangelism, and discipleship. This group, however, runs

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144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
the risk of tending toward inflexibility and isolation from the rest of the church, making this model less than ideal.146

The free-market style group, a fourth model, gathers a group of individuals with similar interests, and transforms them into a spiritual community. This group’s advantage is its ease in starting a group already formatted for fellowship and relational development. The group’s disadvantage is it may focus on preserving the group members’ interests rather than developing its members spiritually.147

The neighborhood group model, as its name implies, is a group created for the residents of a community, to facilitate planting a church in the area. The familiarity of the members, their practices based on the early church model in Acts, and the group’s focus on relational evangelism are its advantages. However, the ancient mindset of an Acts model may be unappealing to 21st Century individuals, thus limiting its evangelistic effectiveness and multiplication.148

The sixth model, the purpose-driven group model, has the potential for developing mature disciples, increasing the numbers of group leaders available for new groups, and encourages trust and intimacy among group members. However, its disadvantages are the need for more involved administration and oversight of its leadership, a high turnover rate among its members, and an open recruitment of leaders to the extent the group trains leaders, who may not be born-again.149

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147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.
The seventh model, the sermon-based model, centers its meetings around a Bible study related to the previous Sunday’s sermon. The advantage is a foundation for study, a ready-made curriculum, and wider sense of community, as it relates all a church’s groups to each other through common study themes. It is disadvantages include the pastor needing to complete a sermon a week in advance to publish its content among the church’s groups. Additionally, some leaders dislike following a pre-determined curriculum. Finally, there is a possibility for the group to assess the pastor’s sermon critically.150

The organic model is a more natural method of building community. The group develops from its membership and its lay leadership, apart from a traditional church organization. Its appeal is its distancing itself away from a programmed and structured model of community. It allows leaders to minister using their gifts, and to focus on the members’ needs without being concerned about the numbers of members, who join the group.151 However, its lack of control by the church leadership may result in a lack of accountability among the leaders, as there is no central authority or leadership over the organic model group.152

The house church small group model offers the advantage being a vehicle for church planting by assembling individuals interested in using groups for this purpose. This model operates independently of a mother church in discipleship, accountability, and other traditional church ministries, all of which can provide training for the day when the group becomes a church plant.153 However, this model’s independence and seeming lack of accountability give it the

151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
disadvantage of making it vulnerable to poor teaching and heresy, if it is disconnected from an established church.¹⁵⁴

The tenth model is the host small group model. This group model has the advantage of beginning in a non-threatening manner for the leader, as the leader is not responsible initially for the members’ spiritual development. This may facilitate leader recruitment.¹⁵⁵ The leader, trained and supported by the main church, hosts the members in his/her home and conducts the meeting using the church’s curriculum. These groups can form quickly, and their leaders given responsibility for the members’ spiritual growth.¹⁵⁶ The ease with which one becomes a leader may be a disadvantage, as the church may promote the leader before he/she is ready. Further, host groups are erratic, with the parent church often losing as many groups as it creates.¹⁵⁷

All the group models have advantages and disadvantages, with some disadvantages seemingly significant, while others seem insignificant. No one group appears to have either a significant advantage or a significant disadvantage over any other group. Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages, the literature supports small groups as an effective means for evangelism and disciple making. Based on the above reviewed literature, the model, which seems to lend itself best to this project is the neighborhood group model.

The neighborhood group model can focus on the target group residents of the target community and eventually result in a church planted in the area. The familiarity of the members with others in their fields of influence, their practices based on the community model of the ¹⁵⁴ SmallGroups.com, “Small groups,” n.p.
¹⁵⁵ Ibid.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
¹⁵⁷ Ibid.
church model in the Acts of the Apostles, and the group’s focus on relational evangelism may result in the group’s success. Creating vision and mission statements, which focus on the needs of modern individuals of the target group, may compensate for the disadvantage of the ancient mindset of the Acts model and contribute to its evangelistic effectiveness and multiplication.

**Theological Foundations**

The Old and New Testaments neither address small groups specifically nor do they give instructions regarding their creation, purpose, and operation. There are, however, general concepts and many examples of small groups found in the Scriptures. They provide a theological basis for small groups, and guidance to any, who would start and lead small groups.

**Small Groups in the Old Testament**

Comiskey examines small groups in both the Old and New Testaments. He writes the Old Testament speaks very little about small groups. Where one finds the concept of small groups, the themes of community, shared leadership, hospitality, and education are evident.

Referring to the narrative of Moses and his father-in-law, Comiskey writes the “…organizational structure…extends down from leaders over thousands to those over tens…[enabling] [the leader] to delegate and share leadership.” This example of small group leadership introduced the concept of shared responsibility by which leaders, who come from the

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159 Ibid., 2.

160 Ibid., 1.

161 Ibid., 2.
groups they lead, serve those groups for the groups’ benefit. Share leadership would find itself replicated in Israel’s immediate future at God’s direction.

God commanded Moses and Aaron to organize the Israelites by their tribes, clans, and families. They were to conduct a census for the purpose of building an army (Num. 1:1-5, 16-19). Moses placed able-bodied leaders, whom God selected, over these groups to help in the census and selection of the soldiers.

The New Testament reflects Moses’ model of small group shared leadership through the practices of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Jesus used the small group model to introduce leadership as a spiritual discipline, in which He participated as well as taught. The Apostle Paul followed the shared leadership practice, when he charged the Ephesian church elders to lead “…the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” (Acts 20:28).

The theme of hospitality appears in several Old Testament narratives (Gen. 18:1-16; 19:1–11; 24:15–61; 29:1–11; Exod. 2:15–22; Judg. 19; 1 Sam. 25; 2 Sam. 12; 1 Kgs. 17:8–16, and 2 Kgs. 4). The narrative of Abraham and the three visitors (Gen. 18:1-16) is the event most often referred to by individuals, seeking an Old Testament foundation for practicing hospitality in the modern church. Lee Roy Martin, writing about the Abrahamic narrative, informs his readers Old Testament hospitality was to transform a stranger and possible threat into a guest. The host


167 Ibid.
welcomed strangers, who entered the physical community but were not part of God’s spiritual community.\textsuperscript{168} Hospitality was given with great respect towards the guests, who were not expected to compensate the host.\textsuperscript{169} However, it was not without limits. It was temporary, not an overnight or extended event.\textsuperscript{170} It offered food, shelter, and protection, but nothing more.\textsuperscript{171}

The Apostles introduced Old Testament hospitality to the church and expanded its limits. Paul instructs believers to practice hospitality to strangers (Heb. 13:2) and with other believers, who are in need (Rom. 12:13). Peter instructs believers to extend hospitality to each other, without complaining (1 Pet. 4:9), while the Apostle John instructs believers to practice hospitality towards others, who may be strangers but work to spread the gospel (3 John 1:8).

The small group model appears in the Old Testament as a vehicle for education. The Old Testament small group model, as practiced through the medium of the family group setting and established by divine order (Deut. 4:9, 6:7, 11:19), is a model for educating God’s people in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 6:7 reads, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Deuteronomy 6:7 provides a biblical foundation for small groups as a vehicle for education, which applies in the modern context. Justin M. Fuhrmann provides support for Deuteronomy 6:7 as a model for small groups as a vehicle for education. In his exposition on the first two commandments and their relationship to Deuteronomy, Fuhrmann points out Deuteronomy is a parenesis. It is a series of exhortations, given by Moses to Israel, meant to advise, instruct, or counsel

\begin{footnotes}
\item[169] Ibid.
\item[170] Ibid., 5.
\item[171] Ibid., 6.
\end{footnotes}
God’s people, whereas the remainder of the Pentateuch is a narrative. The Israelites understood the parenetic nature of Deuteronomy and embraced it. Centuries after its writing, King Josiah relied on Deuteronomy 6-8, when he instituted national, religious reforms in Judah (2 Kgs, Chapter 23).  

Given the differences of style and content between Deuteronomy and the other four books of the Pentateuch, some have argued Deuteronomy is separate from the Pentateuch in authorship and time. Others argued, when King Josiah relied on Deuteronomy 6-8 to reform religion in Judah, he actually was relying on a text written at the time of his reforms, intended to be a blueprint for them. The implication is clear. God did not inspire Deuteronomy. Therefore, Deuteronomy 6:7 is inauthentic and unsuitable to use as a biblical foundation for small groups.

Fuhrmann, however, argues in favor of Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy. He posits literary and grammatical parallels between the Decalogue and Deuteronomy 6-8, the relationship between the first two commandments (5:6–10) and the Shema (6:4–5), the flow in the narrative expanding what it means to love God, the context of the book, and insights from Deuteronomy 6–8 point to Deuteronomy as a covenant document connected with the theophany narrative of Exodus 19–24. Fuhrmann writes, “…it becomes clear the speeches of Moses should be understood as a renewal ceremony functioning in the same manner as the covenant ratification ceremony of Exodus 24.”

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173 Ibid.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 Ibid., 54.

177 Ibid., 62.
Given support from the literature bearing out the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, the authenticity of Chapters 5-11, and its role in education, one may be confident the biblical text (Deut. 6:7) assures the reader the Old Testament family small group is a vehicle for education. It is the vehicle through which God would deliver Moses’ exhortations to his people from parent to child, generation to generation. This family small group pattern of education would remain a practice throughout the generations of the Old Testament and appear in the New Testament, where Paul calls Timothy to remember “…the genuine faith that is in [him], which dwelt first in [his] grandmother Lois and [his] mother Eunice….” (2 Tim. 1:5).

The Old Testament provides a biblical pattern for small groups, founded on the community structure of the Trinity. The Old Testament small group pattern provides for group members’ mutual encouragement, accountability for spiritual development, and shared leadership opportunities. It describes and promotes the practice of hospitality and calls for education in the Scriptures. This foundational model appears in the New Testament in Jesus’ small groups and those of the Apostles and the church. Together, the Old and New Testament small group practices set a biblical pattern for small group models in the contemporary church.

Small Groups in the New Testament

The use of the small group for organizing, leading, discipling, and training others appears in the New Testament in the activities of Jesus and of his Church. Jesus taught small groups of twelve members (Matt. 10:1-15) and sometimes three (Matt. 5:37; 17:1; 26:37). Jesus used small groups as the vehicle for apprenticing his disciples. He used the small group setting to teach them about evangelism, holiness, godliness, ministry, and servant leadership.

In the Acts and the Epistles, the Scriptures present small groups as the norm for the church. The church was a collection of small groups or cells, meeting in individual’s homes as
home churches (Acts 2:46; 20:20; 12:12; 1 Cor. 6:19). Small group home churches met collectively at various times for celebrations, which included all or most of the small group churches in a surrounding area (Acts 2:46; 20:20; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Rom. 16:23).\(^{178}\) These small group churches served as stabilizing communities for the church. They also served as a survival mechanism during persecution.\(^{179}\) The small groups could meet secretly, enabling their members to avoid detection by persecuting elements in society.

In writing about small groups in the Acts and the Epistles, Joel Comiskey informs his readers that the church consisted of small groups as its norm of existence and operation.\(^{180}\) Each local group, many planted by the Apostle Paul and his colleagues, operated as its own small group church, meeting in individual’s homes. The individuals, who opened their homes for the church meetings, became the leaders of that local community of believers.\(^{181}\) These small group churches provided community for believers, helped the church flourish,\(^{182}\) and attracted unbelievers from the communities in which these small group house churches met.

The individual churches did not exist in isolation but in community with each other. The individual small group churches provided fellowship internally for their members and externally with the larger Christian community. Small group churches in a city or region meet on special occasions for purposes such as celebrating the love feast.\(^{183}\) This community of small groups is known as \textit{oikos}, the extended family that connected the several house churches.


\(^{179}\) Ibid.

\(^{180}\) Ibid.

\(^{181}\) Ibid.

\(^{182}\) Ibid.

\(^{183}\) Ibid., 3.
Comiskey writes that “… early Christians met primarily in the homes of individual members over a period of nearly three hundred years…”\textsuperscript{184} He further writes that home churches, as the one “… at Corinth, assume a small group setting, where “each one” is participating in the group ministry.”\textsuperscript{185} As the believers’ witness spread throughout the Roman Empire, the churches were able to maintain a family atmosphere because they met in peoples’ homes. The numbers of attendees at Christian small group meetings was fifteen to twenty believers. As each group grew larger, it established another small group house church. This process is the principle of multiplication of small groups.\textsuperscript{186} The small group multiplication subsequently resulted in the needed \textit{oikos}.

The churches, which met in families’ homes were under the oversight of the couple, who owned the home. The church in that home was an extended family of that couple, which included Christian relatives of the homeowners, their children, their slaves, and their neighbors. This extended family group that was socially and economically diverse, as well as racially diverse, as slaves came from nations throughout the Mediterranean races because of Roman military conquests. Thus, the group, as the God’s family, was an extended, diverse family, representative of all nations. They represented the visible fulfilment of the Great Commission and reflected the Kingdom of God.

This diversity in the small group house churches resulted in the need for a new social order. That new order was the spiritual family of God, in which everyone was related through

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\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
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Christ (Philem. 1:3-4). All family members were equal, having equal rights of citizenship in the Kingdom of God (Gal. 3:26-29). People behaved lovingly towards each other, which was an attraction to the unbelievers that surrounded the oikos community. Attracted to this extended family, unbelievers eventually became believing members of this new order. The “…early house churches [were] a practical demonstration of [Christ’s] power to transform the social order.”

As the numbers of small group house churches grew, a leadership structure developed in and among them. Deacons and elders, appointed by the Apostles to lead the churches, received guidelines for selection and leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-12, 5:17). The numbers of churches that grew in regional areas and cities connected through oikos. Comiskey writes, “Public preaching brought many house churches into existence, but then the oikos web structure through house-to-house ministry sustained the growth.” This interconnecting web is the extended family of the house churches. It helped the church develop, grow, and spread throughout the Roman Empire.

Small Groups as Vehicles for Disciple Making

Discipleship throughout the New Testament occurred in the small group setting. Discipleship in the Gospels, however, differs from discipleship in the Acts and the Epistles. The difference between them depended upon who made the disciples, from which people group they came, and for whom they became disciples. In the Gospels, Jesus made disciples of his fellow Jews to be his followers. Jesus chose his disciples from his Jewish countrymen and sent them to preach to other Jews (Matt. 10:1-6). Jesus did preach to Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon (Luke

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188 Ibid.
6:17), but his disciples were Jews. Jesus did not command that Gentiles become his disciples until his post-resurrection appearance to his disciples (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

In the Acts and the Epistles, the church made disciples. Disciple making was a corporate activity of the body of Christ, occurring in the small group home churches. Both the apostles and lay Christians made disciples of both Jewish and Gentile Christians to be Jesus’ followers. They relied on the Holy Spirit and their Holy Spirit given gifts to spread the gospel message and to disciple those, who converted to Christianity and joined their small group communities.

Rod Buchanan supports Comiskey’s position on the importance of small groups. He discusses the role small group communities played in the life of the early church and disciple making. He also points out that the early church began as groups, and that it was in the group context that believers conducted disciple making. The word disciple, as used in the Acts within the context of the church groups, is always in the plural, indicating that disciple making never occurred outside of the group community context. This important concept of community is described by Steadman in his book *Body Life*.

Steadman does not explicitly write that small groups are communities, which develop believers. He does, however, note the importance of the body, in which its members, working together, develop each other in their spiritual gifts and then minister to each other as they build each other in the faith and ministry. The acts of developing and having been developed as described in Mr. Steadman’s writings cannot occur without the community of the body.

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190 Ibid., 2.

Buchanan points out, when speaking of the Apostle Paul’s dealings with the church, that the church had grown in great numbers. He notes that the large numbers of the church do not necessarily indicate the size of each congregation. Rather, this largeness indicates the increased and ever-increasing numbers of church small groups that existed in the early church and which were connected to each other. This connection of many small groups churches illustrates the oikos, through which many small group churches were connected to each other as the extended family of God. Neither believers nor small group churches were on their own as individual persons or individual groups. All believers were family members in one, extended family community.

In the Gospels, Jesus used the small group to disciple his fellow Jews for the purposes of making them into his own image and continuing his salvation mission to the world. The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles record the apostles and lay Christians made disciples for Christ. They functioned as a unified body, spreading the gospel message throughout the world, and making Gentile converts to Christ into other disciples for Jesus. To understand how the small group functioned as a vehicle for Christ’s and Paul’s disciple making, it is necessary to examine how Jesus’ and the Apostle Paul used small groups for this purpose.

Jesus, Small Groups, and Disciple Making

The small group model, as Jesus utilized it, does not supplant the traditional church. Rather, it supports the traditional church’s efforts in fulfilling the Great Commission. One may

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192 Buchanan, “History of Pre-Reformation Small Groups,” 2.
193 Comiskey, Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church, 25.
see this support illustrated in the way Jesus related to the traditional religious institutions of his day, the temple and synagogue systems of worship and religious instruction.

The Gospels record Jesus’ pilgrimages to Herod’s Temple. There he celebrated the Passover (Lk. 2:41; Jn. 2:13-25; 5:1; 6:4; 11:55) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7-9). They record those occasions when he taught in the Temple (Matt. 21:12,23; Mk. 11:15,27; Lk. 22:53; Jn. 8:2) and paid the temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27) in fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

Jesus supported and participated in the traditional religious institutions of his day. He taught and worshipped in Herod’s Temple and participated in the worship and religious instruction offered by the synagogues. Jesus extended the worship and instruction of the traditional religious institutions by bringing them into private homes. He accomplished this by personalizing them through the intimacy of the small group, which he used to disciple his followers.

Jesus’ disciple making methods provide the foundation for creating and using small groups. By following his methods, one can create healthy, productive small groups. Jesus lived and modeled a lifestyle of relationships. As he had a relationship with God the Father, he also built and maintained relationships with his family, friends, religious and political leaders, the general population, and his disciples. Jesus used small groups to make disciples, which he designed around the Mediterranean family structure. All Jesus taught and commanded, and the relationships he built, he did in the context of this structure. However, Jesus’ core group of disciples did not include the collective of this group of people.


Author Winfield Bevins asserts that Jesus was selective in his choice of disciples. He selected only those, whom he believed would execute his master plan of reproducing disciples for him.\(^{196}\) Jesus’ disciples, with whom he was intimate and in whom he invested himself wholly thorough his lifestyle and teachings,\(^ {197}\) were disciples with whom Jesus was already familiar.

John W. Schoenheit informs his readers that these intimate disciples were Jesus relatives and friends from Galilee. Others, like Philip, knew Jesus through Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, having been one of John’s disciples.\(^ {198}\) Jesus knew his disciples before he chose them. He knew them personally, loved them intimately, cared for them greatly, and trained them thoroughly.

Jesus likely patterned his discipleship model after the traditional Rabbinical model of his time,\(^ {199}\) which consisted of a rabbi and a small group of disciples, who eventually would become rabbis like their leader. Jesus’ followers called Him master, teacher, and rabbi” (Mark 9:5; John 20:16), as the rabbis’ disciples addressed them. Jesus taught according to his culture, which included memorizing the Torah, taking pilgrimages to the Jerusalem Temple, and attending the synagogue habitually (Luke 4:16; John 6:59).\(^ {200}\)

Jesus taught his disciples in word and in deed much as a rabbi or master would teach an apprentice.\(^ {201}\) As Jesus’ apprentices, his disciples left their families, their hometowns, and their


\(^{197}\) Ibid., 4.


\(^{199}\) Earley and Dempsey, Disciple Making Is . . . , 67.

\(^{200}\) Ibid.

\(^{201}\) Ibid., 59.
businesses and joined his group. They gave up everything to follow him, learn from him, and become like him. He expected total commitment from them as he intended making them rabbis, who would disciple others as they had been discipled.\textsuperscript{202} Jesus spent time discipling women (Lk. 10:38-42), and they followed him (Lk. 8:2-3).

