

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

New Believers: Committing to Faith to Sustain
The Life of the Christian Church

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 DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This thesis's objective was to implement a more robust integrated program that would result in fewer people joining Cedar Crest Church and then leaving. Jesus mandates in Matthew 28:18-20 that man is given the authority to make disciples throughout the world by baptizing in the name of the Trinity, teaching them to observe everything that he had commanded while believing that he would be with them at all times. One way of validating this mandate's fulfillment is found in Hebrews 10:25 by not abandoning the opportunity to assemble with other believers through encouragement until the day of Jesus' return. To pursue a solution to this problem, a quantitative research method utilizing interviews from a sample population of new believers applicable from the master membership list at the church. Once the data was collected and analyzed, Cedar Crest followed the mandate to convey the gospel to the people. However, due to personal circumstances within the new believer's life, leaving within a year of joining was unpreventable. This research desires to influence other churches to look at their curriculum for new believers joining in the church and ensuring there are opportunities to fellowship and provide outreach to meet their needs at the initial point of unity in God's house.

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IRB Approval

Abbreviations

CAPI	<i>Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews</i>
CDC	<i>Center for Disease Control</i>
CITI	<i>Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative</i>
CME	<i>Christian Methodist Episcopal</i>
COVID-19	<i>Coronavirus Disease 2019</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

The coming of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost introduces miracles performed, contributing to the church in which the Lord added to daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:41-45).¹ Hanks and Snell state Jesus cannot transform a world without the transformation of individuals by the Master's hands molding them.² Applying this concept to Cedar Crest, a church celebrating 146 years of existence, a more robust integration program will positively impact the number of congregants that have left the church.

According to Lindsey, due to the Holy Spirit's acts, the church represents "the salt that preserves the light that illuminates the world."³ Equipped with the Holy Spirit, the new believers in the book of Acts establish an example in working as disciples. In the Old Testament, God creates Adam and Eve (Larson), demonstrating the uniqueness of humans engaging in relationships with him and each other.⁴ In the New Testament, Jesus teaches with instructions the importance of interaction in his mission.

In the Bible, a conversation (Anders and Butler) between Jesus and the disciples about who was the greatest in Jesus' eyes (Luke 9:46-48) provided a moment of teaching. Jesus expressed that within a modest child lies the key to the kingdom by practicing hospitality toward

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New King James Version* (www.biblegateway.com).

² Billie Hanks Jr., and William A. Shell, *Discipleship: Great Insights from the Most Experienced Disciple Makers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 41, <https://archive.org/details/discipleshipgrea000unse/page/40/mode/2up?q=discipleship%3A+great+insights+from+the+most+experienced>.

³ Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1983), 136, <https://archive.org/details/rapturetruthorco00lind/page/n5/mode/2up?q=%22birth+of+the+church%22>.

⁴ Bruce Larson, *My Creator, My Friend: The Genesis of a Relationship* (Waco, TX: World Books, 1986), 24, <https://archive.org/details/mycreatormyfrien00lars/page/n197/mode/2up?q=Book+of+Genesis+Adam>.

him in his name.⁵ Schnabel states that Jesus had to remind them that in being a "great disciple," a person must be active as the servant of all, which befits the group's most insignificant member.⁶ As a Cedar Crest Church member, a humble person positions themselves to carry out any assignment placed before them.

In recent studies, Bowers asserts that mainline congregations have focused on accepting worship service invitations by individuals to measure their church growth.⁷ Adding names of individuals to the church roll does not always correspond to regular church attendance. According to Milburn, research⁸ shows that 80 percent of individuals who leave the church do so within the first six months of uniting with them. Marler and Hardaway express that although the numbers are impressive when referencing quarterly growth, this does not reflect the actual number in attendance during any given Sunday or weekly activity.⁹ This researcher explores Cedar Crest members paying closer attention to those not seen in church every Sunday.

Cedar Crest Church's presence in the community should mean more than just a building with a church title or a place to have public gatherings. Wesley writes a church's charge comes

⁵ Max Anders and Trent C. Butler, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 150.

⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Vol. 2: Mark* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 222, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5389315>.

⁷ Laurene Beth Bowers, *Invitational Ministry: Move Your Church from Membership to Discipleship* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2013), 54, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=3120478#>.

⁸ Kevin Ray Milburn, "Connecting with One Another: A Step-by-Step Approach to Guest and New Membership Assimilation" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2007), 34. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1075&context=doctoral>.

⁹ Penny Long Marler and C. Kirk Hardaway, "Testing the Attendance Gap in a Conservative Church," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no 2 (1999): 2, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/3711747?pg-origsite=summon&seq=12#metadata_info_tab_contents.

from God through glorification and fulfilling a calling.¹⁰ God gives Cedar Crest a mandated assignment from the Great Commission to embrace all individuals who enter the congregation and train them as disciples.

Ministry Context

History of the church

Cedar Crest Church, located in Dallas, Texas, identifies as one built on the foundation of the twenty-five Articles of Religion as a rule of doctrine in the Methodist denomination.¹¹ Gilmore declares these articles are a condensed version of the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Gilmore shared it is based on the beginning of Methodism of John and Charles Wesley in the 18th century and defined as one that lives according to the Bible's method.¹² As a connectional church, Cedar Crest follows the mandates established by the early Church of England reflected in its procedures. The term "connectional church" refers to a unique theological and practical understanding of the local church congregation's role and its members in the larger denomination.¹³ Besides, all churches are entitled to the same treatment, status, and opportunity extended to one.

¹⁰ Charles Wesley, "A Charge to Keep I Have" *The Hymnal of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church Discipleship 2000 Edition* (Memphis, TN: The CME Publishing House, 2000), 190.

¹¹ Lawrence Reddick, *The Book of Discipline of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church 2018* (Memphis, TN: The CME Publishing House, 2018), 6.

¹² Marshall Gilmore, *A Larger Catechism for Members of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church* (Memphis, TN: CME Publishing House, 1995), 7.

¹³ John Thomas, "Rescue the Value of the 'Connectional Church'," *The Christian Recorder*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.thechristianrecorder.com/rescuing-the-value-of-the-connectional-church/>.

Cedar Crest Church emanates the Christian belief with the custom of the Apostles' Creed, or Symbol of the Apostles and Affirmation of Faith,¹⁴ recited at Cedar Crest during the worship service on Sunday mornings. The mission of Cedar Crest is as follows:

- Be the church others may see and come to want to know Christ.
- Proclaim the gospel through the preached Word.
- Administer the sacraments.
- Love one another and portray genuine fellowship with each other.
- Serve and convert the world (Moore).¹⁵

Moore acknowledges that an individual's driving force should be to develop their faith and then preach this faith to others.¹⁶ This writer agrees an individual cannot share in something he/she does not believe within themselves.

The Cedar Crest Church maintains 146 years of existence in Christianity's teachings and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The origin of the church, Boll Street, illustrates a humble beginning after encountering a series of catastrophes. First, while worshipping in a frame hut, the structure was demolished by a storm. A fire engulfed the second building, and an unstable foundation by the city's inspector postponed the church's plan to rebuild the third building. After completion, the congregation's enthusiasm was temporary when the city's restructuring committee notified the congregation, and the church would have to relocate due to

¹⁴ Reddick, *The Book of Discipline*, 6.

¹⁵ Patti J. Moore, *Training for Preachers* (McKinney, TX: Leffall Consulting, 2007), 6.

¹⁶ Moore, *Training for Preachers*, 15.

redevelopment plans for the area.¹⁷ Cedar Crest Church became a vibrant place of worship at its new location with a growing daycare for the community and regularly feeding the homeless.

In July 1989, Cedar Crest noted a disagreement over leadership would place them in a court system that ultimately split the congregation. Despite the controversy that transpired from the incident, the church continued to move forward, focusing on the Great Commission to make disciples, baptize, and teach everything observed and commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Demographics of Cedar Crest

According to data taken from Dallas, Texas zip code in which Cedar Crest resides, there are 63.56 percent African Americans, 53 percent are women, and a median age of 35 might prove helpful when looking at the probability of more than likely to be the target audience.¹⁸

Tanner emphasizes a church can minister to the community once adjusting to programs that will increase effectiveness.¹⁹ The demographics of the community of Cedar Crest represent churches of individuals who worship regularly.

This history demonstrates a gap between the church and the community where members' conversation consists more of the past rather than present outreach activities. Kinnaman remarks young adults turn away from the modern church, seeing it as nothing more than hypocritical or a place of standards and rules without sacrifice and solidarity.²⁰ Cedar Crest represented a church

¹⁷ Taken from "Celebrating 125 Years: Sustained by God as We Prepare for the New Millennium," Cedar Crest Church Anniversary Committee Manual, 10.

¹⁸ "75216 zip code Population and Races," usa.com, n.d., <http://www.usa.com/75216-tx-population-and-races.htm>.

¹⁹ Douglas K. Tanner, "From Visitor to Minister: Designing a Program for the Assimilation of New Members into the Life and Ministry of the Local Church" (DMIN., Liberty University, 2005), 24, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1408&context=doctoral>.

²⁰ David Kinnaman, Gabe Lyons, and George Barna, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 51, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=476497>.

demonstrating obedience in tithing, utilizing gifts, time, and talents. In the early days of the church, members consistently met the pastor's financial and participating obligations. During the on-site childcare center's operations, they received government funding that provided the opportunity to meet many families' needs in the community requiring assistance in financial obligations.

They had a flourishing monthly food pantry, which included feeding those in the neighborhood and taking hot prepared meals to the downtown homeless people. The church's original members took on the responsibility of investing in the community's needs through evangelism. They regularly scheduled neighborhood canvassing on the weekends to distribute pamphlets, offer prayer and invitations to attend Sunday worship service.

They had quarterly block parties and other activities to be perceived as a church that cared about the people who lived in the neighborhood. Unfortunately, actions changed, and the people renounced activities, including working with the youth. In the past couple of years, a noticeable interest has appeared in some ministries regarding youth activities. Volunteers allow young people in the church to have an opportunity to become participants in the choir, praise and mime ministry, and a children's church on designated Sundays.

The youth's involvement portrays a portion of the church's plan, including ministering to unbelievers. Participation as an associate minister requires attending worship service, but duties extend to the director of membership and evangelism, transportation, and hospitality ministry. These ministries need individuals who are eager to engage in the disciple-making process. Jesus demonstrates in the Bible the importance of selecting members to assist in discipleship as he assembled men for his earthly mission.

Since this researcher united with the church in 2002, the membership and evangelism ministry served unofficially. Cedar Crest's lack of connecting with the community through evangelizing may have represented a congregation's inability to understand and provide for their spiritual needs. The membership and evangelism committee appointed a director, and the task included becoming operational and engaging with current members and individuals visiting the church.

The Cedar Crest membership and evangelism committee's mission requires uniting all individuals into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ as the one and only faithful Savior while regenerating the Holy Spirit's power.²¹ The committee formulates a creative program to implement in the church while spreading the gospel to the community. A member's reaction to withdrawing from a conversation involving evangelism represent an issue that needs addressing.

As the newly appointed director of the membership and evangelism committee, one of the responsibilities lies in creating an easily accessible place for individuals to stay connected. The membership and evangelism ministry active web page share any pertinent information regarding all activities, including Sunday sermons and encouraging words. Two exciting observations relate to a deep sense of belief in the Bible and allowing tradition to overshadow the church's events. Cedar Crest emphasizes Article Five of Religion of the CME Church, which identifies the holy scriptures as canonical.²² Cedar Crest's views about maintaining tradition in the church may be one reason many may not see the individuals joining leave after a certain period and never return.

²¹ Reddick, *The Book of Discipline*, 6.

²² Ibid, 142.

Problem Presented

New believers experience initial unity; however, within a year, they are no longer attending. During any given Sunday, the congregation consists of an adequate number of individuals. The pastor preaches a sermon, and if the individual desires, proceed to the church's front to become a member of the church.

Immediately after verbally acknowledging becoming a Christian, new members automatically connect with a care leader who exchanges personal information and becomes a contact point if the pastor and associate ministers are unavailable. Care leaders (2 for each month) are assigned a new member based on their birth month, and the care leader provides prayer when needed, a well check call if the new member misses two consecutive Sunday services and other needs that fall within the scope of their duties. The pastor or any ministerial staff does not monitor the care leader's activities; therefore, following through with assignments is not verified, and new believers may not feel like a church family member.

Care leaders meet every quarter with the pastor to discuss the number of new members added to the role and any other information or concerns regarding the intake process. The pastor selects care leaders voluntarily, and if any are unable to serve, he appoints replacements for that particular month they represent. The pastor allows care leaders to perform any duty, enhancing new believers' experience to the congregation. The lack of accountability on the part of the care leaders regarding new believers may be an area of interest to explore. If a caring leader receives enriched training about new believers, their skills may redirect how they view the ministry.

Purpose Statement

This DMIN action research project will evaluate the reason for new believers having left Cedar Crest Church and discern a course of action to resolve the issue. This researcher examines the problem by first gathering data from the church covering the past ten years. The data needed for the thesis paper includes a breakdown of the demographics of each new member who is no longer attending the church.

The data represents the number of individuals who are no longer attending the church, and the research will reveal why they stopped. The data will provide the specifics such as name, address, phone number(s), and family members (children and ages) recorded by the church's administrative assistant. This number will include baptisms, members who may have contacted the church to change memberships to other churches, or transferred into the church. Any follow-up information by the member regarding why they left the church would also prove extremely useful.

Once the data was collected and analyzed, the findings provided a clearer picture of why new believers united with Cedar Crest and stopped attending within a year. After relocating, these individuals perceived it became too challenging for all parties involved to continue coming. Based on a shortage of committed drivers in the transportation ministry, their perception made sense. Although this was reassuring the church was not directly related to why they stopped, there still needs to be a reevaluation to enlisting members of the church who are willing to ensure individuals who need transportation and live within various zip codes. Since the pandemic, associate ministers divide up zip codes in the master membership list to distribute communion elements for the first Sunday in the month. Therefore, this researcher can apply a similar transportation ministry strategy to solicit drivers for Sunday service.

Basic Assumptions

When writing a thesis paper, the writer should present more facts and fewer personal opinions. Assumptions can replace what can be proven and reported as actual data. The researcher assumes the problem lies with the congregation and ignoring new believers when encountering each other during Sunday worship service.

Many churches may have different procedures regarding new believers uniting with the church relating to joining a ministry. They may have to understand that integrating within the congregation may have been longer than they initially thought. Once a new member starts attending class, they may learn some relevant things, such as the pastor's annual appointment or required financial obligations related to the church, which may be disheartening.

Another basic assumption views new members needing more than an enlightening sermon to commit to a lifetime of discipleship in the church. An individual engaging in the preached Word or a choir's song can be an encouraging experience. During this time, making hasty decisions can cause individuals to do something they later regret, such as becoming a member of the church role.

Finally, an assumption this researcher could explore regards to new believers invited by family members or coworkers and feeling the pressure into accepting the invitation to discipleship when extended during the service. Visitors who attend a church for the first time or make several visits can find the events overwhelming or awkward. Suppose a conversation does not take place before that Sunday regarding the expectations of the invitee. In some cases, harm can exist between members and visitors if they do not join the church.

Assumptions are made all the time about various problems and yet can be risky in research. Regarding the issue at Cedar Crest, an assumption such as concluding new believers

who have stopped attending church relates to how the congregation members treated them during worship service. This assumption would have been incorrect and could create animosity among some of the members. Assumptions can generate rumors and dissension within the congregation and ultimately manifest discord. Individuals ignore the actual results when they do not allow the opportunity to view a situation with an open mind. Allowing the data collected to represent the actual findings, then the data's validity can be credible.

Definitions

In this thesis, specific terms will be referred to, which have multiple meanings. This section explains utilizing assimilation, care leader, culture, disciples, diversity, faithful, healthy church, marketing strategy, and worship in this project. They are defined as applied to the topic and are significant in understanding Cedar Crest Church's problem. The literature review pointed to the importance of new believers achieving a connection to a healthy church and the type of environment. There was also discussion of teaching them to become faithful as disciples and in their worship.

Durey rationalizes the process of "assimilation," brings an unchurched person to a Christian participating fully in a local church's life.²³ Some of the activities might include regular attendance of worship service, growing spiritually through a personal change, fellowshipping with other believers, and contributing financially and personally in ministries. In this thesis's format, Milburn points out the importance of drawing guests into membership and new members

²³ David Duane Durey, "Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century" (DMIN., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2001), 30, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/305459514/B7636B042E094D4EPQ/23?accountid=12085>.

into active participation in the church's life.²⁴ In this manner, assimilation could be a significant part of a new believer's mind frame in the church and the reason many continue to be consistent in attendance.

Lewis defines "care leader" as a member of the congregation assigned to contact the new believer.²⁵ A care leader's duties ensure the new believer has at least one individual they know by name when attending services when the pastor is unavailable. The pastor conducts training for care leaders annually to be hospitable and answer any questions or concerns new believers may have regarding the church's activities.²⁶ Care leaders are responsible for assisting in the integration, connecting to new believers they define as necessary.

"Culture" has multiple definitions but relates (Merriam-Webster) to a set of shared attitudes, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization.²⁷ In the church environment, culture plays an intricate part in understanding individuals who need ministering. In a religious setting, a vibrant culture symbolizes the atmosphere in which a church exists.

Durey identifies "disciples" as someone who lives a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and grows while conforming to his image.²⁸ It is sometimes incorrectly interchanged with the Word apostles, although Jesus referenced both terms when selecting the twelve (Luke 6:12-16). Anders and Butler affirm apostles were one of the twelve individuals whom Jesus hand-selected to train and later respond to the work he had started during his

²⁴ Milburn, "Connecting with One Another: A Step-by-Step Approach to Guest and New Membership Assimilation.", 34, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1075&context=doctoral>.

²⁵ Reddick, *The Book of Discipline*, 127.

²⁶ Van C. Williams, *Cedar Crest Church New Members Handbook* (Dallas, TX: 2006), 10.

²⁷ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "culture," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.

²⁸ Durey, "Attracting and Assimilating," 7.

ministry on earth.²⁹ Cedar Crest responds to the sharing of Christ's message when assembling and teaching new believers the Great Commission.

Merriam Webster cites "diversity" as the inclusion of different people such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, physical abilities, beliefs, or other attributes.³⁰ Rainer suggests that individuals rarely view diversity as a positive quality in the workforce, but in the church, everyone has a function that can subsequently be a strength.³¹ In Acts 10:34-35, Anders and Gangel interpret Jesus does not demonstrate favoritism but invites earnest seekers everywhere to trust him in eternal salvation.³² In his ministry work, Jesus uses a variety of individuals who could relate to anyone they encountered. The more diverse a church is, the greater the ability to address people's different needs and not just one specific group.

Merriam Webster believes "faithful" references steadfast in affection or allegiance.³³ Whether they agree, communities associate Christians with their faith, and many tend to waver when times get tough. Duckworth proposes faith represents the courage to embrace a congregation while searching for belonging in an unfamiliar environment.³⁴ Faith for Christians today can mean believing in something without a rational explanation. When Christians are faithful, they continue on the journey despite obstacles that arise.

²⁹ Max Anders and Trent C. Butler, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke*, 91.

³⁰ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "diversity," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity>.

³¹ Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 19. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1164894>.

³² Max Anders and Kenneth O. Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 163.

³³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "faithful," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faithful>.

³⁴ Jessicah Krey Duckworth, *Wide Welcome: How the Unsettling Presence of Newcomers Can Save the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 9. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3380984>.

Macchia sees a "healthy church" as being led by a pastor and leadership team who pursue health in their personal lives and leadership capacity.³⁵ Macchia supposes healthy church importance in integrating new believers and assisting members in being accountable to them while becoming all that God needs them to be.³⁶ A disciple can only flourish in a healthy environment of the church to complete the assigned mission. A healthy church focuses on studying and sharing the gospel with others and living a life that represents the example set by Jesus.

Webb compares "marketing strategy" to churches' practices becoming more business-like to achieve growth and meet the congregation's needs.³⁷ Marketing strategy references the different techniques that churches used to attract new members. Some churches have realized that some of the avenues found within organizations, such as television broadcasts and other distributive information, prove advantageous to member growth. Webb argues others disagree and believe these techniques are not appropriate for church settings.³⁸ This researcher asserts each church must implement a method that works for them according to the community. An older generation may not adhere to technology methods, yet younger adults may want to use technology to teach and spread God's Word.

Townley reveals "worship" as a life journey where Christians meet God, each other, and themselves.³⁹ Throughout the Bible, Christians are often reminded of God's commandment to

³⁵ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 16.

³⁶ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 170.

³⁷ Marion S. Webb, et al., "Church Marketing: Strategies for Retaining and Attracting Members," *Journal of Professional Services Marketing* 17, no. 2:1998, 3, <https://doi-org.exproxy.liberty.edu/10.1080/15332969.2012.633440>.

³⁸ Marion S. Webb, et al. "Church Marketing," 3.

worship only Him and whose name is "Jealous" and is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14). When a Christian worships God in spirit and truth, the act comes deep from within, full of sincerity and gratitude for being in the presence of the Creator. When Christians define their worship experience with "awesome" or "good," this can represent making a connection to the Holy Spirit.

Limitations

There are some potential limitations in this study of research. First, the church and demographics' location provide the prospect for many new members to represent one racial background and may depict a lack of diversity. Any participants in the study have the potential, for example, to be of African American, Caucasian, or Hispanic descent. It would be interesting to discover what the responses would be if there were a variety among the community regarding the new believers who united with the church other than the African American race. An assumption made references the participants in this research will provide honest and relatively unbiased opinions about their worship experience at Cedar Crest.

Second, the contact information collected from individuals during their time at the church may be outdated, and those contacted may elect not to participate. Even with longtime members, the church has a problem keeping the church directory updated and sharing vital information when needed. The presence of COVID-19 adds to the dilemma of receiving this information promptly.

Depending on the circumstances related to their departure, new believers who are no longer attending may be hesitant to share any information. This researcher will exercise

³⁹ Cathy Townley, *Missional Worship: Increasing Attendance and Expanding the Boundaries of Your Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011), 9, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3118817>.

anonymity with extreme care since the church's individuals are not quick to provide anything related to their visit. Even with first-time visitors, past experiences in the church with the guestbook show many are only willing to provide their name and city of residence. Individuals sharing limited information make it difficult to contact for participation in this research project.

On the other hand, new believers who elect not to return may provide biased answers due to their experiences. Although honest answers are needed to formulate a non-biased conclusion, this may not be the case if an individual decides to allow anger to distort their responses. This researcher can only trust that the answers relate to the experience and not an opportunity for retribution at a specific member of the congregation.

Insufficient sample size could present a problem for this project, which can cause invalid results. In research, the larger the sample size, the more likely the results will be precise. Conducting interviews with a maximum of twelve participants presents practical responses when compiling data for the findings. However, if the sample size is too small, it will challenge the data results.

Delimitations

Cedar Crest Church has similarities to other churches when it comes to addressing issues. One delimitation was deciding the topics of discussion in the thesis. The decision connects to providing the necessary data, which would be helpful in the research process.

Another delimitation of this research is assessing time constraints on respondents' feedback. These individuals may lack a commitment to the church and may be reluctant to participate, depending on their attitude after exiting. Therefore, using this opportunity as a

learning experience, determining enough time must receive this vital information. The timeframe of two weeks demonstrates the importance of acquiring enough participants for user feedback.

Preparation of any research interview question allows an in-depth response to understand the new believer's experience while attending Cedar Crest. One question proposed to potential participants is, "what made them join Cedar Crest?" As somebody who has completed a fair share of surveys, there have been too wordy and too long. Knowing which questions to include may undoubtedly make the difference between the number of respondents and not having enough information to have a good, finished project.

Thesis Statement

A more robust program of integration will positively impact the number of congregants that have left the church. Church growth has been a common topic among many churches today and measured by the prosperity of megachurches. Tucker-Worgs assesses megachurches' leaders build churches and congregations by aggressively trying to fill a nook not being served by other churches.⁴⁰ Although there is nothing wrong with numerical growth, the focus should be on spiritual growth in the church. Jackman makes the case relating to Paul and achieving maturity in spiritual growth by increasing trust through faith and knowledge in the Son of God.⁴¹ Paul expounds in Ephesians 4:11-16 Christians must unite as the body of Christ working as one while growing and educating in love.

⁴⁰ Tamelyn N. Tucker-Worgs, *Black Mega-Church: Theology, Gender, and the Politics of Public Engagement* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 41, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=1037001>.

⁴¹ David Jackman, *Understanding the Church: Getting your Congregations to Work* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), 71, <https://archive.org/details/understandingchu00davi/page/n5/mode/2up?q=understanding+the+HOLY+Spirit>.

Duin asked, "does the number depicted on the roll book accurately represent the people who are physically in church on any given Sunday and replenishing their needs?"⁴² Regardless of what type of growth takes place, neither is possible without members. Cedar Crest Church has been in existence for 146 years and has faced many challenges yet has members deciding to follow Christ frequently.