Earley does not describe Jesus’ model as lifestyle discipleship, but he gives a description of Jesus’ methods that resembles lifestyle discipleship. Earley identifies four of Jesus’ methods as immersion into a deeper relationship with him, immersion into a Christian community, immersion into the words of Jesus, and immersion into ministry.\textsuperscript{203} Earley tells us that Jesus immersed his disciples into a relationship of prayer by having them with him when he prayed. He taught them and the crowd how to pray (Matt. 6:9-13), and modeled prayer for them when they were alone (Lk. 9:18).\textsuperscript{204}

Jesus immersed his disciples in community by living with them as an intimate small group, which functioned as a family. He taught them to support and depend on each other.\textsuperscript{205} They shared all their belongings, including holding their wealth in common (Jn. 12:16). Jesus taught his disciples to trust him, to depend on each other when he sent them out to preach to the cities of Israel (Matt. 10:5), and when he sent them out in thirty-six pairs to perform ministry (Lk. 10:1-23). Jesus invested time in his disciples. When the thirty-six pairs returned from ministry, Jesus spent time debriefing their experiences, using it as a learning experience. Jesus

\textsuperscript{202} Earley and Dempsey, \textit{Disciple Making Is . . .}, 67.

\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 69-74.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 70.
immersed his disciples in the Scriptures. He referenced them, taught them, lived by them, and expected his disciples to do the same.

Jesus dedicated himself to discipling his followers. They were his surrogate family. The Lord brought them with him everywhere he went. They would witness his life of prayer (Jn. 17) and worship (Matt. 26:30), his teachings and miracles (Jn. 5:36-44), and his conduct in society with both the religious leaders (Matt. 15:1-9) and the irreligious (Lk. 5:29-32). In every situation, Jesus taught and modeled living a holy and godly lifestyle, in a loving, family relationship.

Rod Dempsey, Dave Earley, and Joel Comiskey provide several reasons why following Jesus example of using small groups for disciple making provides a foundation for contemporary, healthy small groups. First, to follow Jesus example is to live as he lived and teach others as he taught them. Dempsey and Earley write, “If we want to live as Jesus lived, we must do as Jesus did.”

One of the many things Jesus did was to use small groups to make disciples.

Jesus was a small group leader, who invited “… a handful of men to be gathered together with Him in an intensive, ministry-focused small group.” It was through this setting the Lord created disciples, a pattern he set for the church to follow. Comiskey tells us that Jesus did not allow people to remain neutral. The Lord Jesus gave those, whom he called, a choice to follow Him. He gave the same choice to crowds and families. They had to choose whether they would believe and accept him and his teachings. Contemporary small groups can be vehicles through which the church gives unbelievers the opportunity to accept and follow Jesus. The small group


207 Ibid.

208 Comiskey, Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church, 74.
gathers those who accept Christ, as the Lord did, and disciples them, teaching them to obey all that he commanded by word and deed, and modelling a lifestyle of obedience to Christ.

Jesus used small group life to introduce leadership as a spiritual discipline, a discipline in which He participated as well as taught. Jesus used the small group to transform the many. Comiskey reminds his readers of this principle when he explains how the Lord sent his disciples, first twelve and then seventy-two to towns and villages, to bring His message to individual homes and families to spread his message. His disciples delivered the message of the Kingdom of God to families that became small groups.

Comiskey relates this success to his readers, writing the Lord “… gave the disciples experiences and allowed them to make…observations, used [them]…to teach a lesson, [and] modeled what it means to love God and…people by personal example….” The homes his disciples found became a base of operations for further outreach. As Jesus’ message spread, it multiplied and established a network of family home small groups that continued His work.

Jesus was personally and intimately involved in small group disciple making after the ascension, when he chose the Apostle Paul to continue his work. The Apostle Paul writes it was Jesus, who discipled him (Gal. 1:11-21). The Apostle Paul writes that the risen Jesus discipled him, even to the extent of revealing to Paul all he would suffer for Jesus (Acts 9:16).

The Apostle Paul, Small Groups, and Disciple Making

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210 Ibid., 78.

211 Ibid.

212 Ibid., 81.
The Apostle Paul followed Jesus’ method for making disciples in his relationships with God and others. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians is a case in point. Paul taught the truths revealed to him by Jesus, such as the true nature and function of the church, and how it could be a healing agent for society, enabling it to live on a more noble plateau. Paul further modeled his relationship with God for the Ephesians by admonishing them to live a life worthy of their spiritual calling. Paul also modeled godly, practical living for his disciples. The Apostle Paul worked to support himself and his ministry (Acts 18:1-4) and urged the Thessalonians to follow his example of industry over idleness (2 Thess. 3:6–12).

Like Jesus, the Apostle Paul trained apprentices. Paul mentored both Timothy and Titus (1 Cor. 4:16–17, 2 Cor. 8:17–18). Paul brought them with him, as part of a small group, while he traveled the Greek world preaching the gospel. They witnessed his preaching, teaching, spirituality, and his interpersonal relationships. Paul instructed Timothy to make disciples by entrusting what he learned to others capable of carrying on the work.

Both Jesus and Paul viewed the totality of believers as the corporate body of Christ. Jesus identified the corporate body in his discourse with Peter (Matt. 16:18), where he pronounces, he will build his church. The Apostle Paul spoke of the corporate church when writing that he persecuted the Church of God universally (Phil. 3:6). Yet, both Christ and the Apostle Paul saw individual members of the corporate church working to develop that body of which they are a

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214 Ibid., 23.
215 Ibid., 25.
216 Ibid.
part. Jesus saw John’s work separate from that of Peter’s (John 21:22). Paul saw each member of the body as having a specific function (1 Cor. 12:7) to perform in the community arena.

Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus, describing the church as a single building comprised of many individual stones or blocks. He describes it as a body made up of many members with each member working at the task God has given him so that the whole body may function as God intends. Every member of the body has at least one gift given by the Holy Spirit, which that individual member is to use for developing the body of Christ. Steadman encourages everyone to discover that gift. Steadman says lay people rather than professional clergy should be using their gifts to do the work of building up the body of Christ.

In his article “Laypeople and the Mission of God: Part II - Reclaiming the Priesthood of All Believers,” Ed Stetzer encourages every church to have a plan for equipping people for ministry and promoting an environment that empowers people for ministry. Every member in the local church needs to be encouraged to be actively involved in developing the church and building up its other members. Stetzer offers a four-step strategy of Communication and

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219 Ibid., 75.

220 Ibid., 81.

221 Ibid., 115.

Growth, and Affirmation, and Assessment for supporting lay people in carrying out the mission of God in the local church.

Church leadership needs to communicate the church’s vision, expectations, and plan to change the church’s culture to move people forward in finding and exercising their gifts. People who understand and buy-in to the program will become advocates for the desired change and promote it among the other members. He adds that for this movement to take place, empowered leaders need to set the plan in motion. Empowered leaders are not afraid to involve their members. They welcome and encourage involvement and encourage new leaders to develop their skills and increase their level of involvement.

Stetzer, informing his readers that people respond to affirmation, recommends continuing the change process by publicly recognizing and praising those who are engaged in that process. This affirmation stimulates further involvement of those already participating and invites more participants, especially among those, whom Stetzer identifies as weaker and needing more encouragement. Coupled with affirmation is assessment. Stetzer defines

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225 Loc. Cit.

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

228 Loc. Cit.

229 Ibid.
assessment as helping others discover their gifts and rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and empowerment to use them.\textsuperscript{230}

The Importance of the New Testament Spiritual Family

Paul views the church as a spiritual family and that family as the preeminent relationship among Christians. It is preeminently more important than the individual, more important than one’s property, biological family, society, the laws governing society, and more important than the individual’s life. The small group is the venue in which this spiritual family operates.

The spiritual family is a surrogate family designed around the four family values of affective solidarity, unity, material solidarity, and loyalty.\textsuperscript{231} There was no concept of individuality among New Testament people groups. The New Testament people, Jews, Gentiles, Christians, and pagans, had what Hellerman calls a “collectivist view of reality.”\textsuperscript{232}

An individual’s identity in the New Testament came from and was bound to his society. The family unit was the single-most important societal group to which an individual belonged.\textsuperscript{233} When individuals made all important life decisions, they made their decisions with their families’ good as their primary focus. That, which ultimately was good for the family, was good for the society in which the family lived. The family submitted to the society and the individual submitted to the family.\textsuperscript{234} Within the family, no relationship was greater or more valued than the relationship among the siblings.


\textsuperscript{231} Hellerman, \textit{When the Church Was Family}, n.p.

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
The New Testament family structure was patrilinear with the father as the head of the family. The family bore his name and submitted to his authority. The hierarchy was father to first-born son and first-born son to the other siblings. These relationships were based on bloodline. 235

The children, as the direct line of the father, carried his bloodline. The children’s blood tie, as offspring of the same parents, bound them together. The mother, having different blood, that of her father, mother, and siblings, was outside the bloodline hierarchy. Outside of the father, the children, being close to each other by blood, placed each other in importance over their mother and any other family. They devoted themselves to each other and remained steadfast allies throughout their lives. 236

The family matriarch found her identity in and placed her importance on her family, her parents, and siblings. This does not mean that a husband and his children disrespected the family matriarch. It means that when she married her husband, a woman left her family and joined her husband’s family as an extended family unit. The couple lived with his parents and the wife became part of his family. 237 She did not divorce herself from her own family, however. She visited her family, interacted with them, and was loyal to them. Her closest relationships were with her brothers and sisters. 238 If she needed help, the mother turned to her siblings. The story of Rebecca, Esau, and Jacob illustrates this relationship.

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235 Hellerman, When the Church Was Family, n.p.

236 Ibid.

237 Ibid.

238 Ibid.
After Jacob betrayed his brother Esau (Gen. 27:1-41), he feared for his life. To protect her son, Rebecca sent him to live not with her husband’s cousins or other family but with Laban, the brother with whom she had blood ties (Gen. 27:42-28:9). Later in the biblical account, the brothers reunited peaceably, as if Jacob’s betrayal of his brother Esau had never happened (Gen. 33:1-4). The New Testament collectivist society reflects this ancient family model.

Affective solidarity is the emotional bond, the deep, abiding affection siblings have for each other.²³⁹ Paul experienced this affection with the Thessalonians, Philippians, Ephesians, and others, whom he led to Christ, and who attended the many churches he planted. The Scripture passage, which clearly illustrates this affection is Acts 20:37-38.

When the Apostle Paul said good-bye to the Ephesian church elders before going to Rome for trial, they “… wept as they embraced him and kissed him.³³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again.” The word wept, klauthmos, from klaio, in Acts 20:37 is weeping, as in “any expression of grief, especially in mourning for the dead”.²⁴⁰ The Ephesians were weeping, mourning the loss of their brother Paul, as if he had died. Such was the deep, abiding, emotional bond of affective solidarity siblings in ancient Mediterranean families held for each other. This was the deep, abiding, emotional bond of affective solidarity the Apostle Paul desired for his brothers and sisters in Christ, God’s children, his spiritual family.

The Apostle Paul expected his spiritual family to unite the way the Mediterranean family of the New Testament era was united. The Apostle Paul wanted his Christian siblings to be one

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²³⁹ Hellerman, When the Church Was Family, n.p.

as God in three persons is one. If the spiritual body of Christ is to display God to the world, then the spiritual family needs to be united. There must not be hint of divisiveness among the siblings. Individuals, who had been strangers to each other before their conversion to Christ needed to be as united as brothers and sisters, who had grown up together and lived together all their lives. In the world of the early church, family loyalty meant one family member would never testify against another family member accused of a crime.

The Apostle Paul complained to the Corinthians that they were undermining the unity of their spiritual family through their litigious acts against each other in pagan courts of law. They sued each other over matters that they could resolve amongst themselves. The Apostle Paul viewed their family unity to be more important than their property or even their individual rights. The Apostle Paul held the spiritual family in such esteem that for him, it was better as loving, unified siblings, to suffer loss willingly and silently at the hands of a brother than to disrupt the family’s unity. The Apostle Paul wrote:

The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead you cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? (1 Cor. 6:7-9)

The Apostle Paul held the spiritual family in such high regard that he viewed disrupters of the family’s unity as being on par with wrongdoers, who would never inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9). The Apostle Paul expected affectionate brothers and sisters to be so unified that they would hold their property in common. A Christian, who holds all his property in

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243 Ibid.
common with the spiritual family, could not consider his property defaced or stolen by another
brother or sister in Christ, as that brother or sister shared in the ownership of the property.

The Apostle Paul held high the family value of material solidarity, the sharing of one’s
food, clothing, lodging, all that one owns.244 The Apostle Paul so deeply believed that members
of the spiritual family ought to care for each other, that he spent years collecting money from the
Gentile churches to give as support to the poor in Jerusalem.245 In accordance with family
values, the Apostle Paul considered that the spiritual, surrogate family ought to see that the needs
of each family member were satisfied. He expected his brothers and sisters in Christ to give what
they could to ease the sufferings of others (1 Cor. 16:2), placing others’ interests on equal footing
with their own (Phil. 2:4).

Caring for the interests of one’s siblings as one would care for one’s own interests
illustrates the elevation of the sibling relationship over the marital relationship. Paul expected
believers to be loyal to each other even above the loyalty that husbands and wives had for each
other. Hellerman writes that Paul placed one’s work and purpose for the kingdom of God over
one’s family relationships, including marriage.246 Paul weighed the importance of marriage
against the importance of the Kingdom of God and not the importance of the Kingdom of God
against the importance of marriage. The believer’s position and service for the Kingdom of God
and loyalty to the spiritual family were preeminent to the loyalty one had for one’s spouse.

The Spiritual Family and Disciple Making

244 Hellerman, When the Church Was Family, n.p.
245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.
The small group operates as a spiritual family. It is an organism\textsuperscript{247} within which and by which disciple making occurs on a corporate level. The organism is a body, the body of Christ, comprised of many different parts or members.\textsuperscript{248} When working together properly, individual member parts give health and strength to the body. The members work together to guarantee the health and proper functioning of each of member, as it makes disciples.

The body of Christ is comprised of a head, Jesus Christ, and a body, which is the sum total of individuals throughout history, who became members of Christ’s body when they received him as their personal Lord and savior.\textsuperscript{249} As the Jesus Christ is the child of God the Father, those, who are members of his body, are the younger brothers and sisters to their elder brother, Jesus, (Matt. 12:50; Rom. 12:5), making them children of God the Father, a spiritual family in and through Christ (Eph. 3:14; 1 John 3:1-3).

The proper function of this collective spiritual family or unit\textsuperscript{250} is to “… reflect God’s holiness,\textsuperscript{251} reveal his glory to the world,\textsuperscript{252} and be a witness to Christ.\textsuperscript{253} Christ’s disciples reflect God’s holiness when they live sinless, moral lives as examples to the world of Jesus’ pure and holy character. Christ’s disciples are to be holy, that is sinless as Christ is holy (1 Pet. 1:16), thereby revealing God’s holiness to the world. As believers, they are to live godly lives that


\textsuperscript{248} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{251} Steadman, \textit{Body life}, 27.

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 31.
reveal his glory to the world, that is show the world what God is like. Living a godly lifestyle that reflects God’s character shows the world God’s glory (Matt. 5:16).

Through believers’ holiness, godliness, and character reflecting the character and personality of Jesus, Christ’s disciples become his witnesses. They witness for him not only in spreading the gospel by word of mouth but through their actions (Matt. 11:29). When the world sees Christ’s disciples in action, it sees Christ. His disciples connect to Christ, with each other, and to the lost as Christ’s hands and feet.\textsuperscript{254} Through its healthy members, the body of Christ is visible and attractive to the world.\textsuperscript{255}

The church, the spiritual family, realizes its calling\textsuperscript{256} when each member of the body functions properly. Each member of the spiritual family functions properly when other members encourage individuals to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts to contribute to building up the collective spiritual family, member by member. This process occurs in concert with all the members of the spiritual family.

The fellowship of the spiritual family members working together develops individual members so that they function properly. Through this process, each member, as well as the collective spiritual body, becomes what God intends for them to become. Steadman writes:

God has given us a set of directions for building a powerful, functional, dynamically effective church…. which … are also God’s directions for building a rewarding, effective, dynamic [individual] life. It is through the koinonia – fellowship of the church that we truly become all God intended us to be.\textsuperscript{257}


\textsuperscript{255} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{256} Steadman, \textit{Body life}, 38.

\textsuperscript{257} Loc. Cit.
Dr. Tony Evans echoes this position when he writes, “... our spiritual well-being depends on our connection with Christ through His body...we must be connected to each other in order to be what God wants us to be.”

It is in developing individual believers by the members of the spiritual family through koinonia that the spiritual family becomes the focal point of disciple making. Through the spiritual family’s efforts, believers become what God intends them to be.

Spiritual family members engage in disciple making as they support, encourage, nurture, and develop each other in a loving relationship. Every family member functions properly, by exercising spiritual gifts and using action principles for building up Christ’s body. There are five action principles. They are promoting truth and unity by speaking truthfully to others, serving God through one’s gifts, sharing the gospel with unbelievers, worshipping the Lord individually and collectively, and loving each other.

All members of the family are equal and therefore equally important. Every member of the body connects to every other member of the body and necessarily so. This connectivity results in the body’s proper function and impact for Christ.

The Importance of the Holy Spirit in Small Group Disciple Making

James Lawson writes the Holy Spirit is an essential participant in the small group discipleship process. He introduces his readers to the role of the Holy Spirit, when he

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260 Ibid.
261 Loc. Cit.
discusses Jesus’ baptism in water and John the Baptist’s pronouncement, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16).  

Lawson refers to the Holy Spirit as the gospel of power, noting that too many Christians focus on the gospel of salvation at the expense of the gospel of power.  

Lawson informs his readers that Jesus promised his disciples that they would do greater things than he. The fulfillment of this promise began in Acts 1:8, when he baptized them in the Holy Spirit, giving them the power to preach the gospel, and win and disciple others. 

Lawson continues by informing his readers of the importance the Apostle Paul placed on the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christ’s disciples, when he discusses Paul’s involvement with the believers in Ephesus, and his disciple, Timothy. 

The Ephesians had received John the Baptist’s baptism for repentance but had neither heard the gospel nor received the Holy Spirit baptism. Paul emphasized the importance of this baptism, preached the gospel to them, and laid hands on them. They received the baptism in the Holy Spirit when Paul laid his hands on them. 

The laying on of hands was an important custom the Christians received from the Jews. They continued this practice, when conferring ministry on others, as Paul did with Timothy.

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263 Lawson, Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians, 1.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
266 Ibid., 7.
267 Ibid., 9.
and praying for others to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{268} Lawson writes that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was the secret to the church’s power.\textsuperscript{269}

In First Timothy 4:14, Paul writes that Timothy received his ministry and his gifts when Paul laid hands on him. He admonishes Timothy not to disregard the gifts he received through the laying on of Paul’s hands and through his childhood discipleship when he learned the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Paul instructs him to teach what he learned to others, who can take that teaching, live it, and teach it, continuing the disciple making process (2 Tim. 2:2).

Steadman’s book \textit{Body Life} describes the church as a dynamic force that can build up its members to transform the world.\textsuperscript{270} He bases this transforming work on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in the life of each of Christ’s disciples. Christ endows each member of the body with spiritual gifts,\textsuperscript{271} which include Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit\textsuperscript{272} and one or several other varieties of spiritual gifts.\textsuperscript{273} The members minister to each other and to the world through their spiritual gifts for the good of the entire body and the transformation of the world.\textsuperscript{274}

John Ortberg, addressing the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ’s disciples, writes that he gives Christ’s disciples a genuine concern for others as they depend on him to help them develop a deep, unadulterated love for others.\textsuperscript{275} The Holy Spirit helps Christ’s

\textsuperscript{268} Lawson. \textit{Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians}, 11.

\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{270} Steadman, \textit{Body Life}, 18.

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 59-60.

\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., 62.

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{275} John Ortberg, \textit{The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God’s Best Version of You}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 39-40.
disciples resist temptation and sin\textsuperscript{276} and provides for their spiritual growth. He gives them success in their work, as Jesus’ disciples, empowering them to complete their responsibilities for God.”\textsuperscript{277}

**Theoretical Foundations**

The church’s history is replete with examples of successfully implemented, biblically based, small group models with principles and practices reflecting those of Jesus and the church. Those models’ success gives credence for the implementation of similar, biblically based small group models in the modern context. The models selected as foundational for this project are those of Celtic Christianity, Jacob Spener, John Wesley, and the Navigators.

**The Celtic Christianity Model**

St. Patrick, the celebrated missionary to Ireland, established what is known as Celtic Christianity.\textsuperscript{278} He and his ministry teams established groups of monasteries, where they employed the small group principles and practices of Jesus and the early church. They developed their relationships with God, accountability peers, and small group members for fellowship and evangelism.\textsuperscript{279} They planted churches and won converts to Christ, whom they discipled and sent out to continue their ministry pattern.\textsuperscript{280} The Celtic Christians sought to transform their society

\textsuperscript{276} Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, 205.