The church maintains the ability to stay current with administrative transactions and the obligations accessed by the presiding prelate. As a church defined by connections between people and other churches within districts, the Cedar Crest income report in the annual conference was the third highest out of nineteen churches in the region. The bishop accesses each church a financial obligation in July and payable within the twelve months.⁴³ The denomination distributes the collected funds for colleges' upkeep within the country and overseas affiliates.

However, in recent years Cedar Crest demonstrated members uniting with the church but within a short period stop, which causes a fluctuation in the numbers. Combined with the number of deaths that have taken place over the years, the declining membership seems desolate. Cedar Crest will reach stagnate and despair if they do not achieve some type of resolution in the future.

Cedar Crest began its existence as a church focused on being faithful witnesses and spreading the gospel. Somewhere along the way, participation in ministry activities has dropped. At Cedar Crest, baptizing new believers and not teaching them about the gospel and how to teach others completes part of the Great Commission and omits the rest.

⁴² Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing* (Colorado Springs, CO: Bondfire Books, LLC, 2013), 88, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3031783#>.

⁴³ Lawrence L. Reddick III, *The Eighty-Sixty Session of the Dallas-Fort Worth Region Annual Conference Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2017, 100.

The time has come for the church to reassess its practices, especially during the worship services. Consider the declining membership; one needs to ask what may be occurring in the church where members fail to continue attendance? This question could turn things around for the church and see a regular pattern of consistent spiritual growth.

If the church continues to ignore the warning signs of church membership, then what lies ahead for them may be an outcome they are not prepared to accept. The competition has become fierce, and Generation Z is finding alternatives to attending church. Dudley analyzes new believers who do not feel right about belonging to a group of individuals who deprive them of their individuality.⁴⁴ The strategy to wait to see if things will turn around may not be favorable for them. Cedar Crest's future depends on the members' determination to integrate with new believers to become the disciples of Christ.

⁴⁴ Carl S. Dudley, *Where Have All Our People Gone?* (New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 41, <https://archive.org/details/wherehaveallourp0000dudl/page/n5/mode/2up/search/assimilating+new+church+members?q=assimilating+new+church+members>.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

This project's conceptual framework contributes to the thesis statement by identifying the variables and linking the relationship between those variables. The independent variable, a more robust integrated program, represents Cedar Crest Church's projected outcome from the research. The dependent variable, attendance record, symbolizes the number of documented visits of new believers to the church within a specified period.

The researcher prioritizes this project's variables when reviewing literature from other resources by determining if a familiar concept or theme exists. The literature review contains peer-reviewed and bible-based material related to the thesis statement and the conducted research. During the literature review process, examining the information from other sources relating to the discussion topic is necessary to analyze a discernable connection.

Worship, assimilation, faithful, culture, and love are common themes that scholars mention while reviewing previous literature. These themes will be highlighted during this process and indicate potential underlying causes regarding Cedar Crest experiencing a period of individuals uniting with the church and then ceasing. The research will demonstrate these themes and how a more robust integration program will positively impact the number of congregants that have left the church.

Literature Review

The literature review identifies themes related to the short-term attendance of new believers at Cedar Crest Church. These themes are vital in comprehending the necessity for new believers to incorporate themselves into the body of Christ. Church research scholar Thom

Rainer suggests that members should be encouraged to set an example and unite as one unity in the church.⁴⁵ Through this process, new believers confirm their position as a disciple in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Worship

The first evidence of man "calling on the name of the Lord" appears in Genesis 4:25-26, with Seth's birth and subsequently, Seth's son, Enosh's birth. Pettit concludes, "calling on the name of the Lord (worship) signifies getting imprinted with God in depths of an individual's spirit and allowing the works of the Holy Spirit to enter every aspect of their life personally and relationally."⁴⁶ New believers at Cedar Crest Church moving from an inactive status to a discipleship status instead of becoming absentee members positions them in a status of "calling on the name of the Lord."

Harvey shares the concept of utilizing worship to uncover their identity as Christians by inviting God into the service.⁴⁷ Congregations sing songs of acclamation, acknowledging God as the Creator and the provider of salvation. As individuals believe, the writer states in James 4:8 that he will draw near them when one draws near God.

A new believer draws near to Jesus by focusing on his behavior of learning to engage with individuals. Dever defines a church as a "local collection of people committed to Christ, regularly assemble and hear the preached Word, obey and adhere to His commands to baptize and celebrate the Lord's Supper."⁴⁸ Jesus demonstrates engagement by loving, healing, and

⁴⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 39.

⁴⁶ Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 60.

⁴⁷ Michael Harvey, *Creating a Culture of Invitation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2015), 61.

⁴⁸ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 54.

offering to them attributes that develop relationships. While participating in worship, Cedar Crest members follow God's instruction in Exodus 20:3 to have no other gods before him. The new believers of Cedar Crest may observe the members as a guide to worshipping the holy one.

Once the new believer commits to engaging during the worship service, the action can lead to a spiritual formation. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes that if an individual has Christ in them, they are a new creation, and the past is no longer critical, and their life starts new. A new life consists of a Christian imitating the teachings mentioned in the Bible. Moore concludes worship represents a lifestyle of bringing pleasure to God with every action and breath a person performs.⁴⁹ God warns individuals in Exodus 20:5 of his jealousy and the consequences of bowing down and serving other idols.

During God's worship, the time spent allows individuals to participate and engage in the Holy Spirit's powerful movement demonstrated during Pentecost. Townley explains new believers learn to become comfortable "in their own skin" as followers of Christ and to allow others to see Christ in them.⁵⁰ Jesus reveals in John 13:34-35 a commandment he gives to his people as disciples to love each other as he loves them.

Kinnaman, Lyons, and Barna stress the importance of worship in the church expounds through hands-on, get-involved, do-something, and sharing with others in need, making God happy mentality.⁵¹ The worship service experience signifies a teaching moment to instruct

<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1140915&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁹ Dwayne Moore, *A Heart-focused Bible Study on Worship* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 2018), 13. <https://web-b-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=70e64df1-e709-4064-86a1-55dc49d685fa%40sessionmgr103&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=1878451&db=nlebk>.

⁵⁰ Cathy Townley, *Missional Worship*, 11.

⁵¹ David Kinnaman et al., *UnChristian*, 112.

Christians in seeking an encounter with Christ. The new believer's desire to pursue a relationship with Christ should be the primary objective to keep coming back to the church.

Suppose an individual can understand the significance of maintaining a relationship with Christ. In that case, this may help analyze why members within a year no longer attend Cedar Crest Church. In Milburn's thesis "Connecting: A Step-by-Step Approach to Guest and New Membership Assimilation," he shares a spiritual worship service that depicts more than meetings but a time to encounter God.⁵² A church's obligation requires structuring the worship experience for a spiritual encounter rather than a production play fit for Broadway.

Cowell says congregations provide a suitable spiritual climate, including an overall atmosphere or spirit conveyed to the first-time visitor.⁵³ Bowers explains when a church creates a worship experience saturated and strengthened in a community of believers, this can be the most influential variable in their decision to return.⁵⁴ Carson thinks Christians learn that the heart's attitude acknowledges God's supremacy over their life, honestly and biblically centered in Christ.⁵⁵ According to John 4:23, this is similar to when Jesus said the true worshipers are the ones who worship the Father in Spirit and truth.

Webb contends the solution to "missing believers" does not relate to dissecting the formation of the Sunday morning service by changing the style of music, visual aids, or added dramatics to sermons.⁵⁶ Although this may be true for some churches, this certainly does not

⁵² Milburn, "Connecting with One Another," 34.

⁵³ James W. Cowell, *Incorporating New Members: Bonds of Believing, Belongings, and Becoming*, 11, <https://archive.org/details/incorporatingnew000cowe/page/n5/mode/2up/search/assimilating+new+church+members?q=assimilating+new+church+members>.

⁵⁴ Laurene Beth Bowers, *Invitational Ministry*, 55.

⁵⁵ Anders and Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*, 77.

⁵⁶ Marion S. Webb, et al., "Church Marketing: Strategies," 3.

apply to all churches since individuals' needs can vary from person to person. The African American community in Cedar Crest may prove challenging when constructing a worship services program due to a mixture of young and elderly adults in attendance.

Church marketing strategies of declining membership exhibit an issue of techniques that require restructuring. Ostling and Bonfante share that Christ's message does not need to be changed, only the package changed.⁵⁷ Cedar Crest's strategy in acquiring new believers to unite with the congregation determines if they remain after a year. Cedar Crest's decision to make some recommendations may create an atmosphere of worshiping more family-oriented. A family-oriented worship service provides the opportunity for new believers to connect to the body of Christ with a purpose.

Cedar Crest worship format may not always be the issue, but this is sometimes the easiest thing to adjust. When individuals understand the importance and true meaning of worship, they can create a lifestyle reflecting worship and maintaining a relationship with God that represents a continuous journey. Townley summarizes the worship journey represents an individual desire to meet God, other individuals, and themselves.⁵⁸ As in 1 Corinthians 12:12, Christians are many members, but all belong to the same God as one.

The worship experience consists of a journey strengthening the new believer's daily walk with God and increasing their faith. Duckworth defines worship as the heart of a believer's spiritual journey and a relationship with God and other church members.⁵⁹ A believer understands that establishing a relationship is vital in worship, although a personal relationship is

⁵⁷ Richard N. Ostling, and Jordan Bonfante, "The Church Search (Cover Story)," *Time* April 5, 1993, 44.

⁵⁸ Townley, *Missional Worship*, 9.

⁵⁹ Duckworth, *Wide Welcome*, 49.

significant. The beginning stage of a disciple requires implementing a foundation and building on developing a worship life filled with God's adoration.

True worship includes growing spiritually, individually, and collectively while creating a discipleship identity ready for God's mission. Duckworth states the Christian identity centers on making disciples, which constitutes a life-staining, life-saving assignment.⁶⁰ God refines new believers during worship by preparing their hearts and mind on one accord for the Master's plan.

The body of Christ's mission includes many working together while striving toward the same goal. Larson speculates when God exists in the center of a shared experience, people become one, and God gives himself to them.⁶¹ God is most pleased (Kinnaman, Lyons, and Barna) when he sees Christians getting involved and doing something.⁶² Worship provides the opportunity for believers to demonstrate reverence for the Creator of humanity.

Assimilation

While some churches struggle to discover why members join but do not return, a more common term, assimilation, has been associated with addressing new church members' participation. While uncovering new research material related to the thesis, Durey analyzes churches as more comfortable with the term assimilation and the need to address absentee members' issues.⁶³ John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, presents assimilation in the Christian church as a systematic and progressive program requiring an individual to submit to

⁶⁰ Duckworth, *Wide Welcome*, 4.

⁶¹ Larson, *My Creator, My Friend*, 56.

⁶² Kinnaman et al., *UnChristian*, 113.

⁶³ Durey, *Attracting and Assimilating*, 21.

accountability and discipline previous to being recommended for membership.⁶⁴ The early church in Acts demonstrates saving individuals and assimilating them into the body of Christ.

Individuals may agree what may have worked for some churches may not necessarily work for others. Durey insists no single church can reach everyone, and defining the target audience group demographically and culturally might be the most accessible way to connect to individuals.⁶⁵ A workable solution for Cedar Crest conforms to the target audience of the church.

Attebury expounds assimilation should include the member being involved in the church, thereby creating a sense of stability.⁶⁶ Cedar Crest must formulate a strategy to address members' ongoing problem of no longer attending within a year of joining. One approach could include allowing new members to focus on their spiritual growth through biblical teachings to fulfill their purpose in the Christian world. Stability can form a sense of belonging and the desire to establish roots while being an active part of their surroundings.

There is no reasonable amount of time placed on stability, and while the church is waiting, time can be the ultimate dissolution. In Matthew 23:36-42, Jesus warns the disciples his return to earth is unknown to anyone, and all his followers must remain ready. Anders and Weber view Jesus' remarks as an indicator that the Great Commission's work must continue through the work of faithful servants and stewards in believers' lives.⁶⁷ Hanks and Shell conclude

⁶⁴ Durey, *Attracting and Assimilating*, 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

⁶⁶ Philip Attebury, "In Their Own Words: Describing the Assimilation Experiences of New Converts" *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 10, https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=vic_liberty&id=GALE%7CA491311227&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon.

⁶⁷ Anders and Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, 406.

the work of evangelism continues until the evangelized becomes evangelizers.⁶⁸ In the New Testament, he demonstrates new believers' assignments become training others.

The process of assimilation may cover various methods of implementation in which one way is through marketing strategies. Webb believes the solution pastors use to attract and retain membership lies partially on the types of marketing tools such as door-canvassing, flyers, and brochures.⁶⁹ Webb analyzes marketing strategies that require a business-like mentality changes as the congregation changes.⁷⁰ Although some churches may be struggling with a growing problem of individuals' high levels of attrition and not staying, the decision to find business-like solutions may be a step in the wrong direction.

Webb thinks the church should work as a team while remaining faithful to the doctrine and theology but embrace the necessary changes to stay healthy.⁷¹ Macchia states a healthy church is one who serves God with all the talent, time, giftedness, passion, temperament, and energy one can muster.⁷² An assimilated church contains members equipped to teach others to become disciples of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When an individual unites with a church, this can be considered a life-changing decision. An encounter can often start with an invitation from someone from the church who can be a neighbor, coworker, or casual acquaintance. In Durey's study, new members' success was not just in the invitation but having someone responsible for an "on-site hospitality" and "post-visit

⁶⁸ Hanks Jr. and Shell, *Discipleship: Great Insights from the Most Experienced Disciple Makers*, 24.

⁶⁹ Marion S. Webb, et al., "Church Marketing: Strategies," 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

⁷¹ Marion Stanton Webb, "Church Marketing: Building and Sustaining Membership," *Services Marketing Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2012): 72, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1080/15332969.2012.633440>.

⁷² Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 21.

debriefing."⁷³ A member of the congregation assigned to a new believer provides the opportunity to connect with the body of Christ through introductions and familiarize them with the church's composition.

Hopefully, in most cases, the people's consistency and the Holy Spirit's moving should be the primary basis to be a part of the body of Christ. The Day of Pentecost signifies the primary reason for the growth of the church and in new believers. Churches should consider that their actions may contribute to a member staying and share partial responsibility when they do not.

Once they have entered the church's doors, Durey considers new believer's needs should be the focal point in the congregation according to Towns Law of Seven Touches.⁷⁴ Durey's atmosphere of warmth and acceptance coming from someone who does not hold a specific title should come from everyone throughout the entire building.⁷⁵ The outreach conversation becomes the subject within the church. The members have a Christian responsibility to draft and execute a workable solution to incorporate new believers for the Great Commission.

Assimilation into a congregation cannot always be comfortable, and in some cases where "cliques or special groups" may exist, these situations make things more difficult. New believers can conclude there is no place for them, and the sad reality exists. Members often do not realize that this type of situation exists in the church. Cedar Crest's leaders must evaluate and minimize the practices that can eventually destroy the morale of established members and new believers.

Many terms reference new members, such as returnees, newcomers, visitors, and new converts, but new believers are the preferred term for researching this project. In this project, a new believer represents someone who awakens from within the desire to follow the teachings of

⁷³ David Duane Durey, "Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century" 30.

⁷⁴ Durey, "Attracting and Assimilating," 34.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 32.

Jesus Christ. Effectively assimilating new believers create an environment of responsible church members growing spiritually, faithfully attending, and bringing other individuals to unite.

Faithful

Hamm notes in Hebrews 11:1 the object of faith represents an individual can depend on God to keep his promises as to the Creator of the universe through His spoken Word.⁷⁶ Harvey identifies faith, knows the unknowable, hears the inaudible, and touches the imaginable.⁷⁷ Faith operates in the domain of things; the physical eye cannot see the invisible.⁷⁸ When a new believer affirms faith in God, they develop the ability to worship him and carry out his disciple's work.

The Word of God references faith both in the Old and New Testament on many occasions. As in Hebrew 11:6 that "without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Hebrews reminds the reader faith led Moses to persevere through the Israelites' deliverance out of bondage in Egypt and Noah building an ark on the promise of an imminent flood.

Being faithful relates to established members' mentality and testifies to the new members' life. Tanner believes that once new members become comfortable in who they are, they come to know and trust in God's plan for them and how to implement it.⁷⁹ John the Baptist (John 1:26-27) recognizes the work he fulfills is of God and committed to completing his assignment.

⁷⁶ Hamm, "Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Jesus Factor," *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 52, 2 (April 1990): 277, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43719466>.

⁷⁷ Michael Harvey, *Creating a Culture of Invitation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2015), 80.

⁷⁸ Michael Harvey, *Creating a Culture*, 68.

⁷⁹ Douglas K. Tanner, "From Visitor to Minister," 12.

At the point of being a visitor, established members should reconcile with the idea they are the first representation of Christ's new believers. Anyabwile submits a health member in a local church aspires and encourages others to follow their leaders with agape hearts, anxious obedience, and joyful submission.⁸⁰ When new believers see the light, which shines from within the congregation, they will want to experience the light for themselves and allow it to reflect in their work. Milburn describes the derivative of light comes from endowed spiritual gifts to members within the congregation.⁸¹ Jesus declares as the "true light" the Word of God guides the path of followers who languish for direction.

Individuals can sometimes draw to the qualities they want to see and share the same experiences they encounter. According to Townley, a church must become missional by remaining faithful to the gospel and simultaneously examining it to engage the hearers and transform their worldview.⁸² For far too long, churches consume themselves by measuring growth in the number of individuals on the church role.

Regardless of the state of an individual's spiritual soul or beliefs, joining a church does not guarantee salvation. Being faithful must supersede the focus of numerical growth within the church as God's trust leads to gospel growth. In Townley's explanation, followers of Christ who desire to grow during worship should avoid returning to an inner place, which can include losing focus on God.⁸³

⁸⁰ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 75. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=355133#>.

⁸¹ Kevin Ray Milburn, "Connecting with One Another," 8.

⁸² Cathy Townley, *Missional Worship*, 21.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 28.

Faith requires comprehending the relationship of God between his people and the community. Milburn observes biblical commands point to faithful living with the reassurance of when encountering new believers, and the desire is to be in a relationship with God.⁸⁴ Cedar Crest is responsible for guiding new believers in the direction they need to go, not knowing what lies ahead.

New believers rely on Cedar Crest to guide them through the process of becoming disciples. Bocock says newcomers learn through observation all about God's power, and when they reach the point of salvation through Christ, commit to becoming members of the congregation.⁸⁵ Once a new believer commits by faith, then they are ready to be trained in the work of the Lord.

Now is not the time to encourage old customs of a culture that can interfere with the church's fundamental mission and the purpose of God's people and his kingdom. Old customs are ideas of attire, music style, the pastor's role, and specific ministries and programs. Some customs are essential and are a part of Christianity and churches' history yet do not supersede the message of salvation. Strengthening one's faith and pursuing a relationship with Christ must be the primary focus. Cowell states that congregations are responsible for accepting and nurturing people on a faith journey and preparing them to live a life in society with integrity, wholeness, and confidence.⁸⁶ When new believers find comfort in who they are as Christians, the faith they need to carry out the mission exists from within.

⁸⁴ Kevin Ray Milburn, "Connecting with One Another," 8.

⁸⁵ David C. Bocock, "Effective Membership Assimilation: Developing a Process by which Adult New Members are Purposefully Integrated into the Full Life of the Congregation" (DMIN, Drew University, 2011), 18, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/878666031/B7636B042E094D4EPQ/42?accountid=12085>.

⁸⁶ Cowell, *Incorporating New Members*, 63.

Culture

Cultures play an intricate part in today's churches and those who do not prepare face obstacles that are difficult to overcome. As Frazee shared, church culture has become individualistic, where people no longer look out for each other.⁸⁷ Structured churches must be careful and not get too "outdated" regarding how they conduct service. As technology changes, today's churches must conform to the needs of individuals in communities.

A church's culture does not always represent what people in the community are looking for in a church they want to make a home. Churches view themselves in their ancestors' light in conducting worship service where individuals demonstrate the limited connection. Bowers examines the model of a discipleship church culture issue an invitation within a congregation recognizing equality in everyone's spiritual needs.⁸⁸ In the cultural model's community, they integrate new believers, allowing them to join ministries and become active in the church.

The goal is striving to arrive at the same place and demonstrating patience and compassion during the process. It is reaching out to those who are different, just as Jesus did during his ministry on earth. DeYmaz and Li access healthy church leadership emphasizes oneness and strive to create a culture of acceptance with people willing to work through lingering effects of systematic racism.⁸⁹ Cedar Crest must integrate with a culture that is composed of some individuals who are nonbelievers.

⁸⁷ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 16i.

⁸⁸ Laurene Beth Bowers, *Invitational Ministry*, 141.

⁸⁹ Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 76, <https://web-a-ebscobost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/detail/detail?nobk=y&vid=1&sid=68cf820e-c12f-4497-b863-8467233aa133@sdv-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSdzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=1948432&db=nlebk>.

Cedar Crest's responsibility rest with ensuring new believers live a virtuous life achieved through rebirth. However, Kinnaman admits the reprieve from deep-seated image problems comes from believers being more faithful to God who offers redemption to everyone, including a hostile culture.⁹⁰ An influential church visualizes utter devotion to God who rescued them and realizing others can receive the same mercy.

Individuals new to Christianity can be disheartened when God's Word appears in a language that can be too complicated and not related to their circumstances. Even today, as this country struggles with COVID-19, a crashing economy, and racial injustices, individuals speculate of a god allowing destruction and loss of lives. New believers seeking Christ can relate to and heighten their awareness of his offer of salvation by delivering God's preached word. Kinnaman remarks that Christ-followers engage in conversations with outsiders to find common ground, speak different dialects, and think about stereotypes.⁹¹ Scripture teaches in Matthew 10:20, "it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." When Christians rely on the Spirit from within to share the Word, they remove all communication barriers.

In every changing culture, diversity is an integral part of the overall picture. As Rainer states, an enormous number of diverse cultures represent an asset in the church. Rainer affirms this type of diverse culture can add to the church's functions in which everyone should have a role.⁹² The church does have a responsibility to understand the community's type of culture to serve them better. Reaching communities occur when the church meets individuals on the level

⁹⁰ Kinnaman et al., *UnChristian*, 170.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 172.

⁹² Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 19.

they operate and not the one in which they are the most comfortable. Cedar Crest, which plants itself in a community, must meet the residents in a comfort zone and not the other way around.

Cedar Crest should be knowledgeable in the culture of the community in preparation for any incoming visitors. Randall shares individuals turn to churches in search of hope, listening for words to renew joyful expectancies and jumpstart deadened hearts.⁹³ Duckworth speculates individuals new to the church usually do not know how members handle things or any church's expectations.⁹⁴ In the initial stage of being considered a newcomer, a church culture often brings about exposure to a new environment. One issue of a new believer can relate to integrating with various ministries available in the church.

Tanner considers individuals are provided a "beautifully painted picture of Christianity" and disregarding what Christian life is really about."⁹⁵ Unfortunately, once a new believer becomes exposed to a church's activities, they can become discouraged and eventually stop attending. James 1:12 declares blessed is the believer who remains committed when faced with trials for individual's endurance is the blessing.

The problem appears to be what happens to visitors once they enter the church and encounter the congregation. There is a noticeable difference between their demographics and the church and the various ministries in many churches. The Christian community requires a healthy environment and avoids confrontations due to differences, often overlooking its purpose. Jackman believes the agenda for every local church community of disciples is to grow in faith and build one another up to obey the commandments of the Lord increasingly.⁹⁶ The Christian

⁹³ Robert L. Randall, *What People Expect from Church: Why Meeting the Needs of People is More Important than Church Meetings* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 51.

⁹⁴ Duckworth, *Wide Welcome*, 11.

⁹⁵ Tanner, "From Visitor to Minister," 4.

⁹⁶ Jackman, *Understanding the Church*, 46.

church seeks to develop, which is achieved by addressing the community's needs and providing discipleship training.

Kinnaman notes past research has uncovered that hypocrisy perceptions can be visible when the "culture war" attacks.⁹⁷ The culture war manifests when Christians' words do not match their actions. Colossians 3:17 confirms a new believer identifies with a Christian that in whatever they do in Word or deed, performing in the name of the Lord Jesus while giving thanks to God the Father through him.

When a new believer's encounter does not prove favorable, labeling the members "unChristians" who do not act like Christ is common. Whether related to attitude, atmosphere, or worship service, the uneasy feeling that many have accumulated makes it difficult for them to integrate with a church fully. A one-size-fits-all attitude (Randall) prevails with principles applied universally and generally to every person in every situation.⁹⁸ The probability that the church will connect with new believers on a spiritual level has dropped dramatically. The possibility of maintaining a new disciple and connecting in a union is not good.

Love

There is not a great deal of literature written on Christianity subjects and the building of disciples that do not include love. The collection of resources that compile this project is certainly no exception since the Bible contains endless passages about God's love. Harney advises building healthy lives and ministries allow God to rule supremely without rivals and our

⁹⁷ Kinnaman et al., *UnChristian*, 49.