\textsuperscript{279} Bevins, “Lessons from St. Patrick,” 2.

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid.
and culture by transforming individuals through evangelism, disciple making, and group multiplication.

The Celtic Christians’ core values and disciple making methods consisted of team ministry, holistic faith, missional community, and biblical hospitality. They built and utilized monasteries as launch points for their missions to non-Christians, not as retreats from them.\textsuperscript{281} Their goal was church planting.\textsuperscript{282}

The Celtic Christians operated through ministry teams in which each member of the team participated in evangelism and disciple making. They conducted evangelism relationally by having team members relate to non-Christians in their target group. They befriended non-Christians, ministered to them, and witnessed to them by living out their faith in the real world, as Christ’s representatives, amongst those they evangelized and discipled.

Within their respective groups, the Celtic Christians spent time alone with God in Scripture study and prayer, and with a peer with whom they were vulnerable and to whom they were accountable. They spent time within the small group by participating in a community lifestyle. The Celtic Christians did everything together, including evangelism.\textsuperscript{283} The Celtic Christians practiced hospitality by which they presented themselves to the world as the hands and feet of Christ. Those, whom they discipled, they out to reach other non-Christians.\textsuperscript{284}

The Celtic Christians practiced biblical hospitality much as the Christians of the New Testament and early church, through their monastic communities. They treated all, who came

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bevins, “Lessons from St. Patrick,” 2.
\item Ibid., 3.
\item Ibid., 2.
\item Ibid., 4.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
into their communities, as guests, offering hospitality as a demonstration of the love of Christ for strangers. Their welcoming manner with strangers transformed them into the friends of strangers, many of whom eventually converted to Christianity.²⁸⁵

The Jacob Spener Model

Jacob Spener focused on reforming the Lutheran Church by using small groups.²⁸⁶ Spener’s reform focused on discipleship aimed at the laity. He proposes believers be assembled for small meetings in their local churches where clergy could introduce them to the practice of koinonia as described in I Corinthians 14, teach them to learn and use the Bible, and model godliness for believers.²⁸⁷ Spener desired that the clergy would deliver simple and clear preaching of the gospel to their congregants.

Through these simple reforms, Spener was introducing the Lutheran Church to a Christ-centered discipleship in which the laity would become Christ’s disciples and practice spiritual disciplines as a loving, caring, nurturing local body of believers.²⁸⁸ Later, Spener would promote small groups meeting in Christians’ homes, where all members of the body of Christ could minister, following Luther’s doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.²⁸⁹

Spener wanted was a scandal free church in which believers could live fruitful, godly lives.²⁹⁰ Like the Celtic Christians, he focused on changing his society and culture by discipling

²⁸⁷ Ibid.
²⁸⁸ Ibid.
²⁸⁹ Ibid.
²⁹⁰ Ibid.
Christians. Spener believed Christians would change their behavior, if taught correctly and influence others. 291

To achieve these reforms, Spener proposes laity should be knowledgeable in God’s Word. He wanted lay believers to be taught Bible exposition, receive counseling, engage in prayer, and receive teaching not only from trained clergy but from anyone in the group with gifts, talent, and the insight to teach. 292 This discipleship would take place in small groups, meeting in individual member’s homes, much like the modern small groups model.

Spener furthered the cause of disciple making methods by insisting on having a professional, seminary trained clergy to lead the laity. The clergy would be educated under direct supervision of their professors, who insisted on godliness and scholarship among their students. 293 Spener looked forward to a clergy, who would preach practical sermons that would further the faith, holiness, and fruitfulness of the laity. 294 Essentially, Spener’s model of the clergy would produce a trained clergy to teach and guide lay believers into maturity in Christ and unity of the faith, who would continue this process with other lay believers.

Spener’s reforms also included a focus on sound doctrine. It was important to Spener that believers understand the doctrines of the faith through preaching of God’s Word, and receiving communion and baptism, all resulting in an inward, spiritual change. 295 Spener was concerned about the inner man, the spiritual church, and the elevation of the laity to ministry.

292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.
294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.
Spener did not intend for a trained laity to replace a professionally trained clergy and assume their duties. He did intend, however, that the laity should read and know the Bible, determine for themselves whether or not the preaching they received was biblical, and live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.296 For Spener, there was one requirement that he expected of the laity. The lay minister was to have a personal lifestyle or testimony that was biblically based and illustrative of New Testament ethics, giving evidence of being a disciple of Christ.297

Charles Wesley and the Methodist Model

Charles Wesley, the founder of Methodism, also successfully promoted the small groups model, focused on changing culture by changing individuals through biblically based relationships. His was an evangelism and disciple making system of five interlocking groups,298 which worked together to produce individuals, who lived holy, godly lives. The groups provided biblical instruction, sought individual behavioral change, trained leaders,299 and rehabilitated any, who lapsed into ungodliness.300

Wesley’s divided his disciple making model into two systems, instructional and administrative.301 He further divided the instructional system into five bands, each with a functional mode, the Society: Cognitive Mode, Class Meeting: Behavioral Mode, Band: Affective Mode, Select Society: Training Mode, and Penitent Band: Rehabilitative Mode. The


297 Ibid.


299 Ibid., 118.

300 Ibid., 122.

301 Ibid., 81.
modes were the vehicles for achieving the goals of the bands. All who followed Wesley’s teachings were members of the Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective modes.302

The Training Mode or Select Society, and the Rehabilitative Mode, the Penitent Bands, Wesley reserved for those, who either would train for leadership roles303 or needed restoration to the faith, following a relapse into sin,304 respectively.

Wesley tailored the five modes or methodologies of appropriate behavior305 used by each group, to the groups’ specific functions. He ensured each group’s members would engage in behaviors appropriate to the foci of their groups. Wesley was careful that these modes or methods came from the Scriptures and ensured those, who were living by these prescribed methods, were living lives “… according to the method laid down in the Bible.”306

Wesley, like the early Acts church, devoted himself to sound doctrine and the Apostles’ teachings.307 He was determined his followers would behave appropriately cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively, as expected of Christ’s disciples. These modes or methods came to be known as Methodism, and those, who practiced Methodism, came to be known as Methodists.308

302 Henderson, John Wesley’s Class Meeting, 93.
303 Ibid., 118.
304 Ibid., 122.
305 Ibid., 81.
306 Ibid., 83.
308 Loc. Cit., 83.
The first and foremost of the primary modes was the Society. Its function was theological instruction, specifically the tenets of Methodism or Methodist Doctrine. These groups, essentially congregations, gathered weekly for lecture, public reading, worship, prayer, exhortation, and to lovingly watch over each other.

Wesley’s instructional methodology was based on three foundational principles, the perfectibility of humanity, free will, and true religion. Wesley believed a person could alter his intentions and behavior for the better, as perfected by God’s grace. Secondly, he believed people could freely choose to make right moral choices, if they learned what they needed to make those choices. Finally, he believed true religion manifested itself in human relations. In this mode, Wesley practiced connections of Christians with the Father, with other Christians, and with the world, by serving as the hands and feet of Christ. For Wesley, one’s love for God translated into one’s love for one’s fellow man, which in turn translated into doing good works to benefit others. The result would be a culture transformed by spiritually transformed individuals.

A highlight of Methodism was Wesley’s unleashing of the laity. Wesley encouraged the laity to participate in ministry to other believers and to the world. In Wesley’s Class Mode, laity

309 Henderson, John Wesley’s Class Meeting, 81.

310 Ibid., 82.

311 Ibid., 84.

312 Ibid., 84.


314 Ibid.

315 Loc. Cit., 85.
often replaced preachers and served as leaders of groups.\textsuperscript{316} Laity, through proper moral choices, could become the hands and feet of Christ in service to one’s fellow man.\textsuperscript{317} Wesley gave lay assistants oversight of the society groups in the absence of local preachers, traveling among the circuits of the Societies.\textsuperscript{318}

Wesley used the laity as trustees to maintain the Society’s property. As stewards, they learned to provide a check and balance system for the society’s group processes and served as a direct link between the spiritual and the physical aspects of the Society.\textsuperscript{319} Much like the Celtic Christians, the stewards lovingly served the community’s poor,\textsuperscript{320} distributing relief to them as well as ministering in love to the other Methodists.\textsuperscript{321}

In addition to Bible-based preaching with practical application, Wesley focused on evangelism. The Methodists reached out to the lost by holding open air evangelistic meetings. They opened their Sunday evening meetings to unbelievers called “Hearers”,\textsuperscript{322} inviting them to join believers in hearing Bible-based sermons.

Like the Celtic Christians, Methodists practiced mission outreach to unbelievers in the community. Wesley held meetings during days and times convenient to the target group he was trying to reach. Working class people usually attended these meetings.\textsuperscript{323} The meetings offered

\begin{footnotes}
\item[318] Henderson, \textit{John Wesley’s Class Meeting}, 85.
\item[319] Ibid., 86.
\item[321] Loc. Cit., 86.
\item[322] Ibid., 87.
\item[323] Ibid., 89.
\end{footnotes}
people options to sinful activities. Each month, on Saturday nights, Methodists held love feasts with testimonial periods to praise God as an alternative to Saturday night pub attendance. Methodists and Hearers could learn a new, holy way of living, resulting from the Class Meeting.\textsuperscript{324}

Wesley was sensitive to the size and structure of the small groups. The Class Meeting was heterogeneous and intimate with no more than 12 people. Many of the female members preached at these meetings.\textsuperscript{325} The class was a testimony to Luther’s priesthood of all believers.

The weekly Class Meeting provided personal supervision for disciples’ spiritual growth with a goal of personal holiness\textsuperscript{326} and emphasizing the connection of the disciple with Christ.\textsuperscript{327} The meeting was presided over by a fellow seeker, not a professional trainer,\textsuperscript{328} like Spener’s model. The leader modeled the expected meeting protocol of being open and vulnerable by sharing his/her spiritual triumphs and failures. Leaders expected members to share, following their example.

The Class Meeting members stayed together for years, cultivating intimate, helpful relationships.\textsuperscript{329} As Henderson writes, “… Methodists … believed … real joy … was spiritual fellowship and moral growth.”\textsuperscript{330} An article published by the Mental Health Foundation reports, “… poor-quality or unhappy relationships have a higher negative influence on physical mental

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item Bevins, “Lessons from St. Patrick,” 2.
  \item Loc. Cit., 95.
  \item Ibid., 98.
  \item Loc. Cit., 94.
  \item Ibid., 100.
  \item Henderson, \textit{John Wesley’s Class Meeting}, 100.
\end{itemize}}
While this was written regarding marital relationships, the concept applies to all relationships. The article goes on to say being “… a part of a community helps us feel connected, supported and gives us a sense of belonging.”

Wesley’s groups also utilized practical management. “Wesley was a great organizer and a strict disciplinarian.” Guests were welcome to the Class for two consecutive visits. If they chose not to become members, group leaders no longer invited into the classes. Further, Wesley’s was practical in the way he handled disruptive individuals. He did not hesitate to expel anyone, who disrupted meetings.

The Society provided instruction. The Class focused on behavioral change, and the Band focused on affective change. The band, Wesley’s favorite group, was a voluntary, homogeneous group “… of people who professed a clear Christian commitment and … desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention.” Wesley intended for this group to bridge the gap between evangelism and discipleship, and spread holiness, which consisted of “ethical morality, inward purity, and perfect love.”

Wesley discipled leaders through the Select Society, who modeled all Methodism represented. The group members were laity, handpicked for their faithfulness. They worked their

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332 Ibid., 18.

333 Ibid., 23.

334 Lawson, Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians, 66.

335 Henderson, John Wesley’s Class Meeting, 105.

336 Ibid., 110.

337 Ibid., 113.
way up through the ranks of the Band, Class, and Society, having an attitude of striving for spiritual growth and service.\textsuperscript{338}

The Select Society reflected the ancient Mediterranean Family values\textsuperscript{339} of an open, honest, and loving commitment to each other, and caring and concerned for each other’s welfare.\textsuperscript{340} This group had no rules or leaders. It hosted open, honest, and critical discussions, with the members participating in the organization’s decision-making process.\textsuperscript{341}

The final group was the Penitent Band. It served as a rehabilitative group for Methodism. The Penitent Band addressed those, who failed to meet Class Meeting standards, but wanted to pursue holiness and overcome their personal problems.\textsuperscript{342} The group helped restore the penitent to Methodism and supported their personal growth process.

Wesley’s biblically based model illustrates the potential success of small groups. His small groups evangelized non-Christians and discipled converts in their relationship with the Father. His model showed how the disciple making process could successfully disciple Christians through nurturing, ministry-oriented relationships among the small group members. Finally, his model showed the potential of the small group in building loving, ministry relationships with the world.

The Navigators Model

\textsuperscript{338} Henderson, \textit{John Wesley’s Class Meeting}, 119.

\textsuperscript{339} Hellerman, \textit{When the Church Was Family}, n.p.

\textsuperscript{340} Loc. Cit., 120.

\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., 121.

\textsuperscript{342} Ibid., 122.
The Navigators, a modern missional organization, successfully applies the biblically based small groups model like those used by its predecessor movements. Each of the Navigator disciple making methods reflects those of Wesley, Spener, and the Celtic Christians by design or practice. The Navigators uses a small group discipleship model to win and disciple souls in accordance with its Multiplication Principle. The principle is each person is a soul winner, who wins a soul, and then disciples and teaches that soul to win and disciple others.\textsuperscript{343}

The Navigators expect their members to be faithful to the Navigators daily regimen.\textsuperscript{344} As part of their daily regimen, each member is to memorize and meditate on Scripture, and pray.\textsuperscript{345} Each Navigator is to be faithful in preparing to win and disciple souls.\textsuperscript{346} Each Navigator carries a New Testament and gospel tracts\textsuperscript{347} in anticipation of evangelizing one other individual daily. The Navigators follow this principle to start and grow new groups and plant churches.\textsuperscript{348}

This multiplication principle also applies to members, who serves on the mission field. The Navigators teach this principle to foreign nationals, who then apply it in winning and discipling souls. The expected outcome is foreign nationals planting churches in their native lands.\textsuperscript{349}


\textsuperscript{344} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{345} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.,11.

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{348} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{349} Ibid.
Disciple making under the multiplication principle is performed as a one-on-one activity.\textsuperscript{350} When an individual accepts Christ, that new believer is assigned a mentor, who serves as a “spiritual parent”.\textsuperscript{351} The mentor counsels and conducts follow-up with the new Christian, leading him into maturity in Christ.\textsuperscript{352} Upon maturity, the believer continues the practice of winning souls and discipling them,\textsuperscript{353} as recorded in 2 Timothy 2:2.\textsuperscript{354}

The Navigator disciple making process includes teaching one’s mentee how to pray, witness, and engage in hospitality so that each home becomes a training ground for other new believers. Navigators train each believer in a close, family atmosphere in a hospitable home setting,\textsuperscript{355} facilitating disciple making and teaching mentees how to maintain a hospitable home. Further, mentors teach mentees to obey God regardless of the circumstances in which one finds one’s self.\textsuperscript{356}

**Contemporary Application**

Mike Breen, and Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley offer models for growing healthy small groups in the contemporary setting. Their models illustrate how one may successfully apply the principles and practices of the four small group models discussed above. Their principles and

\textsuperscript{350} Sanny, “The Pathfinder,” 7.
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid., 17.
practices fit easily into Mike Breen’s UP/IN/OUT\textsuperscript{357} and Earley and Dempsey’s Five W’s models.\textsuperscript{358}

Breen’s relationships model is a model of threefold Christian relationships, relationships of Christians with the Father/UP, with others in the Church/IN, and with non-Christians in the World/OUT. Breen notes each of member of the body of Christ has a ministry.\textsuperscript{359} When Christians build their relationship with the Father by learning the Scriptures and imitating Christ’s lifestyle, they can go out into the world, as individuals transformed in wisdom and innovation. They use their ministries, as the hands and feet of Christ, to minister inwardly to other believers, and outwardly to an unbelieving world. Through their ministries to others with their gifts, words, and actions, they represent Christ, as physically present in this world. They overcome cultural challenges and transform their society through their ministries.

Dempsey and Earley list of five habits of quality groups, which they call the five W’s, Welcome, Worship, Word, Witness, and Works.\textsuperscript{360} The five W’s correlate with quality biblical content, biblical community for group members, and outward impact in the world.\textsuperscript{361} Every member of the group has opportunity to participate in group life by ministering. Group members contact members of the community and invite them to visit the group. After establishing a

\textsuperscript{357} Mike Breen and the 3DM Team, Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Force, (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2012), 41.

\textsuperscript{358} Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying, Small Groups, (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2018), 35.

\textsuperscript{359} Loc. Cit., 47.

\textsuperscript{360} Loc. Cit., 35.

relationship with them, members present non-Christians with the gospel. Discipleship incorporates new believers into the group for their spiritual development.

The small group principles and practices of the Celtic Christians, Spener, Wesley, and the Navigators resonate with Breen’s threefold relationships, and Earley’s and Dempsey’s five W’s. Breen’s, and Earley’s and Dempsey’s models illustrate the Celtic Christians’ small group ministry to the world through hospitality, relationship building, evangelism, and multiplication, to other Christians through mutual support and accountability, and to the Father by practicing spiritual disciplines.

Their contemporary models reflect Spener’s small group practices of devotion to Scripture and lay ministry, and Wesley’s small group relationships of Christians with God, other Christians, and with non-Christians, as well as his leadership development. The Navigators, whose successful contemporary practices, mirror the Methodists’, Spener’s, and the Celtic Christians’ small group practices, giving evidence of their potential contemporary application. Theoretically, this researcher should be able to adopt, adapt, and apply the Methodists’, Spener’s, and the Celtic Christians’ models to the project’s target population, resulting in an established small group that evangelizes non-Christians and disciples both new and unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation development.

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Chapter 3: Methodology

Intervention Design

The project’s purpose is to determine if traditional churches using a small group ministry with lay leadership, and employing non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, will be able to evangelize and disciple the non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted, residential communities. The methodology for achieving the project’s purpose is a two-pronged approach. The first prong is data collection on the evangelism, disciple making, and group multiplication efforts of extant small groups created by traditional evangelical churches, meeting in the target area and other similar restricted communities. The second prong is to plant an experimental small group in the target area, which uses non-traditional evangelism and discipling methods to evangelize and disciple non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in the target area. The research will determine the effectiveness of the experimental small group by comparing its results against those of the extant small groups, meeting in similar areas, under similar conditions. The researcher will design and plant the experimental small group, and design its evangelism outreach and disciple making programs, using current research and data collected in the first prong of the methodology.

The researcher will recruit volunteers from the stakeholders’ churches, to serve as the core members of the experimental small group, and work with the researcher in evangelizing the target population. The researcher will plant the experimental small group in a central location convenient for the target population. The researcher will conduct a separate training session for volunteers in Relational Evangelism, a non-traditional evangelism method. The group will use it to evangelize the target population for group growth and future group multiplication. The
researcher will use current research to design a series of 10 lessons for use by the small group in
discipling its new members into maturity in Christ by teaching them to practice spiritual
disciplines and giving them leadership training. The researcher will teach these lessons in the
weeks following the evangelism training session.

The researcher will begin the research by identifying leading evangelical churches within
a ten-mile radius of the target area, which have planted at least one successful small group in the
target area. The researcher will identify their lead pastors as the project’s stakeholders, contact
them and conduct preliminary introductions. The researcher will explain the purpose and benefits
of the project to the stakeholders and their churches to gain their buy-in for the project and ask
for an appointment to interview them. The researcher will refer to each participating stakeholder
and the stakeholder’s corresponding church in this document for example as Stakeholder 1,
Church 1. The researcher will refer to any other participating individuals in this document for
example as Individual A, Individual B, and so forth.

The researcher will seek the approval and cooperation of the stakeholders throughout the
Bookshelf], retrieved from https://libertyonline.vitalsource.com/#/books/9781483320731/.} Without their approval and subsequent participation, the researcher will
not be able to collect data, elicit ongoing constructive feedback, determine possible next steps in
the intervention implementation process, or start the experimental small group. Their approval is
necessary, as they and their churches are the likely candidates to continue the experimental small
group intervention long-term, if it succeeds.