⁹⁸ Randall, *What People Expect from Church*, 46.

hearts beat with His, which ultimately grow healthy leaders.⁹⁹ Everything that Christians do, according to scripture, must be done in love. Christians are unsuccessful in discipleship without implementing love in the process. Jesus identifies the importance of love in Matthew 3:37-39, that Christians must love God with all their heart and love their neighbor as themselves.

Kinnaman stated, "love becomes tangible as newcomers appear at the threshold of congregations weary, broken, and worn, searching for meaning."¹⁰⁰ Sharing love among individuals as the message of Christ is inclusive in becoming disciples for Christ. Christians envision being distinguished from the rest of the world by their love for one another (John 13:35).

Even Jesus explained the importance of love in his ministry, and without it, the development of disciples was impossible. Encounters Jesus had with the people were conducted lovingly, and yet his example demonstrated the approach to use when unbelievers are present. Frazee advises Christians must corroborate what the Bible defines love as only existing through relationships with individuals, requiring a community.¹⁰¹ Jesus remarks in John 15:12-14 Christians are to show the same passion he offers to them, and the greatest love represents laying down one's life for another.

There are many ways to define love, yet new believers are the ones whose need is the greatest. Duckworth assesses love becomes tangible as newcomers appear in the threshold of congregations weary, broke, and worn while searching for means, purpose, identity, and a new

⁹⁹ Kevin Harney, *Leader From the Inside Out: Examining the Inner Life of a Healthy Church Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 22, <https://ebookscentral-proquest-com.exproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397504>.

¹⁰⁰ Kinnaman et al., *UnChristian*, 63.

¹⁰¹ Frazee, *The Connecting Church*, xxxix.

life.¹⁰² Having no connection with the congregation, Townley suggests Christians must welcome new believers when exposed to the message of God's love and be encouraged to exhibit that love in their lives.¹⁰³ The need to be incorporated into the congregation when uniting with the body can be a turning point for new believers.

The congregation needs a lesson in the importance of welcoming people into the body of Christ. Townley presents welcoming people requires hearing the message of love in Christ and adding him into their lives.¹⁰⁴ God's message reflected his love for the world when he gave his only Son for the remission of sins.

At the time of unity, Christians must work harder to show the same love that Christ did and nurture the new believers on the path of their new beginning. New believers benefit from being active within the church to access their spiritual growth and gift abilities. Attebury considers "the challenge is with keeping members in the church active and fulfilled in attending to decision making and leadership development of new converts."¹⁰⁵ When Cedar Crest members connect consistently with new believers through ministries and available activities, the desire to contribute may be worth a commitment.

The feeling of belonging can be difficult for new believers, and the importance rest with leaders' actions and what programs are in place to ensure they become an active part of the church body. According to the church Discipline, any member showing a lack of commitment, a leader of the church ministers to them to maintain a life of ministry and service.¹⁰⁶ The

¹⁰² Duckworth, *Wide Welcome*, 63.

¹⁰³ Cathy Townley, *Missional Worship*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Attebury, "In Their Own Words," 3.

¹⁰⁶ Reddick, *The Book of Discipline*, 128.

procedures of Cedar Crest state new believers must wait one year before they can become active in ministries.¹⁰⁷ This practice may prove to be discouraging and become costly in the long run.

Macchia admits an area of discussion among some scholars is the impact that a healthy church has when expressing unconditional love and acceptance to new believers.¹⁰⁸ Just because a church is growing in numbers does not mean it is a healthy church; it may be just growing numerically. Duin speculates new members can stem from transfer from other churches, children of families, and people within the community.¹⁰⁹ The fluctuation in a church's role can result from members in a congregation relocating to other areas or children of parents that have grown up in that church.

Individuals who seek refuge in churches, as discussed by Macchia, demonstrated a strong desire to know God intimately.¹¹⁰ Churches that project genuine feelings focus on connecting the hearts of people with God. Feelings that manifest into love represent the purpose of worship and the origin of being a true disciple.

Although there may be many reasons why new believers do not stay, what goes on inside the church may be the very cause for departure. As mentioned earlier, the lack of training for care leaders, information received during new members class, and a disciple's work describe the new believers could represent reasons to cease to attend gradually. The themes discussed, worship, assimilation, faithful, culture, and love, are components to effectively integrate new believers into the congregation at Cedar Crest Church.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *Cedar Crest Church New Member Manual*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 98.

¹⁰⁹ Duin, *Quitting Church*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, W20.

As Director of Membership and Evangelism, this researcher acknowledges an ongoing problem with new believers who join and, within a year, are no longer attending. This thesis project relied on the contributing scholars of material and research conducted from a local church to comprehend better what the congregation needs to address in the absentee members. The information provided from the church's directory of members and data collected from the church referencing members who no longer are in attendance will be used to provide insight into assisting those who are lost find a path to stay in the church.

This project does not attempt to solve the present issue at the church of new members joining and then within less than a year are no longer attending. Based on the information researched by previous scholars regarding the problem, the data collected should provide additional insight into what is taking place in the Christian community. Cedar Crest Church is facing the challenge that may threaten their existence and end their forefathers' work.

Conflicting reports exist where some say that Christianity is as powerful as it ever has been, while some say the church is under attack and attendance is at an unspeakable low. Sterland notes research conducted shows something is happening to the attendance in churches today.¹¹¹ This paper's foundation does not represent anyone's source or reference but instead a merging of the themes of worship, assimilation, faithful, culture, and love.

This thesis focuses on making sure that no matter what direction the research takes, the findings represent an unbiased format. The credibility of the information is proven through accurate reporting and interpreting the data as it appeared. One of the dangers of conveying the

¹¹¹ Sterland et al., "Attracting and Integrating Newcomers into Church Life: Research in Four Countries." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 27, no. 1 (January 2007): 39, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1080/13617670600594285>.

information is remaining impartial during the interview process and not allow personal feelings or recommendations to become a part of the results.

Theological Foundations

Merriam Webster defines theology as the study of the nature of God and religious beliefs. Many attributes describe God's nature: Spirit, Creator, holy (set apart), sovereign, and immutable. God makes man in His image to worship him wholly but freely. God's design for man stated in Revelations 4:11 acknowledges God is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power because he is Creator of all things because of God's will to be this way. The man responds to God's actions through worship, uniting with other believers (assimilation), being faithful, encompassing all cultures, and loving as God loves him.

As recorded in Genesis 1:1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth had no shape and contained nothing, and in six days, God filled it with all the elements he desired. In all his work, God was pleased and referenced it as applicable. Hill states the good represents the end goal of being created to become what man was meant to be and launched on a mission of discipleship.¹¹² Romans 8:28 reveals all things work together for the good of Christians who love God and are called according to their purpose. God's blessings overshadow man's weaknesses when he fulfills a disciple's work in the sharing of the gospel.

When God finished, he said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26) to rule over every living creature on earth. The creation of man represented the importance of God's work. The phrase "in our image" signifies humans were placed above the

¹¹² Edmund Hill, "Creation and Creator: Knowing and Glorifying God," *New Blackfriars* 77, no. 907 (1996): 391, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43249907>.

rest of creation and along God's side. Although God created man in His image, man did not represent his equal. Paul warns a believer should resist seeing himself as more valuable than other individuals, for all have duties to perform in the work of the Lord (Romans 12:3-4).

In the restoration of Gods' image, man was to become God's representative in a world of his choosing. Hill believes an individual can achieve God's perfect likeness through imitation and the perfect praise and glorification.¹¹³ Man's instruction is to be fruitful and multiply while God supplies everything he needs to survive. In this passage of the Bible, God intended for man to reproduce. He also spoke in terms of man being spiritually fruitful and multiply his kingdom. Two of the duties of Cedar Crest members include building a relationship with God and with other believers.

Although God gives power over everything to man, man's capability is limited to provide for anything without God. God provided man with the stipulation that he did not aspire to be like him from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God created man and woman to rule in his name, not as God himself but in the status of training new believers to become disciples in the mission of Christ.

The breath of life represents the "helpless" status of man's existence without God's intervention. God's omnipotence appears in the creation of the world and man's beginning. When man and woman disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden's instructions, God still used them in the building of his kingdom. Their descendants would be the required lineage for the coming of the Messiah. In Luke 3:23-38, he recounts linking Adam's decedents to Abraham, thereby linking Abraham's lineage to Jesus Christ.

¹¹³ Hill, "Creation and Creator," 394.

When a new believer responds to the call of being a disciple, training in obedience honors God as the Creator of humanity. Just as some parents disciplined their children when they do not obey, God has and will continue to do the same with his children today. The writer of Hebrews 12:10-11 shares God's discipline equips Christians in the attributes appropriate to be called his children. Disobedience can become a way of disconnecting from God, and yet his grace and mercy provide the opportunity to reconnect with him.

Moses illustrates an opportunity given by God to demonstrate obedience for a purpose in glorification to Him. Moses was a prophet with a speech impediment and yet following God's calling led the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. However, in Numbers 20:1-13, Moses' disobedience to glorify God at the Waters of Meribah led to his Father's discipline. Despite the fact Moses did not reach the promised land, he carried out God's plans for his people. The life of a new believer shows an example related to Moses in the Old Testament to accept and be obedient to the call of discipleship.

God's plan in creating Noah, described as a just man who walked with God, occurred during earth's corruption and future destruction. Out of obedience to God, Noah built an ark according to the specifications set before him and ignored what others may have thought or said about him. Noah, his family, and some of God's living creatures escaped the horrible sentence given to all that remained on earth. The new believer, like Noah, remains faithful despite the uncertainty of the calling placed on their life.

In the Old Testament, Christians cannot overlook Abraham's story and the one who has been called the "Father of Many Nations." Abraham left his homeland and traveled to a place unknown to him under God's guidance, whom he had faith in and trusted. When God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2-18), his obedience resulted in blessings

extended to his seed. New believers that commit to God's instructions with faith and obedience will experience the blessings like Abraham and experience the joy of salvation.

All three men, Moses, Noah, and Abraham, had faith in common and shared the obedience attribute. A faith of when hearing the voice of God reacted despite whatever personal reservations that may have existed. Hamm suggests exercising faith involves setting out a promise and a sojourner's lifestyle while trusting God will fulfill his promises.¹¹⁴ A new believer allows the Holy Spirit to empower their lives, be more like Jesus, and witness other nonbelievers (Acts 1:8).

The seed, which includes the genealogy of Abraham, aligns with the birth of Jesus Christ. Christ, baptized by John the Baptist, was acknowledged by God as "His beloved Son in whom he is well pleased (Matthew 3:13-17)." Ultimately the baptism of Christ demonstrated his obedience to God and an example set for the obedience of his people. New believers' affirmation of faith through baptism coincides with Christians' actions during the Day of Pentecost in the Book of Acts.

McCabe pointed out that baptism represents a membership character in Christ's community's body and sharing in a priesthood.¹¹⁵ In 1 Peter 2:9, Christians are reminded they are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, holy nation who are God's special people. Floor declared a believer in the role of a priest who cannot access society or reach fellowman had not attained a height of priestly service.¹¹⁶ Members of Cedar Crest should aspire to assimilate new believers into discipleship by baptizing and teaching them the Word of God (Matthew 28:19-20).

¹¹⁴ Hamm, "Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews," 277.

¹¹⁵ Herbert McCabe, "What is the Church? -VII: A Royal Priesthood," *Life of the Spirit* 18, no. 206 (1963): 167, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43706289>.

¹¹⁶ L. Floor, "The General Priesthood of Believers in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 5 (1971): 80., <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43047729>.

God's people are predestined, appointed, and united with God and thereby judged according to their works. Calling individuals out of darkness into God's light allows light to shine for the world to see, that when others see the good works, they will glorify the Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). Saliers glorify God through worship, which is the primary collective manner to remember and express the Christian faith and story.¹¹⁷ When the Holy Spirit consumes a new believer, and a transformation takes place, he/she realizes the need to discover and pursue the work God has for them (Romans 12:1-2).

However, what God has to offer is not something that is forced upon them but instead is a choice that is available to them. Goldberg analyzes in the Old Testament, Abraham elects to sacrifice the ram in the bush of his volition and is not God's commandment.¹¹⁸ Proverbs 16:9 defines free will as "a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." God provides the opportunity for man to embrace his life as he desires without fear of coercion. Zagzebski states God's knowledge of the outside sequence of events led to an act and the external earthly sequence.¹¹⁹ The omniscient of God does not authorize his obstruction in the actions of individuals.

The guidelines established for a Christian in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Word of God is a guide for man to follow and stay within the will of its Creator. In this

¹¹⁷ D.E. Saliers, "Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 175, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40025979>.

¹¹⁸ Hillel Goldberg, "Foreknowledge and Free Will," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 34, no. 4 (2000): 34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23262273>.

¹¹⁹ Linda Zagzebski, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will," *Religious Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 282, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20006192>.

thesis, the theological foundation applies biblically based scriptures to compare God's mandate to Cedar Crest's work and the life of a new believer.

Since the beginning of Peter's (Matthew 16:16) declaration in the New Testament about Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the living God, he announced this is the foundation for building his church. The church Jesus was referencing was His church, which would consist of his people. Anders and Weber explained the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, means "gathering and could come to mean the gathering of people for any purpose including synagogue gatherings."¹²⁰ If Cedar Crest congregation responds to the importance of *ekklesia* with the new believers, the gospel's message will develop more disciples equipped to share in the community.

The conversation on Christ's deity began with the apostles and Jesus inquiring about his identity rumors. In Matthew 16:13-18, the disciples responded that people believed Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other prophet. The apostles answered with what others had concluded he was, and yet the most critical question was who they thought Jesus was.

It was Peter's response that would proclaim Jesus as more than a person who performed miracles but would propel him into the status of being the promised Messiah and the King of kings. Jesus knew the importance of the apostles knowing and believing, the responsibility of what they had to teach others. Anders and Weber make the case a disciple must understand the king's identity and authority he/she received from Christ.¹²¹ Their actions of what was forbidden and allowed on earth had to be aligned with God's will and fulfilling his plan.

Peter's revelation from the Holy Spirit sets the stage for the Day of Pentecost to take place through the disciple's preaching. His Word could only be shared with the people as they

¹²⁰ Max Anders and Stuart K. Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 251.

¹²¹ Anders and Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, 248.

assembled and listened to his instructions. Kilgallen indicates Peter's response signifies the pouring out of God's Spirit (divine cause) and allowing everyone who called on his name, Lord, would be saved (divine intent).¹²² As the new believer relationship grows in Christ, they acquire the ability to articulate with confidence their belief and become ambassadors for Christianity.

The ability to deliver God's message to those in need was only possible with being reborn by offering the unique gift of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the gift that equips believers with the ability to reach God's people. Sachs state the Holy Spirit makes believers into sons and daughters of God by conforming and patterning to Christ into the church body.¹²³ God created man in his image, and as believers, they must acknowledge.

The Holy Spirit's power instills the work needed to faithful implant attendance in church and in the lives of believers to proclaim the good news of Christ. Hebrews 10:25, the author said, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Harre explains that endowing Christians with spiritual gifts intended for others' edification and withdrawing from fellowship removes the gift no longer available to their fellow Christians.¹²⁴ Spiritual gifts illuminate the body of Christ in preparation for ministry work for the church's growth.

The parable found in Matthew 25:14-30 references a dialogue between a master and his three servants. The story warns of the consequences when believers are reluctant to utilize those

¹²² John J. Kilgallen, "With Many Words (Acts 2:40): Theological Assumptions in Peter's Pentecost Speech," *Biblica* 83, no. 1 (2002): 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42614345>.

¹²³ John R. Sachs, "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Form." *Gregorianum* 86, no. 2 (2005): 379, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23581691>.

¹²⁴ Alan F. Harre, *Close the Back Door: Ways to Create a Caring Congregational Fellowship* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 31.

gifts entrusted to them by God to build His kingdom. According to Davis, warnings symbolize pending danger to an individual latent fear and a heightened sense of commitment to one's faith. However, Davis adds for the short-term and uncommitted believer, and a warning can represent harmless or ignored words.¹²⁵ The uncommitted believer shows the magnitude of the desire to have a genuine relationship with Jesus and become a life-long disciple.

New believers spiritually disconnected from the body of Christ run the risk of impacting the mission of the church and having the support when trials are endured (Ephesians 2:21-22). They were instructed in Hebrews 6:4-6 to be careful in backsliding into sinful ways and returning to faithful Christians' fellowship. God promises individuals who respond to the call to commit to knowing him will receive eternal life (John 10:28).

Sider explores God's kingdom as protection from unbiblical, individualistic spiritualism, which reduces salvation to the individual soul's forgiveness.¹²⁶ God's creation of humans represents his desire to commune on one accord but with many members. God does not need a man to exist, but man needs God for his very breath because of man's existence.

The events which lead up to the scriptural passage in Hebrews are necessary to put it into the proper perspective. The beginning of Chapter 10 in Hebrews reminded the people of Israel that the Old Testament law regarding sacrifices was no longer required. Tradition stipulated that while demonstrating the atonement of sins through offerings, the individuals' lack of sustaining a relationship with God was missing. In Hebrews 10:5, the writer confirms Christ's death is committing to fulfill God's will and replacing burnt offering sacrifices.

¹²⁵ Leon Davis, "The Dynamics of Having a Fear of God in the Walk of the Believer" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2014), 25.

¹²⁶ Ron Sider, "What is the Gospel?" *Kingdom of God and Kingdoms of the World* 16, no. 1 (January 1999): 33, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43052485>.

The past practices could not remove sins (Anders and Lea); therefore, the law's inadequacy was apparent by repeating the people continuing to sacrifice animals.¹²⁷ Scripture reveals animal sacrifice was never intended to remove sins but was representative of what was to come when Christ took on a human form. The sacrifice Christ made was the one act that took away the sins of the world permanently.

The first several chapters of Hebrews reference the superiority of Christ above what the people held in the highest authority, which was prophets, angels, Moses, and even Melchizedek. Christ was superior to the Old Testament prophets because he was the Son of God. He was superior to the angels and Moses because he was the Creator, and when compared to Melchizedek, he was the High Priest who intercedes on behalf of believers. Nieuwenhove states our relationship with God acknowledges his superiority and acknowledges our finiteness, or created status, which can be called worship. When we do not, we are defiant.¹²⁸

The comparison of biblical figures brings to light the faithfulness exemplified through these servants. Werpehowski states that love does good work for the neighbor's good by sustaining the covenant's external conditions.¹²⁹ Jesus was an example whose ultimate representation is worth far more than those the people held in remembrance. The sacrifice placed before him would prove to be more worthy of being exalted than the individuals they deemed necessary.

¹²⁷ Max Anders and Thomas D. Lea, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Hebrews & James* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 182.

¹²⁸ Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "The Christian Response to Suffering, and the Significance of the Model of the Church as Body of Christ." *Anglicum* 8, no. 3 (2005): 600, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44616796>.

¹²⁹ William Werpehowski, "Christian Love and Covenant Faithfulness," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 19, no. 2: 118.

The current law had imperfections, and God desired not a sacrifice but people who were obedient to his Word. To help the people better understand his will, Christ voluntarily followed God's plan to share his Word by preaching the biblical scriptures. His sacrifice represented the true meaning of obedience in the life of a disciple.

The system which was in place related to sacrifices reminded the people of their past sins and did nothing to encourage a relationship with God. This relationship (Guthrie) developed in the Book of Hebrews, where Jesus was referenced as the High Priest and contrasted with the old covenant priests.¹³⁰ The significance of the title of High Priest signifies one who intercedes on behalf of others.

As High Priest, Jesus maintains solidarity with the people, having taken on a human form. Jesus sacrificed himself to demonstrate that obedience leads to salvation. The perseverance of Jesus and his restoration to complete divinity is an example of what Christians have in store for them in eternity. His willingness to take on this assignment shows his obedience to the calling placed on his earthly life. Gray offers that having learned obedience, he became the eternal salvation source to all who obey him.¹³¹ God requires believers' obedience to carry out the mission of being a disciple rather than having their agenda.

One conclusion related to the Book of Hebrews, especially verse 10:25 is the importance of Christians not forgetting the sacrifice of Jesus. This passage of scripture connects the desires of God with his people to draw near to him. The passion extends not only to him but to his

¹³⁰ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text...to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 328.

¹³¹ Patrick Gray, "Brotherly Love and the High Priest Christology of Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 22, 2 (Summer 2003): 344, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3268448>.

people to attract to each other. It is their responsibility to encourage one another and help each other as God commands.

Another scripture connected to God's desire for his people's assembling is perhaps one of the most common biblical passages for discipleship. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said,

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The central message of the Book of Matthew was reiterating that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. He does this with the lineage of Jesus through Abraham to Joseph to his virgin mother, Mary. The significance of Mary being a virgin was to certify that God was indeed the one and only true Father of Jesus and therefore having a sinless nature. Although he was born without sin and was the promised Messiah, his forerunner and cousin John the Baptist was a mighty God messenger. He was a preacher referred to in John 1:23 as the "voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."

His message was one of repentance, for the coming of the kingdom of God was near. John the Baptist did not want the people to be confused about his identity; therefore, he continued to preach he was not the promised Messiah. He often referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God, believing in what he was saying and taking his ministry to wherever he could for people to repent.

During John the Baptist ministry, he baptized many with water, which signified a person's desire to change their life from sin. He reminded the people their actions were a step in the right direction, and the promised Messiah would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). The baptism by both represents the purifying process needed for new believers to become a member in the body of Christ.

As a messenger of God, John the Baptist realized that he must operate within the parameters of his assigned duties and not take on an unequipped role. Hughes says John the Baptist considers himself a messenger of Yahweh, and his message aligned with Jesus' ministry.¹³² John acknowledges his credentials as someone who shares the message of Christ to unbelievers.

When the time arrived, John the Baptist was removed from the scene so that Jesus could become the teacher of God's Word and the people's focused attention. After determining the complex needs of the people, God implemented his plan. After carefully orchestrating his plan, the timing was perfect for God to get the glory.

The careful selection and teachings to his disciples demonstrated the need for the right people to deliver the message of the Messiah's coming. He needed individuals who were teachable and willing to follow his direction. Although, in most cases, Jesus did not directly call the disciples to his ministry, they were willing followers, and where Carson suggests is the first step in genuine discipleship.¹³³ Jesus stresses his disciples' importance in maintaining an abundant harvest; unfortunately, workers are scarce (Matthew 9:37).

The Book of Matthew emphasizes Jesus's authority through his teachings and actions with the twelve apostles. His teachings reminded the apostles that they should always be prepared and ready for his return as believers. Believers have a responsibility when they encounter unbelievers to take advantage of opportunities they have on earth in sharing the

¹³² John H. Hughes, "John the Baptist: The Forerunner of God Himself," *Novum Testamentum* 14, no. 3 (July 1972): 212.

¹³³ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 154.

gospel. When new believers leave the church within a year of becoming members, the Great Commission ceases to implementation as Christ mandated during the Day of Pentecost.

God has entrusted his people with the potential to be good stewards in use of their time, talents, and spiritual gifts (Matthew 25:14-30). Johnston believes God does the renewing, empowering, and recruiting, but the work of yielding, submitting, and obeying is the disciples' responsibility.¹³⁴ Good and faithful servants are the ones who encounter new believers and teach them what it means to become a disciple that pleases God. God has decreed the authority for his people to live the life of a Christian pleasing in his eyes.

The authority mentioned in Jesus' teachings in Matthew's early Book would again administer to them in Matthew Chapter 28 as the Messiah. This passage of scripture references the Great Commission. Over the years, Christians have understood the importance of fulfilling this instruction from God and the critical part in the church's continued life.

The beginning verses of the first chapter in the Book of Acts corroborate the words he spoke earlier after his crucifixion, and he had risen in three days. In the forty days of post-resurrection, the disciples were at Galilee, in the Upper Room per Jesus' instructions. Some of the disciples' weakness was probably apparent, and yet he promised to send the Holy Spirit to be witnesses for him throughout the world (Acts 1:8). Anders and Gangel stipulate unity of all believers affords the most significant identifying mark of the people of God.¹³⁵ Therefore, all of God's people must pursue and receive this identifier.

The instructions of the passages in Matthew 28:18-20 closed out the gospel and were perhaps written in this way to become something that should linger in the minds of its readers.

¹³⁴ John G. Johnston, "Stepping Stones to Developing Your Church's Strategy" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2009), 7.

¹³⁵ Anders and Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts*, 31.

Once again, the focus is on the words "all authority." The authority can come to mean power or jurisdiction, while all include everything. Therefore, all authority in heaven and on earth represents the only way the assignment would be successful in this context.

The disciple instruction includes to what (make disciples), when (now/go), where (all nations), and how (baptizing and teaching). Once an individual becomes a new believer (Anders and Weber), the Great Commission is the church's task to assist in seeing themselves as children of God and brothers and sisters in the family of believers and the kingdom.¹³⁶ Baptizing is the outward sign of obedience into a new way of life that acknowledges the changes that must take place from within.

An affirmation of the Christian faith encompasses baptizing in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit's name. Acknowledging the Trinity is a sign of sanctification for believers from the rest of the world. It represents the act of obedience to identify with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. New believers in the church affirm their faith through baptism and committing to teaching others the gospel and belief in the Great Commission.