The researcher will attempt to gain the stakeholders’ approval by meeting with them to
inform them of the research’s purpose, and to explain how its outcomes may benefit them and
their churches by increasing their membership numbers and furthering their disciple making programs. The researcher also will attempt to gain their approval by offering to involve them throughout the research process, as key participants. The stakeholders may be inclined more readily to give their approval, if the researcher includes them in the research as active participants and beneficiaries of its outcomes from the beginning of the project.

The researcher will triangulate data throughout the intervention process, using a variety of data sources. First, the triangulation will consist of interview and survey data collected from the stakeholder pastors. Second, it will consist of data obtained by administering learning surveys to volunteers, who attend the stakeholders’ churches and agree to participate in the project, and to members of the experimental small group. Finally, triangulation will include data obtained through the researcher’s personal observations of small groups recorded in the researcher’s journal.

The researcher will begin data collection on extant small group evangelism and discipleship efforts through interviews, surveys, and discussions with the stakeholder pastors. The researcher will organize the interview and survey data to use as a benchmark against which to measure the success of the experimental small group’s efforts. The researcher will conduct in-person interviews with open-ended, qualitative interview questions administered to the project stakeholders, who, as the lead pastors of the participating evangelical churches, in the area have a vested interest in the success of small groups in the target area. Further, they have a vested interest in the project’s overall results, as the intervention’s purpose is to learn if a small group is

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an effective method for their churches to use in evangelizing and discipling residents of a closed community such as the target area.

The in-person interview method has several advantages. First, it will involve stakeholders in the research and the data collection process, during the initial round of data collection. It will serve to identify the stakeholders’ interests and perspectives rather than those of the researcher. The questionnaire will elicit data from the stakeholders about their churches’ small group efforts, successes, and failures in the target area. It also will provide the stakeholders an opportunity to advise the researcher on how to proceed with the intervention. This information will serve to shape the intervention’s overall design and application.

Finally, the stakeholders’ responses may introduce a line of questioning unanticipated by the researcher. This will give the researcher an opportunity to ask related impromptu questions to enrich the data collection process. However, the researcher will need to be wary of tangential questions and responses, which may lead distract the researcher from the questionnaire’s focus.

Later, as the intervention progresses, should it be necessary to the project, the researcher will administer a survey to the stakeholders. The survey will fill a dual purpose. First, it will increase the data pool with constructive feedback from the stakeholders. This new data may help the researcher monitor the direction the intervention is taking and ensure it is following the action plan. Second, it will serve as a means of verifying whether information collected from the stakeholders in the initial interview phase is relevant to the intervention’s later stages.\textsuperscript{365} This second round of data collection will enable the researcher to amend the intervention to meet any unforeseen issues that may arise during the intervention process such as challenges in conducting

\textsuperscript{365} Stringer, \textit{Action Research}, 4\textsuperscript{th} Ed., 118.
surveys and recruiting volunteers to participate in planting the experimental small group. The researcher also will include the stakeholder pastors in assessing the intervention’s progress.

The intervention design will follow Tim Sensing’s detailed, twelve-step pattern. First, the project’s purpose is to create a non-traditional small group ministry in The Oaks, a restricted residential subsection of the Cane Bay Plantation development. The project’s objectives are to establish a self-regulating, self-supporting, and self-propagating small group ministry, which The Oaks residents ultimately will lead, and which will multiply into other groups under their leadership. As the experimental small group neither uses a traditional church building for disciple making nor traditional evangelism methods, it will be able to operate within the parameters of the subsection’s physical design and the homeowner’s associations restrictions.

The researcher will plant the experimental small group, using best practices gleaned from the literature review and the stakeholder interviews, being careful to avoid any unsuccessful practices identified the stakeholders. The group’s core members will come from the evangelical churches involved in the project. The group leader eventually will come from the core group as the group grows and multiplies. The volunteers ideally will be residents of the target area, and join the group, after receiving permission from their pastors. Target area residents, who attend the group will become additional group members, whose membership contributes to the group multiplying as it grows.

As indicated above, the researcher will teach the small group core members how to evangelize the target population, using Relational Evangelism, a non-traditional evangelism method. The researcher and the core members will disciple new Christians and unchurched

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Christians in living holy and godly lives, in impacting their communities for Jesus, and in developing into leaders, who eventually will plant other small groups in the target area. The small group agenda will include worship, prayer, Scripture reading, Bible studies, and lessons in members meeting each other’s spiritual and temporal needs as well as those of the target population in the community. Because one of the participating churches will adopt the experimental small group, these activities will support and enhance group member participation in the stakeholder church, not supplant it.

Second, the researcher will describe how the intervention’s tasks support the project’s purpose and objectives. There are six identified tasks to support the project. The first three tasks involve the stakeholders and the target population. They are identifying the stakeholders along with the target area and target population, interviewing the stakeholders for the purpose of collecting data, and using data to aid in advancing the project.

The next three tasks focus on the intervention. They are the intervention for evangelism and disciple making, implementing the project, and eliciting ongoing feedback from the stakeholders to ensure a successful intervention and project conclusion. These tasks provide the means to shape the intervention in accordance with stakeholders’ needs and perspectives, and the methods for the researcher to implement the intervention, including record keeping.

In the third step, the researcher will identify and discuss the six tasks needed for each intervention step. The first task is to identify the stakeholders. The researcher will identify the leading, traditional evangelical churches, meeting within a ten-mile radius of the target area, which have planted at least one small group in the target area. The researcher then will identify those churches lead pastors as the stakeholders and contact them for an appointment to interview them for data collection. Interviewing each stakeholder in the privacy of his office will
contribute to creating an atmosphere that encourages the stakeholders to share their group planting successes and failures, along with other data relevant to the project intervention.

As the second task, the researcher will conduct stakeholder interviews. The researcher will generate the interview questionnaire for the interview process, as indicated above. The researcher will meet the stakeholders and record their responses, using a field notes process. The researcher may electronically record the interviews if the pastors agree. In lieu of electronically recording the interviews, the researcher may provide a copy of the interview notes to each stakeholder for final approval. Once approved, the researcher will use the data from the stakeholder interviews to implement the intervention.

Third, the researcher will analyze the data collected, during the stakeholder interviews. The researcher will sort, organize, and analyze the data by identified themes, which appear as question categories in the stakeholder interview questionnaire. Refer to Appendix A. The researcher will use appropriate organization\textsuperscript{367} to identify and record the themes with their related data items. The researcher then will assign each theme to one of the project’s two main categories, evangelism and disciple making.\textsuperscript{368} The researcher will organize the data in each category in implementation order, using a step by step progression. As the final step, the researcher will use the categorized data as the foundation for implementing the intervention. This process occurs in the fourth task below.

As the fourth task the researcher will plan for evangelism and disciple making among the target population identified in the research stage. The researcher and any volunteers will use


\textsuperscript{368} Ibid.
Relational Evangelism as the non-traditional method for evangelizing the target population.\textsuperscript{369} The researcher will download a free, online Relational Evangelism training PowerPoint to use in instructing the volunteers in conducting Relational Evangelism. The researcher will write a disciple making instructional curriculum, as a series of outline lesson plans, to use for disciple making in the experimental small group. The researcher will incorporate components of the Navigator model for mentoring believers.\textsuperscript{370}

The researcher will collaborate with the stakeholders in recruiting volunteers to join the small group, and then train them in Relational Evangelism, during an initial ninety-minute training session. The researcher also will train the volunteers in using a journal, or after-action notebook to keep written records of all their evangelism efforts. Their notebooks will be the basis for the researcher to debrief the volunteers on their evangelism progress and to determine next steps in the evangelism process. The researcher will provide the volunteers resources needed for evangelism, including Relational Evangelism training materials and notebooks.

Having identified the evangelism and disciple making components of the intervention, the researcher will proceed with planting the experimental small group. The experimental small group will meet at the researcher’s home in the target area. The researcher’s home is a centralized location convenient to the target population for evangelizing, to the volunteers for training, and to the community for conducting small group meetings. The researcher will defer to the volunteers to designate a day and a time for conducting the small group meetings. The researcher will inform stakeholders of these and all other decisions made by the researcher and the volunteers.


The researcher will maintain a written record of the volunteers’ evangelism efforts, separate from their records. The researcher will record the contact information of those evangelized, those who became new Christians, and unchurched Christians contacted during the outreach. The researcher also will maintain a written record of the small group meetings, including attendance, group activities, and who conducted each group activity. Ideally, group members will alternate in conducting meeting and ministry activities, so all members have opportunities to lead the small group and use their spiritual gifts. Following the initial ten discipleship lessons taught by the researcher, the researcher in collaboration with the stakeholder pastor, whose church sponsors the small group, will select one of the leading volunteers to assume the group’s leadership.

The fifth task is for the researcher to implement the intervention. The researcher will recruit volunteers from stakeholder churches to serve in planting the small group. The researcher will instruct volunteers in the intervention and make the aware of intervention timelines. The researcher will provide training for the volunteers to familiarize them with the project’s purpose, objectives, plans, and timelines. The researcher will guide and support the volunteers in implementing the intervention according to its timelines.

The researcher in collaboration with the volunteers will establish a weekly follow-up meeting. During the meeting, the researcher will debrief the previous weeks activities with the volunteers and formulate plans for the upcoming week. The researcher will keep an after-action notebook throughout the implementation process, making entries immediately following activities, which include minutes from the weekly follow-up and debriefing meetings.

Having completed the preparatory work and following the establishment of the small group meetings, the researcher and volunteers will engage in relational evangelism. They will
reach out to non-Christians and unchurched Christians they encounter within their fields of influence throughout the target area. They will invite any new Christians and the unchurched Christians to attend small group meetings. There the new members will receive instruction on spiritual disciplines, as indicated above. It is important that the researcher and volunteers encourage any non-Christians, who are interested in attending the small group meetings to do so. Small groups can serve as a venue for disciple making and evangelism.

The sixth and final task is to elicit ongoing feedback from the stakeholders. This ensures the continued participation of the stakeholders in the intervention process. Their feedback will help the researcher successfully implement and conclude the intervention. During the initial stakeholders’ interviews, and throughout the implementation process as needed, the researcher will arrange to meet with the stakeholder pastors for follow-up meetings. During these meetings, the researcher will update them on the implementation’s progress and elicit their constructive feedback to amend the intervention as needed. The researcher will continue this practice as an on-going process, until the intervention’s completion and the writing of the final report.

The researcher will complete the final report as a convenience to the stakeholders. Once written, the researcher will submit the report to the stakeholders for their review. The researcher will encourage the stakeholders to make any corrections or amendments to the report before writing the final copy. The researcher will distribute the report to the stakeholders and incorporate it into the project’s reported results.

Returning to Sensing’s twelve steps, the fourth step is the identification of the people involved in the intervention, including secondary groups. The primary group of people involved in the project includes the researcher, the stakeholder pastors, and any volunteers, who agree to
join in implementing the intervention. The secondary group of people includes new and unchurched Christians, who join the group along with their families.371

The researcher will address the issue of childcare as it arises. As the group grows and more adults bring their children, the group members collectively can address the issue of childcare. The group may choose to change its venue, if needed, to accommodate the increasing numbers of families with younger children or remain at its initial location.

The places where the intervention’s activities will occur, Sensing’s fifth step, include the locations of the initial stakeholder interviews. The researcher will conduct the interviews in the stakeholder pastors’ offices. Evangelism will occur in the researcher’s and volunteers’ areas of influence, both public and private, throughout the target area. The small group meeting location is flexible. The group may meet in the researcher’s home, the homes of any volunteers, who live in the target area, or the homes of the target population, who join the group.

In the sixth step, the researcher will identify intervention timelines and their duration. The researcher will generate intervention timelines for specific research activities, including timelines for stakeholder interviews, data analysis, a mid-way survey, periodic assessments of the intervention’s progress, and the final report. The researcher describes the timelines in the section below on the intervention’s implementation.

In the seventh step, the researcher will address ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality. The names of the stakeholders, their churches, the volunteers, if any, and all others, who participate in the intervention will remain confidential. The researcher will identify participating churches by assigning them corresponding numbers so their names are known only to the researcher. The completed project thesis appendices will contain a copy of the informed

371 Sensing, Qualitative Research, 84.
consent and confidentiality statement. Refer to Appendix B. The researcher will inform stakeholders, any volunteers, and other intervention participants of these consent and confidentiality measures, when recruiting them for the intervention process.

The resources required for the intervention are the eighth step. The resources include an interview questionnaire, the researcher’s notebook for recording interview responses, documents required by the Internal Review Board, secondary online surveys the researcher may need, and a disciple making curriculum, which the researcher will use to instruct Christians in the spiritual disciplines of worship, Bible study, Scripture memorization, fasting, prayer, fellowship, and evangelism.\textsuperscript{372} Refer to Appendix D for IRB approval.

The types of data collected, the ninth step, includes the names and contact information of the stakeholder pastors, their churches, and any volunteers. Data will include changeable information like the numbers and identities of individuals, who become new Christians and all those, who choose to attend the small group. Collected data also will include information that is difficult to gather and measure like data gathered through observations, and the feelings and attitudes of participants.\textsuperscript{373} The researcher will record this data in the researcher’s journal and include it in the project’s reported results.

A primary concern is the quality of the data collected, during the initial interviews of the stakeholder pastors. This data should include information on any groups the participating churches started, the steps the followed in planting and growing their groups, successes they may have had with their groups, and any efforts, which proved unsuccessful. The researcher can use

\textsuperscript{372} Sanny, “The Pathfinder,” 11.

\textsuperscript{373} Sensing, \textit{Qualitative Research}, 79.
this data to identify the best practices the stakeholders and their churches implemented in their small group endeavors and include them in the project intervention.

The next step is the identification of the tools needed for gathering information. The researcher will need documents required and approved by the Internal Review Board, journals or after-action notebooks, data from the stakeholders on their churches’ efforts at planting small groups, data tables to record and organize data derived from both the preliminary interviews and learning surveys. The researcher regularly will record observations in a journal. The researcher may elect to administer the learning surveys either through email directly to volunteer participants at small group meetings and tabulate the results manually, or administer the learning surveys through an online platform such as Survey Monkey, which has an 85% reliability rating.

Following the identification of needed tools, in eleventh step, the researcher needs to set the protocols for using the tools identified in the tenth step. The first protocol is the guarantee of participants’ confidentiality, as specified above. This includes the confidentiality of all, who take the learning survey. In accordance with Internal Review Board protocols, the researcher will collect and store participants’ data in a manner that preserves their anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher will store electronically acquired data on a password protected computer and lock hard copy data in a metal filing cabinet for which only the researcher has the key.

The researcher will create and follow a training protocol with volunteers. The researcher may train volunteers in the comfort and privacy of the researcher’s home, or at a location

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374 Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

preferred by the volunteers. The researcher will instruct volunteers in making and recording observations on observational tables and recording evangelism encounters in their journals for debriefing.

The researcher will set protocols for the proper use of electronic recording devices and storing recorded information. At present, there are no plans for using electronic devices to collect and store data. It may be necessary to use a recording device for the initial stakeholder interviews to ensure accuracy, when the researcher analyzes, sorts, and categorizes the interview data. The participants need reassurance that the researcher will use their recorded responses solely for the project and not play them for any other individuals without their expressed, written consent.

The twelfth and final step is identifying data analysis procedures and methods. As stated above, the researcher will begin analyzing collected data by identifying common themes among the data. The researcher will divide the data and categorize it under those themes. Once categorized, the researcher will analyze and use the collected data to improve the intervention design. The researcher will document the analyses by recording information on appropriate tables. The researcher will triangulate the data for accuracy by a three-step process, interviewing the stakeholders, surveying group members of extant groups and the experimental group, and using researcher observations recorded in the researcher’s journal.

Once implemented, the twelve-step intervention design will change the problem by presenting a tried and successful problem solution. During the intervention, previously unrecognized challenges and needs may arise, which can change the problem. Further, the arrival of new participants may introduce new needs and perceptions, changing the problem, as might the discovery of unforeseen impediments arising during the implementation.
The researcher will treat the intervention design as a malleable instrument adaptable to the changing interests and perspectives of its stakeholders, and unforeseen impediments to the intervention. Changes may necessitate revising the intervention. Therefore, the researcher needs to be flexible in implementing the intervention and willing to make needed changes.

The researcher will address any new issues or changes in the research by amending the intervention to reflect and address them. The researcher first will need to contact and inform the Internal Review Board, if applicable, and acquire the board’s permission to make the needed changes. After receiving Internal Review Board approval, the researcher will inform the stakeholders directly of the needed changes. The researcher will inform the stakeholders of the new parameters for the intervention approved by the Internal Review Board and then elicit their constructive feedback for addressing new issues and changes. The researcher then can amend the intervention in accordance with the stakeholders’ constructive feedback and recommendations.

**Implementation of the Intervention Design**

**Data Collection Sequence and Analysis Process**

The researcher chose the following sequence of data collection because it follows a natural progression from beginning to end, providing the researcher with needed data throughout the project. The data collection sequence, in order, begins with the initial stakeholder interviews, continues with administering the small group learning survey and planting an experimental small group in the target area, and terminates with direct researcher observations of the extant small group. The sequence will provide the researcher with small group planting data, access to church small group members to whom the researcher will administer the small group learning survey, access to a core group of individuals to assist the researcher in planting an experimental small group, and an opportunity to conduct direct observations of an extant target area small group.
The stakeholder interviews constitute the first step. The interviews will provide the researcher with data on the stakeholders’ churches best and worst practices for planting successful small groups. This data will guide the researcher in planting the intended experimental small group.

The researcher needs the stakeholder pastors’ permission to administer the small group learning survey, the second step, to their small groups’ members. The survey data will disclose the small groups’ evangelism and disciple making successes. The researcher will use this data to form a baseline against which to measure the success of the experimental small group the researcher intends to plant in the target area.

The researcher needs a core group of members to plant the experimental small group in the target area. The researcher intends to recruit the core from volunteers, attending one or more of the stakeholder pastors’ churches. Those individuals will assist the researcher in evangelizing non-Christians in the target area, and one of the core members eventually will become the group’s leader.

Finally, the researcher also needs permission from at least one stakeholder pastors to observe directly one of the church’s extant small groups. The direct small group observation will afford the researcher an opportunity to discover if the small group successfully follows the best practices for planting small groups, if at all, as discussed in the literature review. These observations, when reported back to the stakeholder pastor, will provide important data for decision-making around planting further small groups in the target area.

The researcher will analyze the data collected, by triangulating of the data sources. The triangulation includes stakeholder interview data, small group learning survey data, and data obtained during the researcher’s direct observation of an extant small group in the target area. The researcher will compare the data to determine if there were any slippages or silences in the data. Further, the researcher will analyze the data by sorting it into data tables, which the researcher will use as the foundation for data analysis and reporting. Finally, the researcher will use a two tail T-Test scale to
compare the means of the participating churches’ small groups and the experimental small group, eliminate bias in the conclusions, and determine if the experimental small group succeeded. The following sections contain detailed discussions and rationale on the data collection sequence and analysis.

Stakeholder Interviews

The researcher collected data from four distinct sources. Those sources are stakeholder interviews, learning survey data from participating group members, planting an experimental small group, and researcher observations. The researcher began collecting data by contacting several potential stakeholder pastors of evangelical churches in the region of the target area. These stakeholders, as stated above, are a convenience sampling of the pastors of the leading, traditional, evangelical churches within a ten-mile radius of the target area. Each of those pastor’s churches planted successfully at least one small group in the target area. Church 1 planted ten successful small groups to date, nine of which are in the target area. Church 2 planted one successful small group in the target area, which has been in existence at least three years. Following introductions and explaining the project to the potential stakeholders, two of them, Stakeholder 1 of Church 1 and Stakeholder 2 of Church 2 agreed to participate in the project.

Church 1 is a church of small groups, which meet at a central location for Sunday morning worship under the direction of the lead pastor. Church 2 is a traditional church, which operates on the attractional model. Church 2 is the lead church of a campus of ten churches planted throughout the county. Each campus church has a pastor, assistant pastors, and staff. At present, all the campus churches and their pastors come under the oversight and leadership of the

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Stakeholder 2 pastor. Each campus church has some dedicated specialty small groups to meet its members’ needs. Each campus church’s members also participate in campus wide shared small groups. Church 2, the lead campus wide church umbrellas the campus wide shared small groups, numbering 95, under the oversight of a lead campus small groups pastor, employed by Church 2. The lead campus small groups pastor reports directly to Stakeholder 2, the Church 2 lead pastor. The Stakeholder 2 pastor informed the researcher Church 2 is planting small groups with the vision of becoming a church of small groups. The pastor did not explain how this proposed change will affect the other 9 campus churches.