In Acts 2:38, Peter instructs the people to repent, followed by baptism in Jesus Christ's name to forgive sins and received the Holy Spirit. Chai suggests God's Spirit empowers the people to live righteously and minister to others and choose a new way of life.¹³⁷ The receipt of the Holy Spirit is only available after the acceptance of Christ in one's life.

The Holy Spirit creates the opportunity to be welcomed into Christ believers' community with the mindset of thanksgiving. Brown stated believers seeking to be controlled by the Holy Spirit surrender and submit to him while giving thanks and glorifying God.¹³⁸ However, when

¹³⁶ Anders and Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, 485.

¹³⁷ Yan Chai, "The Spirit-Empowered Discipleship in Acts" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2015), 51.

¹³⁸ Curtis Wayne Brown, "The Spirit-Filled Christian Life" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2003), 59.

believers do not pursue a spirit-filled life, they miss the opportunity for God to manifest one another as the body of Christ.

This scripture passage serves as a reminder that is carrying out the Great Commission's fulfillment reassurance that Christ would not leave or forsake his people. Jesus' deity of omnipresence is clearly defined in this statement and represents his protection for all his children. The assignment set before believers comes with challenges, yet the promise of Christ is added assurance of a completed mission.

Matthew's gospel opens as he emphasizes Jesus' role as the Son of David, King of the Jews, Messiah, leader, shepherd, and God's Son. Jesus is greater than the prophet Jonah, and King Solomon and Matthew recorded numerous miracles in his gospel. The foundation of Jesus' teachings contains the kingdom of God while emphasizing church discipline and forgiveness.

Jesus reminded his followers that those faithful to his teachings would find themselves persecuted (Matthew 5:11-12). Despite opposition, they will receive eternal blessings as the prophets who endured the same before them. Matthew defines Christian's role and their identity as disciples in Christ's expectations before them.

Parks expressed that believers who proclaim serving the living God but allow their compassion to develop a negative attitude toward another person or church do more damage to God's kingdom than sharing the gospel can improve.¹³⁹ In Matthew 22:37, Jesus instructed that the second greatest commandment was a person must love thy neighbor as thyself. In this passage, Jesus wants his followers to be inclusive with the commandment to love God with all a person's heart, soul, and mind.

¹³⁹ John Parks, "Churches Working Together: Four Keys in Serving One Community" (DMIN Liberty University, 2017), 70.

Believers must understand that as a child of God, it is a requirement that they always have a love of God in their hearts. This love extends to the people of God because he created all humans in his image. The importance of love in the Christian life (1 John 4:7-11) is where God defines himself as love, and all that know him must be of love.

God's love toward his children manifested when he sent Jesus for them to live within him. This demonstration of love is the example set before believers, with the expectation of sharing with everyone. Yoo insists that love expressed through true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit as mainly an inward, spiritual event, not an outward, bodily event, and is a response and guided by God's total views.¹⁴⁰ Engaging true worship, new believers hear the Word of God and experience moving of the Holy Spirit, and commit to continuing the discipleship process.

Matthew reminds individuals of the importance of establishing and maintaining a relationship with Christ. He defines the expectations Christ has for his people and his never-ending grace and mercy. However, since it is essential to have an ever-lasting relationship with God, his people are required to interact with each other and continue to spread the gospel to all who are willing to listen.

Man cannot deny or ignore the plans that God has on the lives of his people. Jonah (1:1-17), in the Old Testament, discovers in the belly of a fish how far God goes to get his attention and fulfill the call on his life and the people of Nineveh. In the New Testament, the Father owns the garden, Jesus is the vine, and his believers are the branches. Believers should expect to bear much fruit (John 15:5), and pruning the vine allows their fruit to continue growth. Many

¹⁴⁰ Kichun Yoo, "A Strategy of Promoting Health in the Local Church" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2010), 59.

reference Galatians 5:22-23, remembering the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The fruits of the Spirit are the believers' attributes representing a relationship with God provided by the Holy Spirit and visible to everyone. Believers assess the fruits of their Spirit to stay connected to God and prepared for conflict with one another and the flesh as shared in Galatians 5:16-18. Christians are reminded in 1 Timothy 4:14 not to neglect the gift which they possess. These gifts given by the Holy Spirit are for Christians performing their service, which benefits the church but, more importantly, glorifies God in heaven.

God created a generation for a purpose to glorify Him and his kingdom. Man fulfills his destiny to be a disciple, and he will be held accountable for his actions, or lack of them. The good news of the gospel for Christians must be more than just a repeated story in pulpits or read in Bible study class.

Christians must fully engulf themselves in what it means to carry out the mission of God. As demonstrated by the apostles and other appointees in the Bible, trials and tribulations were endured continuously by those elected to lead the Christian life. Through Jesus' teachings, he gave the apostles the authority to travel among the people sharing the message of God's kingdom.

Even Jesus, during His ministry on earth, did not go out alone. He had followers, and he spent much-needed time in prayer and talking to his Father in heaven. Christians who engage in spiritual warfare understand winning the battle is not a solo act but includes a relationship structured by God's guidance.

Hain insists that the good news for believers is that the crucifixion of Christ represents Satan's defeat giving his followers authority and power to continue the war waged against the

advance of God's kingdom. Satan's defeat secures the victory of Christ's return and the eternal defeat.¹⁴¹ In the meantime, believers continue to win more disciples, grow in Christ, and engage their worship mode of manifesting God in their lives and the lives of others.

Scripture revealed in Luke 10:2 that the harvest is excellent, but there are few laborers, and believers must pray that God would send more of them. Jesus was conscious of the world's circumstances, so his mission and training disciples were important. The need for disciples prepared and ready for the work to be completed in the field can only be carried out when the church has received God's necessary teachings.

Theoretical Foundations

God has called Cedar Crest Church to assemble, baptize, and teach new believers to go out into the community to share the good news of the gospel. Cedar Crest's responsibility is to encourage those who are lost and trying to find a sense of direction. Leaders of the church, and ministries, must be held accountable to ensure completion of the mission to glorify God.

Challenging the people of God is necessary to take the church to a much higher level in discipleship. Boone maintains the world needs leaders filled with the Holy Spirit who brings balance to leadership and provides holiness in church relationships.¹⁴² Although their ancestors understood the importance of fulfilling the mission, the current generation appears to have lost interest. Sunday morning worship and Wednesday Bible Study classes were scarce for parents and young people due to extracurricular activities taking precedence.

¹⁴¹ Frank Hain, "The Battle is Real: Spiritual Warfare, Discipleship, and the Christian Soldier" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2017), 72.

¹⁴² Jeffrey James Boone Sr., "Acts of the Holy Spirit in Leadership: A Case for Holy Leadership in the Church" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2019), 27.

A faithful few go the extra mile to affirm the achievement of the church's duties. However, the depletion of these individuals' persistence continues to deteriorate their ability to carry on faithfully. Something needs to be in place to help Cedar Crest become more accountable as the children of God.

There are multiple passages of scripture that speak of accountability (Luke 12:48, Romans 14:11-12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 4:25, and James 5:16) that is a constant reminder of the expectation God has for his creation. In Romans 14:11-12, Paul says that every Christian must account to God of their life on the judgment seat. Paul continues to explain believers being held accountable for criticizing others instead of concentrating on their behavior.

In this passage of scripture (Matthew 12:36), the specific usage of Jesus' words "I say to you" is powerful when spoken in this setting. Just as the usage of "verily, verily" and "most assuredly" by Jesus in the Bible, he often referred to phrases to emphasize a strong declaration of what he was trying to depict to his listeners. The Scribes and Pharisees were asking Jesus for a sign, and yet he pointed out to them the very words they proclaimed would eventually destroy them. Jesus wanted the people to understand that not only would they be held accountable for their actions but how they would lead others astray.

In the early chapters of Mark 2:1-17, a paralytic man whose desire is to be made whole confronted Jesus and his four acquaintances. It is the faith of the person with paralysis that Jesus does so and forgives his sins. The scribes are perplexed at the thought of Jesus claiming to have the authority, and yet they were witnesses to him, knowing at that very moment he knew what was on their hearts.

After the healing, he continues his journey, and this is where he encounters Matthew and Levi, and they become his disciples. Once again, the scribe's question whom Jesus claims he is

because he dines with tax collectors and sinners. Encountering obstacles and challenges is necessary to carry out God's important work. However, despite the obstacles and interruptions, Jesus encountered he did not allow this to distract him from his mission.

Jesus encountered many individuals, and one prime example was the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1-29. Christians experience Jesus' invitation to anyone who actively seeks him. The writer of Hebrews 11:6 states with faith, anyone who comes to God must believe who he says he is and diligently seek him. When the new believer elects to seek God, the church response should rejoice a lost soul as reflected in the lost coin's parable (Luke 15:8-10).

In Luke 12:35-48, this passage indeed acknowledges God's expectations of a Christian's duty and responsibility where he is concerned. Kim advises a Christian's duty includes a dedication to encouraging faith regardless of how feeble, weak, and unwise they may be but using gifts, abilities, and time to allow God to work miracles once they commit to him.¹⁴³ Jesus used parables to teach spiritual lessons so the people could become better Christians. The parable is a reminder that man should always be ready for Christ's return but, during the time, must be busy carrying out the work of a disciple.

Anders and Butler share the dedication of Christians must be to God's kingdom and not to the world. Their preparation must be devoted to Christ's return and not their pleasure in his absence.¹⁴⁴ Even as a child, he understood the importance of God's work in Luke 2:49, where he was found in the temple, listening and asking the teachers' questions.

¹⁴³ Ho Kyung Kim, "The Biblical Approach to Church Growth Through Personal Evangelism" (DMIN, Liberty University, 2000), 43.

¹⁴⁴ Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 205.

This work can include many concepts while understanding that the essential practice is through prayer as Christ's disciples. Disciples must learn to pray for each other as well as themselves. The body of Christ is dependent on each other to carry out that which God wills. James 5:16 states that we must confess our trespasses to each other and pray to heal one another. The effective prayer of a righteous person avails much.

Effective prayer comes from people who have faith, which represents living an obedient life. Giardini believed that uniting in love through prayer as a communion produces a permanent attitude of being aware of God's presence, which saturates the Christian's entire life.¹⁴⁵ It is a life based on the believer's heart who has a passion for carrying out what God has placed before them. It is in 1 Corinthians 12:12, 26 where although the church has many members, they are all one in Christ, and when one suffers, everyone suffers, or when one is honored, all are honored.

Each called disciple has an assignment to carry out, and as recorded in Romans 14:12 that each must give an account of himself to God. Therefore, Paul is warning individuals to accept one another as God had intended by not judging or looking down on them. Kruse believes the consequence is having to give an account of their actions of himself to God.¹⁴⁶ Christians are unable to escape the ramifications of being disobedient to God's mandate of the Great Commission.

As a disciple of the Membership and Evangelism ministry, this researcher has the authority to enlist any believer of the congregation deemed capable of contributing towards the Great Commission. Just as Jesus selected individuals whom he knew were teachable and eager to become "fisher of men," the assignment represents the need for disciples to grow within the body

¹⁴⁵ Fabio Giardin, "Unceasing Prayer" (DMIN, Liberty University, 1995), 303.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44617501>.

¹⁴⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: Paul's Letters to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 519.

of Cedar Crest to spread the gospel. One of the Membership and Evangelism ministry duties ensures believers follow the instructions of Jesus in John 8:31 to abide in his Word and only then be a true disciple.

One representative from the active ministries will be selected, including Sunday school, Christian Education, Stewards, Stewardesses, Mass Choir, Trustees, Ministry to Men, Missionaries, and Youth/Young Adult. Nine individuals plus the Director will be responsible for creating a plan of integration for new believers that address any found issues during the research study. The goal is to be ready to integrate with individuals regardless of their differences.

On a more practical side, some people within the church actively use their spiritual gifts while others do not. The mentality of some represents a strong desire to carry out God's will despite the often-encountered obstacles. It is essential to match the correct attributes with incomplete work assignments within the ministry. Individuals displaying patience should be working with children and teenagers while matching single new believers with congregational members with similar predicaments.

Leaders within Cedar Crest have learned that selecting key personnel for specific positions is vital to carrying out assignments. Carrying out the work of the Lord requires getting the right people with the right mindset. They are determined to take the actions that are needed regardless of the level of uncomfortableness that exists. Recruiting congregational members for the transportation ministry who share their frustrations with new members will harm their perspective of what lies ahead for them.

Cedar Crest is a church today that has developed a strong resistance to change regardless of the circumstances. The critical phrase "we have always done it that way" can be heard in almost every attended meeting. Tradition is a long-time term that can be very useful when

presented at crucial times. Tradition can sometimes be an issue when people are grounded in too much tradition and the church's history. Cedar Crest members have a solid connection to the Negro spirituals and the desire to maintain that church atmosphere. When the youth expressed an interest in a praise dance and mime ministry, some congregation members did not hesitate to express their contention.