The researcher interviewed the pastors, using a cross sectional interview process,\(^{377}\) as they are the best suited individuals\(^ {378}\) to discuss any small group efforts and successes in and around the target area. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with each pastor,\(^ {379}\) using qualitative, open ended questions,\(^ {380}\) being careful to avoid questions, which would result in single-response answers.\(^ {381}\) The researcher generated qualitative questions, following the models given by Ernest Stringer\(^ {382}\) and Tim Sensing.\(^ {383}\)


\(^ {378}\) Ibid.


\(^ {381}\) Ibid., n.p.


\(^ {383}\) Sensing, Qualitative Research, 79.
The researcher interviewed the pastors to determine their interests and perspectives as prospective project stakeholders. The researcher further used the interviews to collect data on their churches’ efforts in evangelizing non-Christians and discipling unchurched Christians in the target area, and their successes, if any, with the small groups they planted. Finally, the researcher used the interviews as an opportunity to establish a working relationship with the stakeholders.

Stakeholder 1, the Church 1 lead pastor, signed both the stakeholder participation form and a letter permitting the researcher to conduct research through his church. The researcher then interviewed Stakeholder 1. The pastor provided data on the numbers of groups planted, the average membership, and the numbers of individuals on average the groups have led to Christ.

The researcher then met with and interviewed Stakeholder 2, the Church 2, the lead pastor. The pastor signed the letter permitting the researcher to conduct research through his church and the stakeholder participation consent form. The researcher then began interviewing the pastor. The pastor asked that the lead campus small groups pastor join the meeting, as he had immediate access to the data of all small groups in all the campus’s churches the researcher needed. The pastor also asked that the lead campus small groups pastor to serve as the contact person for the researcher. The researcher agreed. The lead campus small group pastor signed the volunteer consent form and completed the interview for the lead pastor, providing the researcher with needed question responses and statistics.

Learning Survey

Stakeholder 1, though not participating in planting the experimental small group, did offer valuable assistance towards project data collection via the learning survey. Rather than posting the small group volunteer recruitment poster in his church, the pastor said he would assist the researcher in collecting data from volunteers in the church’s small groups by
distributing the learning survey and the small group consent form to the church’s small group members via their group leaders. This was a necessary step in the process, as Church 1 had already dismissed its small groups for the summer recess.

The researcher emailed the small group consent form and learning survey to Stakeholder 1. Refer to Appendices B and C to view these documents. The pastor agreed to have participants email their signed consent forms and completed surveys directly to the researcher to insure participants’ confidentiality. The researcher and pastor agreed to a deadline of 6 weeks for the Church 1 volunteers to return their signed and completed documents. The volunteer participants from Church 1 returned their signed and completed documents well within the deadline period.

During the initial interview with the Stakeholder 2 lead pastor, the pastor instructed the lead campus small groups pastor to assist the researcher in procuring volunteers to complete the learning survey, which the lead campus small groups pastor did. The researcher met with the Church 2 lead campus small groups pastor, who procured volunteers to participate in the learning survey. The researcher and the campus small group lead pastor agreed on a date by which he would secure names of volunteers and the date by which the learning survey collection process would terminate. The pastor secured ninety-five names and email addresses of volunteers to participate in the learning survey by the deadline. The pastor then assisted the researcher in opening an account with HelloSign, which the researcher would use to disseminate the volunteer consent form and learning surveys to willing participants. The lead campus small groups pastor informed the participants that the Stakeholder 1 pastor gave the researcher approval to conduct the survey and requested their cooperation and participation.

The researcher prepared the consent form and learning survey in the required HelloSign format to send out to the volunteers, who agreed to take the learning survey. During this process,
the researcher discovered Google Mail would accomplish the same purpose as HelloSign free of charge, allowing the researcher to avoid the high cost associated with HelloSign. The researcher switched to Google Mail, created a special email account dedicated to receiving these documents, and emailed them to the Church 2 volunteers. The email included the deadline by which the recipients needed to sign, complete, and return the documents.

As of the arrival of the due date, only five of the 96 volunteers returned their surveys along with their signed consent forms. Several of the recipients emailed the researcher prior to the due date, asking for clarification regarding the consent form. These individuals thought participation in the survey required them to fulfill all the requirements of small group activities listed in the consent form. The researcher emailed all 96 individuals, as a safety measure in response to the queries, to alleviate any confusion or concern that may exist in the mind of anyone, who had neither returned their completed documents nor questioned the researcher about them. This email included a second distribution of the documents, because one of the participants stated losing the documents from the first emailing.

The researcher explained to the prospective participants the need for securing their consent before being able to administer the survey to them as a matter of protecting their rights. The researcher further explained that those, who chose to participate in the project, could withdraw from the project at any time, as the form did not require them to participate in every aspect of the project. Several other volunteers then returned their completed documents. Others again emailed the researcher questioning if signing the consent form required them to participate in every aspect of the project.

The researcher resent the consent form and survey a third time with an email subject line that read “Further Clarification of the Consent Form and Final Survey Appeal.” The researcher
again explained the importance of the survey, how it is that anyone may sign the consent form and complete the survey without obligation to participate in any other small group activities specified in the consent form. The researcher extended the due date for the submission of the document. Several others then submitted the completed documents by this final due date.

The researcher protected the confidentiality of all participants by securing their identifying information in a separate document from their signed consent forms and completed learning surveys. The researcher assigned a participant number to each of the participating individuals. The researcher then recorded their numbers with corresponding names and email addresses on an Excel spread sheet, which the researcher stored away in file on a password protected computer. The researcher saved the consent forms and learning surveys on the same password protected computer under the corresponding identifying numbers for ease of access, during the data analysis process. The researcher alone has the identifying information for the stakeholder pastors, their churches, and all their volunteer participants.

Planting an Experimental Small Group

Immediately following the initial interview with Stakeholder 1, that lead pastor informed the researcher his church would not be able to participate in planting the experimental small group in the target area for the following reasons. The church’s groups were on vacation during summer months, so there were no seed group members to join in planting the group. Further, the church has specific protocols for planting small groups. The researcher, untrained in those protocols, would not be able to plant the small group using Church 1 group members. Finally, the church has a specific leadership training pipeline. At the time of this project, Church 1 had no leaders in training to lead a new small group.
During the Stakeholder 2 interview, the lead pastor offered to select volunteers from his church to assist the researcher in planting the experimental small group in the target area. This eliminated the need to post a volunteer recruitment flyer in Church 2. The pastor informed the researcher he would canvas church members, who satisfied the criteria indicated in the volunteer recruitment, and provide the researcher with the contact information of volunteers, willing to plant the small group. The pastor and researcher agreed on a due date of one week.

The following week, the Stakeholder 2 lead pastor called the researcher with the name of an individual, identified in this document as Individual A. According to the pastor, individual A, along with other select church members, would help the researcher plant the experimental small group. Individual A had training as a group leader and experience leading a recovery support group for Church 2. The researcher would conduct the initial evangelism training session and the ten disciple making lessons. Individual A then would assume the role of group leader and continue the small group in the target area. The lead pastor advised the researcher that Individual A might want the target area small group to become a recovery group.

The researcher met with Individual A. During the meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of the project and the experimental small group as an attempt to enlist this individual’s participation in the project. Individual A informed the researcher that two other couples, whom Individual A and spouse would potentially bring into the small group, could serve as the nucleus of the new group. Individual A informed the researcher that these individuals are in recovery, were members of the Church 2 recovery group, and might commit to forming the experimental small group as a specialty group devoted to individuals in recovery. The researcher agreed.

Individual A informed the researcher of potential obstacles to planting the small group. Individual A first needed to secure spousal approval to participate in the project. Further,
Individual A was reluctant to host the group at home, as it might entail individuals, who are not in recovery, joining the group. Individual A then informed the researcher that the prospective group members needed information about the project, and if interested, would inform Individual A and the researcher of a meeting weekday that suited their schedules. The researcher and Individual A set a due date of the following week by which Individual A would advise the researcher if the group could move forward.

While awaiting a reply from Individual A, the researcher informed Stakeholder 2 about the meeting and its outcomes. The researcher also asked Stakeholder 2, as a backup, if there might be other potential seed members from Church 2, living in the target area, who might participate in planting the experimental small group as a group open to the community, should Individual A and the other prospective members be unable to work with the researcher. Stakeholder 2 informed the researcher if Individual A did not follow through, the pastor would provide the researcher with another list of names to serve as core group. Stakeholder 2 informed the researcher the names would be available within one week.

When Individual A failed to contact the researcher about the potential small group plant, the researcher phoned Individual A. Individual A declined to move forward with the group. Individual A offered as a reason not feeling as having the Lord’s permission to plant the group. The researcher accepted Individual A’s reason, phoned Stakeholder 2, informed the lead pastor of the outcome, and requested names of others to help plant the experimental small group. The Stakeholder 2 lead pastor provided the researcher with names of two other couples, who live in the target area and might participate in planting the experimental small group.

The researcher immediately phoned each couple. The first couple did not answer the call. The researcher left a voice mail briefly detailing the reason for the call and referencing the lead
pastor as having given their names. They did not return the researcher’s call. The researcher also called the second couple. The husband expressed interest in participating in the group but added he and his wife are cautious about going out due to the Corona Virus. He said he would discuss with his wife the possibility of joining the group and then inform the researcher of their decision. This couple did not call back with their decision.

Some survey recipients asked about having an online Zoom group. They cited safety concerns about the COVID-19 virus threat as their reason for wanting the group. However, due to a lack of commitment to joining a Zoom group, no such group formed.

During this process of attempting to plant an experimental small group, Church 2 suspended its small group meetings due to a government-imposed lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The small group Church 2 planted in the target area resorted to Zoom to conduct its weekly small group meetings. After three weeks, the group host dismissed the group for the summer recess.

Researcher Observations

The researcher is a three-year member of a small group Church 2 planted in the target area. The researcher collected data from observations made of that group, its leadership, meetings, member interactions and participation in group meetings, and evangelism outreach. The researcher gathered data on the group’s practices and activities, which reflected best practices for successful small groups found in the literature. The researcher also collected data on the group, where it was lacking the implementation of best practices for successful small groups found in the literature. The researcher recorded the group’s successes and made recommendations for the group’s continued success, based on the best practices for successful
A small group found in the literature. The researcher reported the results of the observations and recommendations for continued success in Chapter 4.

Analyzing the Data

The researcher used the interview data to gain insight into the workings of the participant churches’ varied groups by examining their group planting, evangelism, and disciple making methods. Then, the researcher planned to use the numerical growth of these groups to establish a baseline against which to evaluate the success of the experimental small group the researcher anticipated planning. By entering the numerical success rate data of these groups and the numerically expressed outcomes of the researcher’s experimental small group into a two-tail T-Test, the researcher could compare the means of the two sets of groups, eliminate bias in the conclusions, and determine if the intervention group was successful.

One criterion the researcher planned for evaluating a successful outcome of the extant small groups as well as the experimental small group is a quantitative analysis of the group’s growth over a given period against an established baseline. The baseline is the numerical growth in new members of the three extant groups, during their first 10 weeks in existence. The measure of success of the experimental small group is its meeting or exceeding that number during its first 10 weeks of existence. The researcher chose a 10-week period for the evaluation, as the disciple making lessons covered a 10-week small group meeting period.

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384 Gary Bredfeldt, “What is a T-Test?” (presentation, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, December 10, 2018), accessed February 14, 2020, [https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/sov-kaltura-BBLEARN/LuMashupPlayIframeWrapperResponsive?course_id_old=426797_1&content_id_old=27110101_1&playUrl=/browseandembed/index/media/entryid/1_h902kgms/showDescription/false/showTitle/false/showTags/false/showDuration/false/showOwner/false/showUploadDate/false/playerSize/400x285/playerSkin/39959781/&course_id=_572053_1&content_id=_36031234_1](https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/sov-kaltura-BBLEARN/LuMashupPlayIframeWrapperResponsive?course_id_old=426797_1&content_id_old=27110101_1&playUrl=/browseandembed/index/media/entryid/1_h902kgms/showDescription/false/showTitle/false/showTags/false/showDuration/false/showOwner/false/showUploadDate/false/playerSize/400x285/playerSkin/39959781/&course_id=_572053_1&content_id=_36031234_1).
A second criterion the researcher planned for evaluating a successful outcome is a qualitative assessment. The researcher planned to use data from the learning survey administered to extant small group members as a learning baseline. The survey would measure the group members’ level of discipleship development through their small groups. The researcher would compare that data with data acquired from learning surveys interval assessments administered to the experimental small group members.

A third criterion planned for assessing the intervention’s success is whether the intervention met its due dates, which included survey collection dates and the 10-week disciple making period. The intervention having met or having failed to meet those completion dates and learning survey interval assessments is an indicator of its success. The researcher planned to use the data from the satisfaction survey, the baseline analyses, and the due dates to determine the intervention’s overall success. The challenge to this entire evaluative process arose as the researcher’s inability to plant the experimental small group.

The researcher used a categorizing process to group and organize themes in the stakeholder interview questions and the learning surveys.\textsuperscript{385} Refer to Appendix A. By analyzing this data, the researcher could determine if there were any slippages or silences in the stakeholders’ interview responses and the learning survey responses. The researcher discusses the analysis results in Chapter 4.

The researcher involved the stakeholders in writing the report, which included data tables and analyses, by keeping them informed of the intervention’s progress, eliciting their assistance as needed, and soliciting their evaluation of the finished document. This ensured the inclusion of

\textsuperscript{385} Stringer, Action Research, 4th Ed., 141-142.
the stakeholders’ perspectives and priorities in reporting intervention outcomes, and contributed to triangulating the evidence.

The amount of stakeholder involvement depended on their availability and the needs of the intervention. The researcher strove to involve the stakeholders as much as possible throughout the intervention process. The stakeholders accommodated the researcher in person as much as their schedules permitted. Where their schedules prevented them from in person meetings, the stakeholders communicated with the researcher by phone and email.

The researcher initiated the meetings and other contact with the stakeholders and assumed the responsibility of writing the initial report. The researcher incorporated the final report into the discussion of the project’s results in Chapter 4, having received stakeholder approval of the report’s contents. In addition to intervention procedures, data tables, and data analyses, the report stated the degree to which the intervention was successful.

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Chapter 4: Results

Supporting the Thesis

The greater weight of the project results supports the thesis. However, the results also demonstrate a need for further research, as some project interventions’ results are inconclusive. Those results, which are inconclusive, are inconclusive due to design flaws in some intervention documents, and external factors beyond the researcher’s control. Those flaws became evident as the intervention process unfolded.

Results, which support the thesis, derive from the study of small group data gleaned from stakeholder pastor interviews and researcher observations. The supporting results show the success of the small groups of the churches, participating in this project, is due to their adoption and implementation of the best practices for successful small groups found in the literature. The report discusses the data and the churches best practices. Based on the project’s results, the researcher finds traditional churches, using a small group ministry with lay leadership, and employing non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, can evangelize and disciple non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted communities.

Stakeholder Interviews Results

Data from the stakeholder interviews supports the thesis, while demonstrating the need for further research, because some needed data was unavailable. Data in some instances was unavailable on the numbers of individuals introduced to the gospel through the small groups. Subsequent data as to how the salvation of those individuals through small groups impacted the growth of their sponsoring churches also was unavailable.
Two, evangelical churches local to the target area, participated in the research project. Church 1 is a church of small groups with Sunday morning services, serving as community meetings for members of its several small groups. Table 4.1 contains data obtained during the Church 1 Stakeholder 1 interview, which depicts the growth of the church’s small groups and its own growth due to the small group growth. The data indicates the church has successfully used small groups to evangelize the residents of the target area, resulting in small group multiplication and the church’s overall numerical growth, as a church of small groups.

**Table 4.1. Church 1 Stakeholder 1 Interview: Small Group Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Category</th>
<th>Year 2018</th>
<th>Year 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main/Mother Church Average Attendance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Main/Mother Church Members</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Main/Mother Church Members Saved</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Water Baptisms all Church Small Groups</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Small Groups</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Small Group Attendance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Members per Small Group (Avg.)</td>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Small Groups in Cane Bay</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Small Groups Created in Cane Bay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Individuals Saved per Small Group (Avg.)</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lead pastor reported the church’s small groups have been successful to the degree that they provide the greater ministry focus for the church’s members. The data table supports the pastor’s report by illustrating more people attend the church’s small groups than attend its Sunday morning service. The Church 1 Stakeholder 1 Interview data reveals the church has 274 members regularly meeting in groups, while 250 individuals regularly attend Sunday services. The data table further indicates over a two-year period, the small group evangelism outreach
increased church membership numbers by 2-3 people per group, per year. The addition of the new believers to each group contributed to the church’s small group multiplication.

Each fall season, the church holds a missional meeting, which acts as a small group fair. This meeting introduces the church’s small groups to the general church membership. The church’s members become acquainted with its several groups and select a group to join. Additionally, the church conducts Connect Classes for new commers, which serve to introduce them into the congregation, where they become acquainted with the church’s small groups.

Church 1 has been planting small groups for 8 years. It planted 10 groups by the time of this investigation. Nine of the small groups exist in the target area. The church is deliberative in its small group planting process. The church plants small groups in the target area based on identified community needs. The church designs the small group around the needs of the community members it serves. The church chooses small group leaders carefully, and trains them specifically for small group leadership, using a leadership pipeline program.

The pastor emphasized the church will not plant a small group unless it has available leaders, trained to plant, and lead a small group. Church leadership selects and trains small group leaders based on candidates’ missional visions, and spiritual growth and development. The source for small group leaders is the Huddle.

A Huddle is an organic group of 2-3 people, which meet weekly. During Huddle meetings, the leader conducts a spiritual devotion for the members, which concludes with Bible journaling. The members write their thoughts and any insights received from reading and discussing the Scriptures, during the devotional time. Church leaders review journal entries of prospective group leaders as part of assessing their spiritual growth and development, during the leadership selection process.
Once selected, prospective leaders receive training in their respective Huddles. Those ready for leadership become assistant leaders in extant small groups, a practice like on the job training. Once trained, the new leaders move on to plant small groups.

Small group leadership consists of a group leader, usually a couple, assistant leaders, also usually a couple, and a host. The host opens his or her home, as the venue for the meeting. As the group’s meeting place rotates periodically among its members homes, the host changes with the meeting venue, while the group’s leaders remain the same.

In addition to considering the needs of the target community, when planting a small group, leaders also consider the proposed group’s proximity to the church. The groups are people focused, concentrating on meeting group members’ needs. Once planted, the small group leaders work to build a consistency of relationships among their group members. The church is careful to avoid focusing on itself rather than the groups, on weekly Sunday church meetings, and on meeting its needs over those of the groups and their members.

There are two sets of goals per group, overarching church goals, and individual small group goals. The overarching church goal, determined by the church, applies to everyone in the communities the groups serve. The overarching goal is to offer multiple opportunities for all residents in the target area to hear and receive the gospel. The groups’ evangelism techniques include non-traditional methods such as Relational Evangelism and a variety of other evangelism methods suitable to the individuals and communities the small groups serve. Individual small group goals are determined by the group, based on the group’s and its community’s needs.

The lead pastor notes the church uses its small groups for discipleship training. The group leaders disciple members, using materials prepared by the pastor, based on that week’s sermon, and disseminated to the group leaders. This centralized method of material development and
dissemination provides continuity of instruction among the church’s several groups. The discipleship goal is spiritual maturity of the group members. As the researcher was unable to collect learning surveys directly from most small group members, as the church had dismissed its groups by the time the researcher conducted the intervention, the researcher was unable to determine the level of spiritual development of the majority of the small group members.

Each small group is approximately 12-15 members, with 2-3 individuals on average becoming born-again Christians annually. However, the church determines if a group is successful by examining the group’s impact on its members lives rather than by the numbers of group attendees and the numbers of those born-again each year. When determining a group’s success, the church maintains its people-oriented focus. The church evaluates a group’s success qualitatively by basing the assessment on group leaders’ reports of the spiritual condition of group members. Group leaders’ make their assessments using the members testimonies of how Jesus has operated in their lives.

The church starts new groups by encouraging individuals to have and pursue their missional dreams. Those, who express the desire to realize their dreams through small group leadership, receive training in Huddles, as discussed above. Once experienced, the new leaders move forward with planting a small group. Although some small groups failed to multiply themselves, most of the church’s small groups have multiplied into other small groups. The result is the church’s current 10 small groups. The church doubled its numbers of small groups in the target area from 5 to 10 groups in two years. The church planted two of the small groups in 2018 and 3 in 2019.

The pastor reported those small groups, which did not multiply, failed to do so because their leaders became comfortable with the nature of their groups and maintaining their groups’
status quo. The pastor further reported the church has not closed any of its groups. Some small groups have dissipated, however, due to the loss of the group leaders for a variety of reasons, such as burn out or the desire to pursue other forms of ministry.

The Church 2 lead pastor, who pastors the main campus church of a 10-campus church organization, describes the church as one with groups, working towards becoming a church of groups. The following data, unless otherwise indicated, represents the main campus church, Church 2. The data in Table 4.2 displays the church’s progress in planting small groups, the results of its foray into the target area, the relationship of small group membership to church membership.

**Table 4.2. Church 2 Stakeholder 2 Interview: Small Group Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Category</th>
<th>Year 2018</th>
<th>Year 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main/Mother Church Average Attendance</td>
<td>1,910</td>
<td>1,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Main/Mother Church Members</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Main/Mother Church Members Saved</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Water Baptisms all Campus Churches</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Small Groups</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Small Group Attendance (Est.)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Members per Small Group (Avg.)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Small Groups in Cane Bay</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Small Groups Created in Cane Bay</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Individuals Saved per Small Group (Avg.)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the data in Table 4.2, Church 2 appears to be flourishing. Its numbers of individuals born-again and submitting to water baptism increased from 159 in 2018 to 210 in 2019, an increase of 32%. What is unclear from this data is the extent to which the church’s small groups contributed to its numerical growth. This lack of clarity is due to the blurring of
lines between the campus churches and the total number of small groups. Some of the small
groups have dedicated campus churches, while entire campus shares other small groups.

The main campus church and its sister campus churches host 95 small groups among
them. With an average small group attendance for all campus churches for 2019 of 12 members
per group, the data suggests the total small group attendance is 1,140 persons. The data does not
indicate how many of the small groups are associated solely with the main campus church and
how many are associated with each of the other campus churches. Further, the data does not
reveal how many individuals each group added to its membership through evangelism. As this
data was unavailable, the researcher was unable to determine the impact each campus church’s
small group evangelism efforts had on its sponsoring church’s membership growth.

Some of the 95 groups are open to all members of the communities the small groups
serve, while other groups are topic specific, focusing on specific members’ needs and issues. The
categories of groups include men’s groups, women’s groups, recovery groups, youth groups,
maintenance groups, and virtual groups, as well as small groups like the small group Church 2
planted in the target area. The main campus church currently sponsors only one small group in
the target area but plans to plant more small groups there.

Church 2 identifies small group multiplication by group growth and division, as its
primary strategy for planting additional small groups. The church presently does not have a
formalized evangelism program for group growth. However, it encourages its small groups to
engage in evangelism to increase their membership and encourage the birth of new small groups.

The church also attempts to increase its small group membership by recruiting new
members through an annual fall recruitment fair held simultaneously at each campus church. The
churches employ a word of mouth process via one-to-one contact, public service announcements
made during Sunday services, and advertisements across social media platforms to alert members of the fair. This fair presents a challenge to small group growth, as group members often rotate among the groups. The church does not collect data on the numbers of new members in a group, who come to the group through evangelism versus the numbers of new members, who come into a small group through membership rotation.

The campus churches offer a program called Life Point, which educates new believers in the organization’s tenets of faith. This program also serves to increase small group membership by funneling new members into small groups. Group leaders assist in recruiting members for their groups by communicating with prospective members via email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings.

The small groups meet in private homes, although some meet in reserved rooms at their dedicated campus church locations. The Church 2 lead pastor and lead group coordinator, employed by the main campus church, determine the overarching small group goals for all campus churches’ small groups. Each small group’s goals are discipleship of its members, evangelism of non-Christians in the small group’s community, and group multiplication. The church supports small group discipleship as part of its leadership accountability structure, which promotes relational accountability. The research results found this process promotes and maintains continuity of leadership, group structure, focus, and function. The results, however, also found the practice of relational accountability inconclusive as a means for small groups to mentor their members. Church 2 does not appear to have an articulated plan for using relational accountability as a tool for mentoring small group members.

Church 2 trains both couples and single members to be small group leaders. The church leadership selects group leaders, who have completed both Life Point and the church’s leadership
training program. Each prospective leader undergoes a background check prior to selection for a leadership position. All 10 campus churches use the Leadership Pipeline program as their small group leadership training program.

The church uses the Hub Model to organize its leaders and their small groups. The wheel’s hub represents the church. Its spokes represent individual small groups and the wheel’s rim represents the groups’ leaders. The church’s accountability model supports the organization’s pastors, all small group leaders, and small group members. This model holds them accountable to their peers and church leadership for their conduct and spiritual growth. How this model holds small group members accountable for their spiritual growth is unclear, since the church, as stated above, does not appear to have an articulated small group mentoring program.

The Hub Model holds small group leaders accountable to a group coach, who oversees 5 small group leaders. The group coach is accountable to a group coordinator, who oversees all the groups dedicated to its respective campus church. The group coordinators are accountable to the lead small groups coordinator, employed by the main campus church, Church 2, and accountable to the Church 2 lead pastor.

Church 2 and the campus churches use a Free Market Model small group discipleship structure. The group leaders may choose the curriculum used by their respective groups. Currently, the small group leaders use a Question and Answer discussion method, centered around the previous Sunday sermon. The campus pastors collectively select sermon topics and the Bible texts from those topics to serve as the foundations for their sermons. Each campus church pastor then prepares his sermons, using those texts. The main campus church prepares the study questions designed to promote small group member spiritual development. The church
disseminates the questions to group leaders prior to their meetings, to allow them time to prepare for the meetings. The discipleship goal is the spiritual maturity of each group member.

Church 2 identifies its best practice for conducting small groups as a focus on people rather than curriculum. The church endeavors to maintain this focus by avoiding the selection of small group planters and leaders, who have personal gain motives for starting and leading small groups. The church monitors the general condition of its groups by administering a questionnaire to group leaders and members. The church has not needed to close any of its small groups. However, some groups dissipated due to a lack of member recruitment and/or leader burnout.

The data from the stakeholder interviews provided information on the small groups’ evangelism effectiveness, and insight as to how the groups conduct disciple making. However, the interviews left a gap in the data in that they did not provide in-depth data on the effectiveness of the small groups’ disciple making. The researcher attempted to utilize a learning survey, to fill this data gap by measuring the group members spiritual growth and development qualitatively and quantitatively.

Learning Survey Results

The purpose of the Group Learning Survey Questions document, hereafter referred to as the learning survey, was to reveal the effectiveness of small group disciple making by measuring the depth and describing the evidence of small group members’ spiritual development. Refer to Appendix B. Its enclosed document, the Small Group Learning Survey Consent form, hereafter referred to as the participation consent form, enabled the researcher to recruit participants for the project, which included acquiring their consent to participate in the survey process. Refer to Appendix C. The survey failed to achieve its intended purpose in that its results were inconclusive. The survey’s results proved to be inconclusive due to two factors.
The first factor was a design flaw in the survey questions and the instructions in its accompanying participation consent form. The second factor was the category of individuals, who completed the survey.

The researcher emailed 96 sets of learning surveys with accompanying participation consent forms to leaders and members of small groups. The learning survey had a twofold purpose. Questions 1-7 in Part 1 assessed the participant’s understanding of salvation as it relates to evangelism. Refer to Appendix B. The next 6 questions in Part 1 addressed the participant’s understanding of discipleship, their discipleship lifestyle practices, and thereby the degree to which the small group contributed to the participant’s spiritual development.

Part 2 of the survey provided recipients the opportunity to self-examine and self-identify any gaps in their evangelism knowledge and discipleship development. Part 3 assessed the effectiveness of small groups in evangelizing non-Christians in the target area and related communities by identifying whether the small group or some other agency had introduced the participants to the gospel. Part 3 also attempted to acquire additional data on small group evangelism efforts directly from survey participants.

Of the 96 emailed sets of documents, only 11 participants signed, completed, and returned them to the researcher. Three participants attend Church 1 small groups and 8 attend Church 2 small groups. Given that the combined numbers of small groups of the two participating churches totaled 105 groups, the researcher anticipated receiving at least 100 returned document sets from the groups, representing at least one survey per group. This would provide the researcher an overview of the small groups effectiveness in evangelism and disciple making. The small number of returned surveys lessened if not negated the significance of the survey data. The researcher determined from participant comments and questions, and a re-
evaluation of the consent form the low numbers of returned surveys was due to a design flaw in the participation consent form sent.

During the learning survey implementation phase, several recipients of the learning survey and participation consent documents emailed the researcher for clarification on the instructions given in the consent form. When conceived, the researcher intended this document to be a universal consent form. The consent form’s parameters for participants both described the target population and explicitly invited individuals to join the project’s experimental small group, which focused on the target population. Refer to Appendix C. The consent form document also implicitly gave the opportunity for other individuals from the churches and their small groups to participate in the research project by completing the learning survey. As participants could withdraw from the project at any stage of the implementation, they either could join the group and later decide to withdraw for any or no reason, and without explanation or fear of consequence, or choose to complete only the learning survey and then withdraw from the project. This implicit invitation proved to be a design flaw in the consent document, resulting a general lack of participation.

The wording in the participation consent form document proved to be confusing for the recipients. The researcher needed to resend the documents two times, each time with clarifying instructions to alleviate the confusion. Additionally, several recipients responded to the clarifying instructions, asking for further clarification. This design flaw in the document likely contributed to the low numbers of completed and returned surveys.

The completed learning surveys the participants did return, did not offer useable data. The data neither supported nor refuted the thesis. Table 4.3 below displays the results of the learning survey.
Table 4.3. Small Group Learning Survey Data Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Church 1</th>
<th>Church 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Surveys Returned 11

The data reveals most participants are long-term born-again Christians. The data suggests the learning survey participants to be versed in evangelism and discipleship and presented with the gospel by some agent or agency other than a small group. This data contributed no knowledge to aid in determining the effectiveness of small group evangelism and disciple making on the participants.

Nine participants responded affirmatively to the first question and all 11 participants responded affirmatively to the remaining 12 questions in Part 1. However, these responses only reveal that the group members were discipled. The results do not reveal the depth of knowledge obtained by the group members or degree to which they spiritually matured. The researcher determined a design flaw in the learning survey questions resulted in the learning survey’s failure to produce needed data.
The literature recommends survey questions be open-ended to elicit original thoughts from the respondent rather than clue the respondent how to answer in a manner that satisfies the surveyor’s agenda. The researcher intended the survey questions to be open-ended. Upon closer examination, the researcher discovered the questions are more ambiguous as True or False questions than they are open-ended. Anyone with any level of knowledge on the questions’ subject matter would be able to answer them affirmatively. An individual with a minimal level of understanding of the content could answer affirmatively as could others, who had greater knowledge and understanding of the content. Question 3 illustrates the ambiguous nature of the questions.

Question 3 asks if the respondent can explain Jesus mission on earth. Anyone, with a rudimentary understanding of Jesus mission acquired by reading the Gospels, could answer affirmatively. Therefore, an affirmative response indicates neither the respondent’s level of knowledge nor the degree of the individual’s spiritual maturity.

To measure an individual’s level of knowledge of Jesus’ mission on earth and their depth of spiritual maturity, the question should target specific knowledge and development levels. Using multiple-choice questions could accomplish this goal. It would have been better to write Question 3 as follows, asking the respondents to select the correct response. Jesus mission on earth was to (a) heal the sick, (b) preach the gospel, (c) reunite fallen mankind with God. Reuniting fallen mankind with God is the correct answer. Individuals with less knowledge on the subject might select healing the sick or preaching the gospel, both of which are means to achieving his mission. The ambiguity of the survey questions challenges their reliability as measurements of one’s spiritual development and thereby the effectiveness of small group discipleship training.
Part 2 of the survey also failed to produce usable data. Many survey participants glossed over Part 2 without answering. Others gave cursory responses, illustrating topics of interests rather than meaningful statements, divulging their level of knowledge and spiritual maturity. The form in which the researcher wrote the question led to this section’s failure to produce meaningful data, also a design flaw in the document. Refer to Appendix B.

Finally, Part 3 of the learning survey failed to provide meaningful data due to the category of individuals, who had completed and submitted the survey. The data in Table 4.4 reveals the length of time the participants have been both born-again Christians, how many are members of a small group, and whether they received the gospel through their small group or some other the agent or agency.

**Table 4.4. Small Group Learning Survey Data Part 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years as a Believer</th>
<th>Years as a Group Member</th>
<th>Led to Christ by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church 1</td>
<td>Church 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>26-30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Reply</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No Reply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the individuals completing the survey fall into the category of long-term, mature Christians, having been born-again for more than a decade. The implication is that their spiritual growth and maturity may have developed over time due to a variety of disciple making sources, including the small groups to which they belong.

Nine of the 11 learning survey participants have been born-again Christians from 11 to 50 or more years, as displayed in the data table. The table also indicates that all but 2 of the participants have been members of small groups for 11-50 or more years. The data suggests these small groups had a positive impact in discipling the participants. The data, however, falls into question, when one considers other possible factors, contributing to the participants level of knowledge acquisition of evangelism and their spiritual growth and development.

This data does not indicate whether the survey participants attended their small groups at the exclusion of other instructional agencies as Sunday School classes and weekly church Bible studies, both of which could have impacted their knowledge and spiritual maturity greatly. The data neither indicates if their group leaders were faithful in using their churches’ disciple making curriculum nor does it indicate the academic and spiritual levels of the curriculum materials. The data does not indicate whether the group members were faithful in their small group attendance and actively participated in the learning process. Because the survey data does not reveal this information, it proved to be inconclusive in determining whether their small groups were successful in evangelizing and discipling the learning survey participants. These factors indicate the need for further research in this area, using a superior assessment tool.

Experimental Small Group Results

The experimental small group phase of the implementation process neither supports nor refutes the thesis, as the researcher was unable to plant the group. The researcher planned to use
a T-Test to determine the success of the experimental small group by comparing data from the small group against a data baseline, derived from the stakeholder interviews. The absence of this group deprived the researcher of the valuable data needed to perform the important T-Test analysis.

The inability to plant the experimental small group proved to be beneficial in a manner unanticipated by the researcher. It brought to the researcher’s attention unforeseen challenges, which may interfere with any group’s success, and, as it happened in this instance, prevent the creation of a small group. This data serves as a caveat to any, who would consider planting a small group.

This phase of the project demonstrates there are more variables contributing to the failure or success of a small group ministry model than a restricted community’s home owner’s rules and zoning restrictions, or a small group’s decision to use non-traditional ministry methods, respectively. A variety of unforeseen variables materialized during the implementation phase of the project. An unanticipated viral pandemic, a lack of participant commitment and follow through, conflicting personal interests of prospective group leaders, and the researcher’s inability to recruit participants prevented the researcher from planting the experimental small group.

The experimental small group had a twofold purpose. First, it would test if the small group was effective in replacing traditional churches in non-traditional settings, using lay leaders, and non-traditional evangelism and disciple making methods. Second, it would serve as an additional small group planted in the target area in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The researcher was unable to recruit volunteers to plant the group as core members and then to assist in evangelizing the target area residents. One of the participating churches has a well-developed and established protocol for training group leaders and planting small groups.
This protocol, which works well for the church, understandably prevented it from lending core members to the researcher for the experimental small group intervention.

The other participating church provided the researcher with a list of several names of individuals, who potentially could form a membership core for the experimental group. The project’s parameters, however, which relegated group members to individuals living in the target area, limited the list of prospective participants the church could offer. Those individuals, who satisfied the project parameters and had considered joining the group, declined to participate, citing personal goals and concerns, and outside constraints as causes for having reconsidered their participation. Others cited schedule conflicts, work-related constraints, and prior commitments reasons preventing them from joining the group.

Health concerns and government regulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic were significant factors preventing the researcher from planting the experimental small group. The government lockdown on public gatherings prevented the researcher from using a public space to hold meetings open to the target area population. Some prospective members, having considered joining the group declined to attend a small group, meeting in a private home, due to the concern of contracting the virus from others possibly infected with it.

The researcher entertained the idea of planting the experimental small group as a Zoom group to circumvent the challenges presented by the COVID-19 virus. Potential group members, who lived outside the target area, expressed an interest in joining a Zoom group. Project parameters requiring group members to live in the target area notwithstanding, the researcher considered planting the experimental group with anyone interested in joining. The researcher anticipated that once established, the group members could contact target area residents,
establish relationships with them, and help organize them into a target area small group. The Zoom group did not materialize due to a subsequent lack of interest and commitment to join.

When the researcher began planning the experimental small group intervention, the COVID-19 pandemic had not yet reached a level requiring a government-imposed lockdown on public gatherings. Consequently, the researcher had not considered the negative implications of the pandemic on small groups, during the intervention planning stage. The uncertain duration of the pandemic poses negative implications for future small group plantings, extant small groups, and the churches sponsoring them.

In his recently published article, Ryan Burge, instructor of political science at Eastern Illinois University, asks “Will the COVID-19 lead to a long-term shift in church attendance?”387 Burge’s study of church attendance from 2010-2014, led him to discover those, who regularly attend services likely will continue to attend them after the pandemic. Those, who seldom attend, are likely not to return to church after the pandemic ends. The middle group, representing the bulk of church members, who have less than regular attendance, attend services less and less over time.388 By implication, the longer the pandemic deters this middle group of individuals from attending church services and small group meetings, the greater the likelihood they will not return to church services and small group meetings after the pandemic ends.

Burge recommends pastors, concerned about decreasing attendance post pandemic, contact their church and small group members now, beginning with infrequent attenders. He suggests contacting them through phone calls, email, mass media as Facebook and Twitter, and

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388 Ibid.
The results of this study’s data suggest church pastors, small group leaders, and those intending to plant small groups, consider addressing the pandemic’s projected negative effects on religious meetings and the solutions to those effects.

Researcher Observation Results

Although unable to plant an experimental small group for this project, the researcher was able to observe a small group already planted in the target area by one of the participating churches. The researcher observed the small group had incorporated into its makeup many of the practices of effective small groups found in the literature. Those observations both support the thesis and call for further research.

Church 2 planted a small group in the target area in 2017, which the researcher attends and has observed closely. A leader, trained by the church, planted the small group. Church 2’s free market curriculum selection model affords groups and their leaders the option to use a curriculum they may prefer over the materials the church provides for groups. This group’s leaders chose to disciple its members, using materials generated by the main campus church.

The group has 13 members, including the leader and his wife, and the host and his wife, who originally planted and led the group, until this calendar year. The group has been growing steadily since its inception. When it began in 2017, the group consisted of the current leader and his wife, and the host and his wife. During the second year, three other members joined the group, including the researcher. The remaining 6 members joined in the group’s third year.

Most group members are retirees. Only the host and his wife satisfy the project’s target group parameters of parents or other adult caregivers under the age of 40 with school-aged children. Twelve members are members of the main campus church. One group member, who

lives in the target area, attends one of the other campus churches. Eleven of the group members are born-again Christians. The researcher observed one couple, who does not yet profess to be born-again, lives in the target area, and attends both the main campus church and the small group. All but two couples live in the target area. None of the born-again group members responded affirmatively to the gospel either through attending this group or due to any evangelism outreach by the group’s members.

The group meets weekly from 7:00-9:00PM at the host’s home. The meetings converted over from in-person attendance to Zoom meeting participation, when the COVID-19 pandemic brought an end to public gatherings. It was at this time Church 2, its campus churches, and their groups resorted to online services and group meetings. One of the couples, living outside the target area, hosted this group as a Zoom meeting. Approximately three weeks after the Zoom meetings began, the host dismissed the group for summer recess, including the Zoom meetings.

When the group is in session, members seem to enjoy their social interaction with each other, during the pre-meeting, half-hour refreshment period. The host provides the refreshments for the members. Occasionally, other members contribute food items to the refreshment table. The members also seem to get along well with each other during group meetings. They respect each other and each other’s opinions and seem to value the opportunity for all members to participate in discussions.

The leader convenes the meeting by welcoming the members and engaging them in some casual, pre-lesson conversation. He continues the meeting by referring the members to the previous Sunday’s sermon and Bible text, the latter of which he reads aloud for the group. The campus church pastors deliver their messages on the same Bible passage. This makes it
convenient for members of one campus church to attend and participate in group discussions in a
group sponsored by another campus church.

The leader conducts the meeting using a set of sermon-based questions provided by the
main campus church. The leader either asks a question about the sermon text or the sermon, and
then opens the floor for discussion. The leader encourages all members to offer their insights and
personal experiences, as they relate to the sermon. The meeting ends with a concluding prayer by
the leader or another volunteering group member, who first accepts prayer requests from the
members, and then prays for them during the closing prayer.

The researcher observed there are several practices of effective small groups this group
could incorporate to insure it becomes a more successful and multiplying small group. They are
on-site training for prospective leaders, evangelism for multiplication, and a new believer
mentoring program. The absence of these practices does not necessarily forecast a negative
future for the group, but their absence, according to the literature, lessens the group’s likelihood
for success. Their absence also prevents the researcher or any observer from evaluating the
group’s overall effectiveness in evangelizing and discipling the target area residents. The
adoption or exclusion of these practices would require further research on this group.

The group needs to engage in evangelism outreach to bring non-Christian and
unchurched Christian target area residents into the group, as there is no evidence that this group’s
members engage in evangelism outreach to their neighbors or community. Other than the host
couple, who have invited some of their neighbors to attend the meetings, the researcher is
unaware of any other group members having invited guests to the meetings. Further observation
indicates the group neither offers in-session nor extra-session evangelism training to its
members. This does not suggest that no individual member evangelism outreach takes place, only that there is no evidence of an organized outreach by the group.

The group leaders need to invite and train prospective leaders to plant and lead other small groups, which might result from this group’s potential multiplication. The founding leader announced he would hand over the group’s leadership to the current leader this calendar year, for unspecified reasons. The founding leader did not train the new leader. The new leader and his wife, however, appear to be capable leaders. The leader seems to know and understand the Scriptures, has extensive knowledge of evangelical theology, and appears to be an apt teacher. His wife, who is known among group members to live a godly lifestyle, serves as a role model for the other group members.

The group needs to incorporate a mentoring program for believers, who either are recent converts to Christianity or less spiritually mature than other group members. As in the section discussing stakeholder interview data, Church 2 holds all group members relationally accountable to each other and to their small group leaders as a matter of practice. This extant practice gives the group ready access to a mentoring model. The group, in collaboration with church leadership could implement this practice successfully in the group.

None of the group members has completed the Learning Survey. Before the researcher was able to administer the learning survey to the entire group, the group dismissed due to the COVID-19 lockdown. One of the group members agreed to complete the learning survey via email but did not follow through with it. Based on this collection of data, it is difficult to determine the members’ level of discipleship growth and maturity or the extent of their outreach into the surrounding community.
Regardless of the group’s need to adopt and incorporate additional key elements for successful small groups into its repertoire, the data and the research suggest this group has potential for growth and multiplication. The group’s leaders founded it using many of the successful practices discussed in the literature for healthy groups. The members faithfully attend meetings, and the leadership cares for the members. If encouraged to incorporate further practices for successful small groups, this group likely could grow and multiply. Left in its present condition, however, it is possible the members may become satisfied with the group’s nature and focus on maintaining its status quo.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Replicating the Project

Comparing Results with Similar Situations

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to determine if traditional churches using a small group with lay leaders, and employing non-traditional evangelism and discipleship methods, can evangelize and disciple the non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted, residential communities. The project examined small group effectiveness in evangelism, discipleship, small group leadership training, and group multiplication.

The researcher found no other similar situations with which to compare the project’s results. When writing the literature review for this project, the researcher searched several online university databases to find similar studies done under similar conditions. Although there were other studies performed on small group ministries, none of those studied small group ministry as vehicles for evangelizing non-Christian and discipling new and unchurched Christians living in restricted residential communities. There may be researchers interested in studying the effectiveness of a small group ministry in restricted residential communities. They may apply this study independently or in collaboration with traditional churches interested in using small groups to minister in restricted residential communities like the community described in this research project.

Replicating the Research in Similar Situations

Other researchers may replicate this research project in a similar, restricted community situation by following the steps presented in the methodology section of this project document.
Refer to Chapter 3. Any researchers, who choose to follow this project’s methodology, need to review the several, unforeseen variables with potential to impact their research negatively, as this project’s researcher encountered and discussed in the reported results section of this document. Refer to Chapter 4. The researcher identified and described several variables, which prevented the full implementation of this project’s methodology, and altered its anticipated outcomes. Researchers would need to compare those unforeseen variables to their contexts to determine which variables might apply. While all those variables may not be applicable to every researcher’s context, it is likely that any research performed in a similar setting in the United States of America will encounter at least two variables, which the researcher encountered when researching this project’s stated problem. Those likely variables are the consequences, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and poor recordkeeping by some of the traditional churches researchers may recruit to participate in their studies.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are nationwide. Churches in many states are unable to conduct either their weekly Sunday worship services or their small group weekday meetings, because of government-imposed lockdowns disallowing public gatherings with more than 10 attendees. To counter the pandemic’s negative consequences, churches have adopted online streaming of their services, as substitutes for weekly Sunday worship services, and Zoom groups to substitute for small group weekday meetings. Researchers may want to consider they may experience the same or similar effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their research this researcher experienced and discussed in the results portion of this study. Refer to Chapter 4.

Researchers, intending to replicate this study, need to be aware the churches, volunteering to participate in their studies, like those participating in this study, may not have complete if any records of the evangelism statistics the researcher would need to measure the
evangelism success rate of their experimental small groups. This researcher needed small group evangelism data to construct a baseline against which to measure the evangelism and subsequent growth rate success of the project’s experimental small group. The project’s volunteer churches insufficient data was a significant challenge to the successful implementation of this study, as the lack of adequate records of small group evangelism prevented the researcher from creating a baseline. Refer to Chapter 4.

Further, any participating churches, which do not have adequate records on the success rates of their small groups’ evangelism efforts likely will not have data on the impact those small groups’ evangelism efforts might have had on their churches’ numerical growth. The lack of this data also contributed to the researcher’s inability to form a measurement baseline. Should other researchers choose to replicate this study, they might want to consider how to plan their research methodology to compensate for poor or missing church data along with the questions for further research discussed immediately below.

Comparing Research Information with the Literature

The research project’s results reflect the information found in the literature review. The total of 105 small groups from the two participating churches implemented many of the best practices for planting, growing, and multiplying small groups found in the literature review. Both participating churches planted small groups in the target area. One of the sponsoring churches, Church 1, planted 9 of its 10 small groups in the target area. Church 2, which sponsors 95 small groups throughout the region in which one finds the target area, planted only 1 church in the target area. Further, the groups sponsored by Church 2 implement more of the best practices than does the Church 2 sponsored group.
The small groups of 12-15 members meet in the homes of believers, living in the target area, where the small groups intended to evangelize and minister to the target population. Lay leaders, trained by their sponsoring churches, lead the small groups, both best practices discussed in the literature review. Many, though not all, have assistant leaders in training, who will eventually plant new groups, growing out of the established small groups.

The sponsoring churches, as one might expect from the literature review, select lay leaders from their congregations and then train them, using formal leadership training programs at their churches. Group leaders apprentice the newly trained leaders into mature and experienced group leaders, who train them in their groups. As the groups grow, they multiply by giving a core group to the assistant leaders, who assumes the position of group leader of the newly formed small group.

All the groups encourage their members to engage in evangelism outreach to their target area residents, as discussed in the literature review. Not all small groups, however, have reliable, formal evangelism outreach programs, suggested by the literature. The Church 1 small groups, which use formal evangelism programs, use the non-traditional evangelism outreach program Relational Evangelism. Those groups, using a formal evangelism outreach program, multiply, as the literature review suggests they would. Church 2 does not have a uniform evangelism method. All the Church 2 small groups are growing in numbers of members, though it is unclear how much numerical growth comes through evangelism, and how much growth comes by taking in church members, who rotate among the sponsoring church’s small groups.

The research did not reflect the success and impact of small group evangelism on the numerical growth of one of sponsoring churches, Church 2, as data discussed in the literature review suggests could happen. The researcher was unable to make this determination due to that
Church 2 does not keep complete data records on this matter. Neither all the church’s small
groups nor the sponsoring church keep data on the numbers of new Christians, which result from
evangelism rather than from born-again Christians, who rotate their small group membership.
This church’s small group members tend to rotate their small group membership, when the
church conducts its annual small group recruitment fair.

As discussed in the literature review on small group multiplication, the groups, which
have formal evangelism outreach programs, add new members to their groups regularly. The
Church 1 small groups in this study, which use a formal evangelism outreach program, added 2-3
new members annually to their group membership, and subsequently to their sponsoring
church’s membership numbers. The growing groups then divide when their numbers reach or
surpass the 15-member mark. A leader, who formerly was the assistant leader in training for the
parent group, leads each new group.

When the Church 1 small groups multiply, the new small group leader takes mature
members from the parent group as a core to begin the new group in another target area
community, again as discussed in the literature review. The new small group members remain
with the parent group where mature Christians mentored them. The groups in this study for both
Church 1 and Church 2, however, do not appear to have a formal mentorship programs outside of
their disciple making efforts. One of the participating churches considers its accountability to
include a form of mentoring in that each member is accountable to the group leader. The church,
however, did not describe this accountability relationship or how it operates.

The leaders, of the groups in this study, conduct disciple making, during their group
meetings, following the pattern discussed in the literature review. The disciple making includes
biblical and theological instruction. The instructional materials generated by their sponsoring
churches, reflect the churches’ theology and biblical teaching. This instructional setting replaces formal church Sunday School and week-night adult Bible studies instructional programs.

There are some small groups in this study, which have not implemented all or even most of the best practices discussed in the literature review. They appear to be flourishing, but in fact are neither growing nor multiplying. These groups appear to have become complacent with the group’s status quo and appear to make little if any effort to evangelize to acquire new members. Because they do not evangelize their communities to bring about small group growth, they do not contribute to the membership numbers of their sponsoring churches. Further, as they have no mentoring programs, one may question the level of Christian maturity they produce in their group members.

Questions Needing Additional Investigation

There are several questions, resulting from this study, which need additional investigation by anyone, who wants to replicate this project or generate a new project, addressing a similar situation. These questions are related to the areas, where research should go regarding this problem, discussed in the following section. The questions needing further investigation involve evangelism, mentoring, meeting target population’s spiritual and temporal needs, and small group sustainability.

How are small groups members trained for evangelism outreach? The answer to this question is significant, as it contributes to the success of failure of the evangelism methods the groups use. Neither of this project’s participating churches, which sponsored the small groups the researcher studied, either surmised or were able to produce information pertaining to the methods their churches and small groups use to train their members in conducting evangelism. Consequently, much of this study relegated its focus to studying the evangelism methods the
small groups used or did not use, and whether those methods were effective in advancing small group multiplication and the sponsoring churches’ numerical growth.

The next question, how small groups mentor their group members, addresses small groups’ mentoring of their new and immature believers by the groups’ mature believers. Neither stakeholder pastor addressed specifically how their small groups practice mentoring. The pastors left the issue of mentoring to the prevue of the groups’ leaders.

The researcher observed the small group sponsored by Church 2. That small group’s members ranged in years of having been born-again from those not yet born-again to others, who have been born-again for more than 20 years, with most members falling between those values. Yet, that group does not have a mentoring program.

When the researcher asked both stakeholder pastors to identify their mentoring programs, they seemed to equate mentoring with disciple making. They replied that disciple making is a process of religious instruction delivered to group members by their group leaders. This leads to two additional, related questions for follow-up investigation. If the group relies solely on religious instruction for disciple making, then how are the group members mentored in translating into practical application in the real world the religious content they learn in group meetings? Can group members mature spiritually without the guidance and support afforded them by a well-designed and implemented mentoring program?

A third question for additional investigation concerns the method or methods by which small groups address a target population’s spiritual and temporal needs. Both stakeholder pastors stated their churches plant small groups in a target area after the church identifies that area’s needs. They orient their small groups’ vision and mission to provide solutions, which meet those identified target area needs. Again, neither pastor explained how their small groups meet the
identified spiritual and temporal needs of the target population. Additionally, neither church had action plans for planting their small groups the researcher could examine to answer this question. If a researcher is to determine a small group’s effectiveness in ministering to its targeted community, then the researcher needs to know how a small group meets both the spiritual and temporal needs of their target area populations.

Small group sustainability, the fourth question, is perhaps the most critical question to emerge from this study. If the assessment of a small group’s success includes that group’s potential for sustainability, then the researcher must ask how sponsoring churches promote sustainability among their small groups. Sustainability is a critical issue for the small groups studied by the researcher, as some of the participating churches’ small groups dissipated. Their dissipation is due to a lack of interest by target group members, group leader burnout, and group member rotation, where most or all a sponsoring church’s small group members rotate among the church’s many groups in search of another group of interest. This practice of member rotation occurs during the churches’ annual small group recruitment fairs.

It is even more important to answer the question of small group sustainability, during this time of COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. As indicated in the results section above, church members, who are erratic in their attendance, during times of public good health and prosperity, reduce their regular church attendance over time. Given the long-term effects of lockdown on church and small group attendance, these small group members are even more likely not to return to their respective churches or small groups, when the pandemic and its subsequent lockdown end. If this assumption is correct, then researchers, churches, and small group leaders need to identify how they will promote small group sustainability.

Next Steps in Researching the Problem
The next areas, where research should go regarding this problem, are those areas where the researcher was unable to conduct extensive research. There is a need for further research in several areas. They include recruiting and interviewing more stakeholder churches regarding small group evangelism, planting an experimental small group, either actual or Zoom, and conducting a follow-up study of the Church 2 target area small group observed by the researcher.

The research needed a larger pool of small group data to assess the effectiveness of small group evangelism on small group growth and multiplication, and church overall numerical growth. A key source for obtaining this data are the stakeholder pastor interview. As noted above, there were large gaps in data provided by the participating churches stakeholder pastors. One of the participating churches did not keep complete records of small group evangelism statistics on the growth of its small groups or the impact its small group growth had on church’s overall membership growth. Further, that church did not keep records detailing which groups multiplied due to its evangelism efforts as opposed to growth due to membership rotation during small group recruitment fairs. The reliability of this data depends on the type or types of evangelism programs each church uses.

A researcher needs to consider the validity of the data used for the project. When determining the reliability of small group evangelism data, it is important to know the type of evangelism program the small group uses, and that method’s reliability. One of the participating churches uses Relational Evangelism as its non-traditional method to deliver the gospel to target area non-Christian residents.

Relational Evangelism is a reliable method for evangelizing non-Christian populations. This method contextualizes the gospel message to that of the hearer, as the individual
evangelizing is a member of that hearer’s social and economic context. Evidence in the literature review validates the effectiveness of delivering the gospel according to the hearer’s context.

This project’s data collected from Church 1 supports Relational Evangelism as an effective evangelism method. All the church’s current small groups use Relational Evangelism as their preferred method. The data suggests they use Relational Evangelism effectively. Those groups’ numerical growth comes from receiving new converts into their groups rather than small group member rotation. Church 2, however, affords its groups the opportunity to choose the type of evangelism method they prefer to use. There is no data available for that church to indicate if its groups are using any evangelism methods, much less using them effectively.

It is important for the researcher to note the literature review does not rate one method of evangelism superior to another, because it bears out the reliability of Relational Evangelism. Information in the literature review also supports the one-on-one, in-person method of delivering the gospel used by the Navigators. The issue is not allowing small groups to choose one method of evangelism over another. The issue is a church allowing its small groups to choose an evangelism method unknown to it. If the method of evangelism is unknown to the sponsoring church, then that method’s reliability also is unknown. Consequently, the church is unable to determine whether a small group’s failure to grow is the result of the unreliable evangelism method it uses or the group’s ineffective use of the method.

Another area for further research is planting an experimental small group in the target area under the auspices of and with the assistance of one of the stakeholder churches. The results of this study show the success of being able to plant an experimental small group depends on the researcher obtaining a dedicated volunteer core of Christians from one of the project’s participating churches. Any researcher, who can recruit volunteers, living in a designated target
area and dedicating themselves to the group’s success, may be able to plant an experimental small group in that area more readily than if the researcher chooses to plant the group by gaining members through evangelism.

A larger pool of participating churches increases the likelihood a researcher will be able to recruit 4-6 members to serve as a core group to plant the experimental group. Having a large pool of small group data from a large pool of participating churches, will enable the researcher to establish a baseline for against which to measure the success of the experimental group. This will enhance the project’s results.

There is a need for further research to in observing the small group planted in project’s the target area by Church 2. In this document’s reported results section, the researcher reported that this group incorporated many of the best practices of successful, growing, multiplying small groups. The group did not incorporate the two essential practices of following a reliable evangelism method to evangelize non-Christians in the target area and assistant leader training. There is a need for further research to ascertain if the group incorporates these two best practices. If the group incorporates them, then the researcher can observe if the group grows through evangelism and then multiplies by dispatching a trained assistant with a core group of members to plant another small group. If the group does not adopt these practices, then the researcher can observe the group’s sustainability. That is, whether the group continues to exist but becomes complacent with its status quo, or if it dissipates due to a lack of growth. Either of these scenarios will contribute to the overall data for determining the success of a small group ministry in a restricted residential community.

Learning by Implementing the Project
The researcher learned several lessons from successes and failures, while implementing the project’s research methodology. The first lesson is to expect the unexpected. Several unforeseen variables arose during the implementation process that affected the project’s outcomes. The researcher could have controlled some of those variables, during the methodology planning phase. Other variables proved to be beyond the researcher’s control. It is possible that the researcher, having considered them during the methodology planning phase, might have been able to plan around them, thus avoiding their negative effects on the project.

The unforeseen variables, which were under the researcher’s control are those variables associated with document creation. The results of the Group Learning Survey Questions and its enclosed Small Group Learning Consent form might have greatly impacted the positive or at least revelatory results of the survey, had the researcher given this matter attention, when creating those documents. Refer to Appendices B and C, respectively. The researcher would have been able better to gauge the effectiveness of discipleship learning and growth, and small group effectiveness in evangelism, using more focused and in-depth survey questions.

Additionally, more individuals likely would have completed the survey had the Small Group Learning Consent form instructions been clearer. The ambiguity of the instructions resulted in confusion among the recipients of the documents. That confusion led to fewer individuals participating in the survey process. The lesser numbers of participants reduced the effectiveness of the data the researcher was able to collect.

Finally, if the researcher had foreseen and planned for a variable outside the researcher’s control, the researcher could have moved forward with a key component of the project. As reported above in the project’s results, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inability to convene an operating Zoom group prevented the researcher from either planting an
experimental small group in the target area or having a suitable substitution like the Zoom group for the actual small group. The COVID-19 pandemic induced government lockdowns were beyond the researcher’s control under any circumstances. However, had the researcher considered the lockdown earlier in the methodology planning phase, the researcher could have canvassed a larger audience of potential recruits from which to enlist numbers of individuals, willing to commit to participating in a Zoom group. Having done this, the researcher could have planted the experimental small group as a Zoom group and realized the collection of anticipated necessary data for determining the project’s outcomes.

As a second lesson, the researcher learned the importance of planning the documents one needs to submit to the Internal Review Board to gain approval to begin the project research. When creating the Stakeholder Interview Questions document, the researcher did not include a data table as part of the original document. Refer to Appendix A. The Internal Review Board approved the document without a data table, enabling the researcher to begin the data collection process. When beginning the data collection process, the researcher learned from a subsequent conversation with a review board representative, adding the data table to the questionnaire document required Internal Review Board approval. This addition necessitated the researcher filing a modification to the original proposal. The researcher lost two weeks for data collection, waiting for approval. During those two weeks, the participating stakeholder churches dismissed their small group meetings for summer recess. This prevented the researcher from visiting those groups to administer the learning survey for greater data collection and being able to observe multiple small groups to collect small group meeting data needed for the project.

Finally, the researcher learned the importance of selecting a larger area from which to recruit participating churches for data collection and volunteer recruitment. Originally, the
researcher decided to recruit only those evangelical churches, having planted small groups in the target area. This limited the field to three evangelical churches. Only two of those prospective churches choose to participate. This limited the field of churches needed for collecting data and recruiting core members to plant the experimental small group. Had the researcher broadened the recruitment area to include evangelical churches outside the target area, which planted small groups in other, similar restricted communities, the researcher would have access to more research data, and a larger audience from which to recruit core group members.

Applying the Project’s Results in Other Settings

The results of this study might apply in any settings, where churches plan to use small groups to evangelize non-Christians and disciple new and unchurched Christians in both restricted and non-restricted communities. Traditional churches with groups, churches of groups, and churches that are groups can use this project’s results either to forecast the possible results of their efforts, or to establish a baseline against which to measure the success of their small group planting efforts. The results of this project may encourage traditional churches without groups to attempt to plant at least one experimental small group.

Traditional churches without small groups may decide to attempt planting an experimental small group, because of this project’s report of successful results and potential pitfalls to avoid. Traditional churches, considering planting their first experimental small group in either restricted communities or non-restricted communities, can use these results as talking points during their planning meetings. This project’s results may guide those churches’ leaders in conceiving more effective research methods than those conceived for this project. Knowing possible outcomes of their efforts may afford these churches the opportunity to plan for challenges they might encounter in anticipation of successful results from their efforts. They can
avoid the mistakes made during the implementation of this research project and more readily realize this project’s successes reported in its results.

This project’s results might encourage Churches, which consider recordkeeping cumbersome or even unnecessary, to review their data recordkeeping practices, because of Churches, which keep poor, or no evangelism and discipleship records, may realize the importance this data has in guiding a church’s future evangelism and discipleship efforts, especially as they relate to increasing church membership numbers. This type of data drives church growth decision-making and planning efforts. The churches may realize it is easier to set goals and generate plans to achieve those goals, using their recordkeeping data.

Emergent Issues for Future Research

A topic emerging from this study and meriting future research is that of large, traditional churches, with complex organizational structures, transitioning into churches of small groups. During the initial stakeholder interview, the Church 2 stakeholder pastor identified his church as a traditional church with groups. He further stated that his goal for his church and the other 9 churches, which are part of a campus structure, is to transition into a church of small groups. The Church 2 stakeholder pastor leads an organization of 10 campus churches. These churches, which plan to become a church of small groups, comprise a complex organization of both independent and interdependent leadership, programs, finances, property, and activities, with the Church 2 pastor at the top of the leadership and accountability hierarchy.

Church 2 is both the original and the lead church for a campus church organization of 10 campus churches. Church 2 registers 300 active members. It hosts an average 1,847 attendees throughout its 3 consecutive Sunday morning worship services.
The 10-church campus has a complex organizational structure. One church governing board, which meets at Church 2 oversees the 10 churches. Church 2 collects tithes through its online giving site and then distributes tithes to the other 9 churches as designated by the givers. The 10 campus churches share the 95 campus-wide small groups, with designated small groups meeting at the individual campus churches. The 10 campus churches participate in campus-wide special religious, social, and sports programs. Several families from the 10 campus churches send their students to the Christian academy with classes from pre-school to twelfth grade, located on the main campus church grounds.

Each of the other 9 campus churches like Church 2 owns the building it uses for Sunday worship services and small group meetings. The churches have offices for their own pastors, assistant pastors, team leaders, and staff. Membership numbers for the 9 campus churches range from 150 to 450 members per church, with the larger churches conducting 3 consecutive Sunday worship services.

Conclusion

The research project’s implementation phases did not produce the results the researcher anticipated. However, the results supported the project’s thesis sufficiently to warrant a traditional church, with or without groups, to consider planting a small group ministry in a restricted residential community to evangelize and disciple its residents. Those phases, which did not support the thesis, did not refute it. They proved to be inconclusive, suggesting the need for further research in those areas, and exposed errors a researcher needs to consider before attempting to replicate this project or attempting to implement one like it. Finally, the project identified an emergent issue for future research, a traditional church with groups, having a complex organizational structure, transitioning to a church of groups.


Appendix A

Stakeholder Interview Questions

Church Name:
Church Address:
Interviewee’s Name and Title/Position:
Phone:
Email:
Interviewer/Researcher’s Name:
Interview Date:

Planting Small Groups
1. Has the church planted any small groups in the Cane Bay Plantation? If so, how many? (If the answer to #1 is “No”, then skip to #14.)
2. What is the church’s strategy for planting small groups?
3. Where do the small groups meet?
4. How long have the small groups existed?
5. What is the goal for each small group?
6. Who sets the small groups’ goals?
7. What are the church’s three best practices for planting small groups?
8. What small group planting practices should be avoided?
9. What criteria should be used to determine if a small group is successful?
10. Has the church closed any of its small groups? If so, why?

Small Group Multiplication
11. What is the church’s small group multiplication strategy?
12. Have any of the small groups multiplied into other small groups?
13. If so, how many and how often?
14. Have any of the small groups not multiplied into other small groups?
15. If not, then why have they not multiplied?

Small Group Leadership
16. What is the source for the small group leaders?
17. How are small group leaders selected?
18. What leadership training does the church provide its small group leaders?

Evangelism Practices
19. Do the small groups conduct evangelism?
20. If so, what method(s) do they use?
21. How are new converts incorporated into the small groups?
Discipleship

22. Do the small groups engage in discipleship training?
23. What is the goal of small group discipleship?
24. How do the small groups disciple their members?
25. Do the small groups use a specific curriculum for discipling their members?

If the answer to question #1 is “No”, then ask:

26. Why has your church not started any small groups in the Cane Bay Plantation?
27. Does your church have any plans to start a small group in the Cane Bay Plantation?
28. When does your church plan to start the small group? (Go back to questions 2, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 16-25.)
Appendix B

Group Learning Survey Questions

Part I. Answer the following questions by checking either True or False in the boxes provided.

1. I can compare Christianity with at least one other non-Christian religion.
   □ True
   □ False

2. I can explain who Jesus is.
   □ True
   □ False

3. I can explain Jesus’ mission on earth.
   □ True
   □ False

4. I understand what it means to be saved.
   □ True
   □ False

5. I know what I am saved from.
   □ True
   □ False

6. I know what I am saved to do.
   □ True
   □ False

7. I know what the good works Christians should do are, and I do them.
   □ True
   □ False

8. I know what discipleship means.
   □ True
   □ False

9. I understand what it is to love God with all my heart, soul, and mind.
   □ True
   □ False
10. I understand what it means to love others the way I love myself.
   □ True
   □ False

11. I can explain the three-way relationship I have with God, with other Christians, and with non-Christians.
   □ True
   □ False

12. I know and use my spiritual gifts and encourage others to know and use theirs.
   □ True
   □ False

13. I practice at least one of these spiritual disciplines: Bible Study, Prayer, Fasting, Hospitality, Helping Others, Charity Work, and Charitable Contributions.
   □ True
   □ False

Part II. What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about? ____________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Part III: Participant Background Information – Please fill-in the blanks with the appropriate corresponding information.

1. I have been a born-again Christian for ____________________________.
2. I have been a member of this small group for ____________________________.
3. I came to know Jesus Christ as my personal savior through ____________________.
Appendix C

Small Group Learning Survey Consent

**Title of the Project:** “Determining the Effectiveness of Using Small Groups to Evangelize and Disciple the Unchurched in Restricted Residential Communities”

**Principal Investigator:** John P. Tornifolio, MDiv., MS. Ed., Liberty University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitation to be Part of a Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are invited to participate in a research study that will be conducted in the Cane Bay Plantation. In order to participate, you must be between the ages of 18 and 40, employed or unemployed, a married, partnered, or single parent with children 18 years old or younger, and live in the Cane Bay Plantation, Summerville, SC. It is not necessary for you to be a Christian to participate. If you are a Christian, you must not be a member of any Christian church or have attended church services and activities for one or more years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the study about and why is it being done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the study is to determine if a small group of people, meeting in a private home in a restricted residential community, is an effective method for evangelizing non-Christian residents and discipling Christian residents of any denomination or organization, who are not members of a church, and have not attended church services and activities for at least one year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will happen if you take part in this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The first procedure is to take 3, 10-minute, written learning surveys, one during the first meeting, a second during the fifth meeting, and a third during the last meeting, to measure how well the small group has helped you learn about the subjects discussed in the small group meetings.
2. Assess your learning progress by taking the written learning survey and choosing whether to discuss your progress with the group.
3. Influence the choice of learning topics by suggesting topics for discussion and learning not covered by the learning survey or the group leader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How could you or others benefit from this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Learning about Christianity, as a non-Christian, to have increased knowledge about Christianity to better understand one’s Christian relatives, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances, and develop meaningful relationships with them.

2. Learning more about Christianity, as a Christian, to increase one’s knowledge about Christianity, to develop a more intimate relationship with God, and to develop a more intimate relationship with other Christians, and to learn how to relate to non-Christians as a Christian.

3. Having the opportunity to track and assess one’s learning progress.

4. Having the opportunity to influence topics studied in the small group by recommending other study topics of personal interest.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Paper records will be stored in a locked metal filing cabinet. After three years, all paper records will be shredded.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in small group settings. While discouraged, other members of the small group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the principal investigator.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from small group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be...
included in this study. Small group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the small

group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study John P. Tornifolio. You may ask any questions you have

now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 843-499-8369 or

jtorrifolio@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeffrey D.

Ward, at jdward2@liberty.edu.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone

other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971

University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what

the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study

after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided

above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received

answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and photograph me as part of my

participation in this study.

____________________________________________________  __________________________
Printed Subject Name                                      Signature & Date

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Appendix D

Thesis Defense PowerPoint Presentation

A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development’s Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC

Doctor of Ministry Thesis Defense

John P. Tornifolio, Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Jeff Ward, Mentor
Dr. David Wheeler, Reader

Thursday, September 17, 2020

Research Project Background

• Cane Bay Plantation
• 4,500-acre restricted (HOA/Zoning) residential community
• Eleven self-contained subsections
• 10,000 single-family homes for estimated population of 30,000
• 1% Asian, 5% Interracial, 10% Hispanic, 25% Black, and 59% White
• Forty-eight percent of families have children under 18 years old
• 94% speak English, 4% speak Spanish, and 2% other languages
• Annual median household income is $55,290.00
• Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches serve the plantation
Target Population

• Non-Christian and unchurched Christian adults of any race or ethnicity
• Forty years old and younger
• Married, partnered, or single
• Parents or primary caregivers of children ages birth to eighteen years
• English Language speakers
• Live in The Oaks subsection of the Cane Bay Plantation

Problem

The problem this project will address is traditional churches are unable to fulfill the Great Commission in the Cane Bay Plantation residential development’s subsections, using either traditional evangelism methods to evangelize the unchurched, or erecting traditional church structures to disciple the unchurched Christian residents.
Purpose

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to determine if traditional churches, using a small group ministry with lay leadership, and employing non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, will be able to evangelize and disciple the non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted, residential communities.

Limitations

Homeowner’s Association Prohibitions:
• No soliciting door-to-door and community areas evangelism
• No soliciting door-to-door and community areas survey research

Limited Demographic Data:
• Home construction post 2010 United States Census
• Researcher dependency on 2010 United States Census
• Researcher dependency on limited Realtor and education data
• Approximate identification of target area population
Thesis

If traditional churches use a small group ministry with lay leadership, and employ non-traditional methods of evangelism and disciple making, then they will be able to evangelize and disciple the non-Christian and unchurched Christian residents, living in restricted, residential communities.

Literature Foundations

- People centered approach
- The church as effective small groups
- Lay leadership
- Small group values – culture changing
- Small group vision and mission statements
- Target groups, evangelism, and discipleship
- Challenges to effective small groups
- 10 Small Group Varieties, advantages, and disadvantages
- Neighborhood Model vs. Free Market Model
Theological Foundations

- Small groups in the Old Testament
- Small groups in the New Testament
- Small groups as vehicles for disciple making
- Jesus, small groups, and disciple making
- The Apostle Paul and small groups
- The importance of the New Testament spiritual family
- The spiritual family and disciple making
- The importance of the Holy spirit in small group disciple making

Theoretical Foundations

- Celtic Christianity Model
- Spener Model
- Charles Wesley and the Methodist Model
- Navigators Model
- Contemporary Application – UP/IN/OUT and the 5-W’s
Research Method and Rationale

The research method is a two-pronged data collecting process, using interviews, surveys, and observations, and an experimental small group plant using non-traditional evangelism and disciple making methods. The rationale for using this method is to test the thesis.

- Data collection process to reveal effectiveness of:
  - Relational Evangelism, reflecting Wesleyan Methodist, and Navigators evangelism practices
  - Small group disciple making programs, reflecting Jacob Spener’s, Wesleyan Methodists’, and Navigators’ practices
  - Experimental small group to test literature-based best practices

Intervention Design

- Stakeholder Pastors Interview Questionnaire
- Stakeholder Church Data via pastor interviews
- Small Group Learning Survey
- Researcher Small Group Observations
- Experimental Small Group Plant
- Two-tail T-Test
Research Variables

Observational Study – No Variables

- Researcher Observations on an Extant Small Group’s Practices

Experimental Study – Independent and Dependent Variables

Independent Variables – Causal
- Stakeholder Interviews – Qualitative and Quantitative Questions
- Small Group Surveys – Qualitative and Quantitative Questions
- Small Group Meeting Schedules
- Small Group Core Member and Leader Recruitment
- COVID-19 Pandemic

Research Variables

Dependent Variables – Effectual
- Incomplete and insufficient data from interviews and surveys
- Small group meeting schedule seasonal breaks
  - Barrier to effectively conducting Learning Surveys
  - Barrier to researcher observation of multiple small groups
- Inability to recruit experimental small group core members and leaders
  - Conflicting schedules and interests of core members and leaders
  - Concern of member recruits over COVID-19 infection
- COVID-19 Pandemic closed small groups
  - Barrier to effectively conducting Learning Surveys
  - Barrier to researcher observation of multiple small groups
Implementation of Intervention Design

Limitations discovered during implementation in data collection:

- Incomplete stakeholder church records
- Insufficient small group Learning Survey responses
- Ambiguous Consent Form instructions
- Limited researcher small group observations
- Unable to plant experimental small group

Findings: Stakeholder Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1. Church 1 Stakeholder 1 Interview: Small Group Data</th>
<th>Table 4.2. Church 2 Stakeholder 2 Interview: Small Group Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Category</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main/Mother Church Average Attendance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Main/Mother Church Members</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Main/Mother Church Members Saved</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Water Baptisms at Church Small Groups</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Small Groups</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Small Group Attendance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Members per Small Group (Avg.)</td>
<td>12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Small Groups in Core Bay</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Small Groups Created in Core Bay</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Individuals Saved per Small Group (Avg.)</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: Small Group Member Learning Survey

Table 4.3. Small Group Learning Survey Data Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Church 1</th>
<th>Church 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Small Group Learning Survey Data Part 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years as a Believer</th>
<th>Church 1</th>
<th>Church 2</th>
<th>Years as a Group Member</th>
<th>Church 1</th>
<th>Church 2</th>
<th>Led to Christ by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Church 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Church 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+30</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31+35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36+40</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41+45</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46+50</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Church 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Reply</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Surveys Returned: 11

Findings: Planting an Experimental Small Group

The researcher was unable to plant the experimental small group:

- Neighborhood Model vs. Free Market Model conflict
- Inability to recruit small group core members and leaders
  - Conflicting goals of potential leader and researcher
  - Conflicting schedules of potential core group members
- COVID-19 Pandemic hinderance to member recruitment
- Disinterest in Zoom small group meeting alternative
Findings: Small Group Researcher Observations

Best Practices adopted from Literature:
- Cell Group Model
- Planted in the target area
- Meets in private home weekly
- Sponsoring church trained leader
- Disciple making church materials
- Membership 13 members
- Social interaction during meeting
- Whole group participation
- Member prayer requests

Best Practices from Literature Lacking:
- On-site leadership training
- On-site evangelism training
- Evangelistic community outreach
- Group growth due to evangelism
- New believer mentoring program
- Member fellowship – Cs. New Testament Family Model; Spiritual Family and Disciple Making

Supporting the Thesis

The research results supported the thesis sufficiently to warrant planting small groups in restricted communities.
- Weight of the project results support the thesis
  - Stakeholder pastor interview data
  - Stakeholder church data
  - Researcher small group observations and best practices data
- Inconclusive results needing further research
  - Small group learning surveys
  - Experimental small group plant
Comparing the Project with Similar Situations

• Several studies on varieties of small groups and small group ministries
• Lacking studies on small group ministry to restricted communities
• Contribution to the body of knowledge for small group ministry to restricted communities

Replicating the Research in Similar Situations

To replicate the research with greater success:
• Obtain IRB approval well in advance and begin research early
• Create Interview and survey documents with open-ended questions
• Recruit several stakeholder churches, including out of area churches
• Prepare for inadequate or missing church data records
• Attend multiple small groups, surveying all spiritual maturity levels
• Use additional recruitment methods for core members and leaders
• Secure commitment from core member and leader volunteers
• Prepare alternative options to manage adverse variables
Comparing Research Information with the Literature: Theological Foundations

*Old Testament Practices Revealed by Research:*
- Small Group as a venue for leadership training – Yes, but limited
- Hospitality – openness to non-Christians and the community – Yes
- Family Model – care and education of individuals – Yes, but limited

*New Testament Practices Revealed by Research:*
- Biblically-based worship, prayer, and instruction – Yes
- Priesthood of Believers – ministry of spiritual gifts – Yes, but limited
- Leadership training – Modeling – Yes, but limited
- Small Group multiplication – Yes, but limited

---

Comparing Research Information with the Literature: Theoretical Foundations (1 on 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values, Mission and Vision Statements</th>
<th>The Navigators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values: Male and Weston; Sikora</td>
<td>Evangelism – Each one win one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision: Dave Earley; Bill Search</td>
<td>Discipleship – Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission: Stetzer and Im; Jay Ebben</td>
<td>Multiplication – Missional Focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wesleyan Methodism Group Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism – Public Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group – Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring – Class Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training – Select Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laity – “Hands and Feet” – Class Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitative – Penitent Band</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing Research Information with the Literature: Theoretical Foundations (2 on 2)

Theoretical Foundation Best Group Practices Revealed by Research:

- Values, and Vision and Mission Statements – evident in both churches
- Evangelism – evident in both churches to varying degrees
- Discipleship – evident in both churches to varying degrees
- Mentoring – evident in one participating church
- Multiplication – evident in one participating church
- Laity in ministry – evident in both churches
- Leadership Training – evident in both churches

Questions Needing Additional Investigation

- How should small group members be trained for evangelism?
- How should small groups mentor their new and spiritually immature group members?
- How can small groups identify and meet their target population’s spiritual and temporal needs?
- How can sponsoring churches promote small group sustainability?
Next Steps in Researching the Problem

- Follow-up study of the researcher observed small group
  - Observe for further adoption of best practices from literature, i.e. on-site evangelism and leader training, mentoring, fellowship, and community outreach and ministry
  - Observe for continued growth, sustainability, and multiplication
  - Plant experimental small group using best practices from the literature

Learning by Implementing the Project

- Expect and prepare for the unexpected consulting with stakeholders
- Avoid ambiguity when interacting with others
- Prepare for variables outside the researcher’s control
- Select a larger area to recruit participating churches and volunteers
- Utilize a greater variety of group core member recruitment methods
Applying the Project Results in Other Settings

Research results may:
• Indicate outcomes for planting groups in non-restricted communities
• Provide a model for planting groups in other cultural contexts
• Serve as a baseline to measure success of future small group plantings
• Encourage churches without groups to attempt to plant small groups
• Advise traditional churches of potential pitfalls to avoid
• Guide churches in planning for potential challenges in planting groups
• Encourage churches to review their data recordkeeping practices

Emergent Issues for Future Research

• How traditional churches with groups and having complex organizational models can transition into a church of groups
• How the research might be applied in other cultural contexts such as evangelizing and discipling Hindu residents of restricted villages in the Republic of India, which are closed to Christianity
Closing Comments

- The research results supported the thesis sufficiently to warrant planting small groups in restricted communities.
- Results not supporting the thesis were indeterminant.
- Indeterminant results identified areas needing further research.
- Based on this study’s results, traditional churches can use lay-led, non-traditional small group ministries successfully, to evangelize and disciple the residents of restricted, residential communities.
June 11, 2020

John Tornifolio
Jeffrey Ward

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-278 A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development’s Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC

Dear John Tornifolio, Jeffrey Ward:

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

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

Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of
continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research Ethics Office