As times change and technology refuses to stand still, generations are demanding more from churches that some are unprepared to give. The upcoming generation needs Cedar Crest to assist in the issues they are dealing with today. Covid-19, gun violence in schools, homosexuality, and social injustices are issues youth face with questions and very few answers. Although the pastor understands and profoundly addresses these issues, Cedar Crest responds with a reluctance to be the called disciple of Christ. In this case, they tend to focus more on what the past practices were instead of what people need in today's communities.

Cedar Crest Church secured itself in the past and did not consider what the church could be. The lost people need churches like Cedar Crest to step up and represent a family atmosphere. Unfortunately, if they cannot see what is going on, then how can they fix it.

New believers who join and within a year stop attending is an ongoing problem that needs addressing. Even in the Bible, Jesus did not allow the people's customs to stop him from reaching out to everyone who crossed his path. The primary lessons in the Bible are the platform that is needed to reach God's people, yet the church cannot share what they do not believe in themselves.

Cedar Crest has engaged in revivals to regenerate the members' spiritual needs in the past few years. Although the process has been enlightening, the results have been temporary, and the

congregation members were active for a few months. They engaged in various activities of community outreach but eventually returned to their past habits and inactivity.

In 2015, Cedar Crest took on a mass project and decided to remodel the sanctuary and educational building, which was long overdue. When individuals enter the facilities, they would never guess that the church received a transformation. However, the physical house of God cannot be the only focus in the body of Christ. Nurturing God's spiritual house includes planting seeds and creating witnesses to reiterate his Word while continuing to move forward and out unto the end of the earth.

In moving forward, Cedar Crest must change their frame of mind to continue performing the work it committed to do in the Great Commission. Connecting to God means spending more time with the Word of God and understanding that the assigned duties remain in effect until Christ returns. New believers uniting with the church provide Cedar Crest's opportunity to baptize and teach them to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. Once new believers develop a desire to unite with Christ in a relationship and discover a purpose for their life in building his kingdom, perhaps they will stay to see their spiritual life grow.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This section included a methodology that proved vital in implementing a more robust integrated program, resulting in fewer people joining Cedar Crest Church and then leaving. Achieving beneficial results in arriving at the workable solution required selecting the appropriate method to formulate and execute to arrive at the intended destination. A qualitative method identifies new believers' behavior and why they left with an approach to resolve the issue. The contribution delivered by the participants was essential to establishing significance to this research. The methodology required the data, organization, code, and analysis to align with the outcome. The use of interviews conducted in a Zoom in-home environment provided a certain security degree during the scheduled appointment day. When analyzing the data, the thematic approach provided the information needed to address the church's problem.

After conducting the interviews, the process that took place pointed to a conclusion that should contribute to a practical solution when implemented. The methodology contained research questions assembled according to what ministries were available at the church and if new believers were comfortable participating in those ministries. The method described where this data originated and the safety protocols established by Liberty's IRB. The procedure covered ethical issues, data coding and analysis, questions presented, and interview procedures in the intervention design.

The type of data used, how it was collected, administered, and stored were all details that had to be covered in this section to understand better the importance of utilizing the correct procedures to arrive at the necessary conclusion. In other words, the methodology justified the direction in the research for the dilemma experienced at Cedar Crest.

An exploratory study addressed Cedar Crest's issue to ascertain a solution by first identifying the problem, new believers' uniting with the church, and leaving within a year. A hypothesis establishes a connection between the new believers and why they determine why they were leaving within a year of joining the church. After establishing the hypothesis, data had to be collected to be relevant and provided a purposeful insight to a resolution. Twelve individuals were selected and interviewed from the master membership list who recently joined Cedar Crest and then stopped coming to obtain the required data. These individuals were the only ones who fitted the research criteria; therefore, eliminating all other names. The interview process included coding, analyzing to determine any common themes, and then recording the results. The conclusion presented implementing a remedy to procure a more robust integrated program that would result in fewer people joining Cedar Crest and leaving.

The list of alphabetical names of potential participants provided the procedure in contacting them. Selection continued until the desired number, twelve, had been reached. The researcher emphasized the significance of recruiting individuals motivated to contribute input to an ongoing dilemma during the interview process. At the time of an inquiry, addressing potential participants' concerns transpired while assembling individuals for interviews. Individuals were allowed to participate in a video-taped interview to assist in the research to understand better why they were no longer attending the church.

Participation was strictly confidential, and assigning pseudonyms, everyone protected their identity after completing the interview. At the time of the recruiting, research questions remained private to the potential participants. The objective was to generate an impromptu reaction and not allow them the opportunity to develop constructed or well-thought-out responses. The technical equipment process needed to work appropriately to ensure there were

no rescheduling of interviews since participants had access to the research questions. The element of surprise would not exist.

During the interview, the participants were allowed the opportunity to refuse any question they were uncomfortable answering. Fortunately, refusing to answer questions was not an issue during the interviews. Each participant attempted to provide as many answers as possible, even during struggling with a question. They were allowed to skip any question or make a notation of an exact answer to a previous question. During the interview, they could decline to participate if they chose not to proceed any further luckily, no one had a problem with the questions posed to them. Selecting ten questions minimized a lengthy process that focused on addressing the worship service experience, interaction of members within the congregation, and Cedar Crest Church.

This researcher identified a problem at Cedar Crest of new believers uniting with the church and within a year leaving and pursued valuable resources to obtain information to address the issue. The best way to solve the church's dilemma was to interview those directly connected to the problem. Relying on the methodology in this research provided a blueprint with insight into solutions that would help the church move forward. This project's carefully planned execution yielded adequate and usable data interpreted successfully by this research's conclusion. Recruiting enough participants to provide the data allowed the study to move in the direction needed. These actions provided findings and deduced what Cedar Crest applied toward this course of action.

Intervention Design

Chapter one defined Cedar Crest Church as a place with an established history in Christian religion sustained through multiple catastrophes while maintaining the reputation of being a vibrant place of worship. The problem presented, new believers no longer attending after joining the church within a year, aligned with investigating and remediating the issue of short-term attendance at Cedar Crest. Demographic data collected related to the new believers to target their needs in a church environment. The intervention design applied research into the thesis and produced a logical solution once implemented resolved the issue.

Church records list members who are officially a part of the congregation. The standard custom of Cedar Crest is to allow members' names to remain on the list and removed in one of three ways. First, they request by phone, in-person, or writing removing their names due to uniting with another church. Second, they no longer desire to affiliate with Cedar Crest or any other church (their reason unnecessary at the time of contact). Third, they are deceased. These names match the currently attending financial and attendance records of individuals who are not attending the church regularly. Currently, active or stagnant members are not distinguishable on the master membership list except through financial contributions. This project focused on implementing a more robust integrated program to positively impact the number of stagnating congregants who left within a year of uniting with Cedar Crest.

This process began by contacting the pastor to access the Cedar Crest master membership list. Initially, the pastor granted permission in the IRB application, which was approved earlier. The list contained all the members who joined and those who attended the church. As secondary data, following specific protocols ensured compliance, such as recruiting participants, obtaining consent, maintaining privacy, and protecting human participants' rights and welfare. Upon

receipt of the master membership list and the individuals who were not currently attending Cedar Crest identified, contact for recruitment into the study began.

The thesis statement's primary objective addresses new believers uniting with the church and leaving within a year by referencing their names in the master membership list of Cedar Crest. The names of these individuals are the only names that contributed material vital to this research. This list can only be obtained through the church office and receiving permission from the pastor. The church's administrative assistant emailed a copy of the list per instructions from the pastor. Upon review, the master membership list seemed out of date, and there were several noted discrepancies related to members unrecorded as deceased. The pastor stated that past attendees' personal contact information might not be correct; however, this was not apparent through the interviews' initial contact.

The first step in this process was selecting the list of individuals who qualified for the research. The criteria used to select these individuals were 18 years or older, who joined the church formally and subsequently left the church within a year. The names on the list consist of African Americans, which eliminated the possibility of overlooking other races participating in the research. A predetermined master membership list removed bias since there was no control over the names of members who joined but no longer attended Cedar Crest.

The second step was contacting potential participants alphabetically from the list. Multiple attempts resulted in finally connecting with the participants to schedule interviews. The selection of twelve participants was sufficient for this study which provided an adequate amount of feedback on the research questions. A self-addressed stamped envelope, along with the signed consent letter, provided the opportunity to schedule interviews.

The tools required for the research project were access to the internet, iPhone, a laptop, or desktop computer with a built-in camera, digital voice recorder, notetaking tools, and the interview questions. During the interview, the participants responded to ten questions and relied on a machine-produced hard copy of the interviews; taking hand-written notes helped verify responses. Explanation of the recording process during the interview was discussed with participants when scheduling the appointment. Participants acknowledged their understanding of the digital recording of their interview and understood the process captures the essence of their responses. Since the Zoom web recorder provided a built-in recorder, purchasing a digital recorder was not necessary. The site's sufficient quality minimized the technical difficulties related to the interview and the cost of purchasing a wasteful product.

The presence of COVID-19 provided another challenge to conducting Zoom interviews. Before the pandemic, the plan was to set up face-to-face interviews with the participants in their homes at their convenience. If this were not acceptable to the participant, then another location agreeable to both parties would be considered that provided an adequate amount of privacy. However, since COVID-19, even this researcher's home would not be possible due to the Center for Disease Control social distancing guidelines and at-risk individuals. Selecting an alternative research method represented the social distancing guidelines eliminated in-person interviews. Instead, implementing the Computer Assisted Personal Interview was the desired course of action to conduct the project's data but proceed safely. Despite some apparent apprehensions about relying on this method of gathering data, such as internet and computer issues, this was the safest way to conduct the research.

The use of the website Zoom was one way to conduct one-on-one meetings without hindering everyone's lives and abiding with health restrictions that were in place at the time of

the interviews. A personal account was linked using the Zoom software. The Zoom meeting was created by inviting individuals to join a discussion. The participants received an email of information needed to access the interview meeting place. Scheduling meetings required selecting a date, time, generating a meeting identification, and security passcode. Participants were required to provide the passcode before entering the forum, which had complexity requirements established by the administration. Limiting access to only those individuals who had authentication credentials protected anonymity. Additionally, participants had the option to turn the video on or off. An invitation was sent to each participant before the scheduled interview with a link to enter the meeting.

Zoom provided the opportunity to interview ten participants within a reasonable amount of time, collect the data and maintain social distancing. Individuals with an iPhone had the technology to utilize Facetime, another method to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, some limitations were associated with this type of conversation. The phone style and lack of access to a built-in recording application limit its use for research interviews.

After collecting qualitative data, the next step required transcribing the pre-recorded information. Transcribing ten interviews can be time-consuming when done manually; however, various sites made the process effortless and at a minimal cost. The Zoom site provided an option to record, used along with the Happy Scribe website at a reasonable cost. Zoom and Happy Scribe, the two methods acclimated, were used because one did not transcribe the interviews at 100%; the other made up the difference. This process allowed the opportunity to comprehend better the responses the participants were providing. While viewing Zoom, participants' body movements and facial expressions were particularly interesting when responding to questions regarding what they would change about the church.

A computer-generated document and along with Zoom recording provided a backup system for added security. When transcribing the interviews and converting them into hard copies, the process included assigning a corresponding number and letter of the alphabet after completing the interview. Pseudonyms protected the identity of each participant and the answers they provided. The protection of identities ensured the immediate use of the transcriptions' information to continue in the next phase of the project while complying with the IRB guidelines.

Ethical Implications

Problems can exist when research involves human participants, creating an issue of following specific safety protocols. Collecting information using electronic devices and using tools that invade an individual's privacy requires implementing specific steps to ensure infractions do not occur during the research. Completion of the Collaborative Institute Training Initiative basic course program enhanced social and behavioral research knowledge and professionalism. The training consisted of understanding there is 1) respecting others, 2) not cause any harm, and 3) fairness in the distribution of research involving human participants. Participants had to be made aware of any risks involved, participation was strictly voluntary, and freedom to withdraw at any research point. Maintaining autonomy allowed people to remain empowered to make decisions concerning their actions and well-being. Once certified, the training did not expire for three years, an acceptable timeline to complete this research study.

Once CITI training was completed and documented, the university has an Institutional Review Board department responsible for assessing risks and benefits from any proposed research. The IRB ensured the reason for the study and participation is explained explicitly in the application. Research disclosed any risks that the participant may experience and the

confidentiality of accessing the interview records. This researcher explained the details regarding the participant's right to withdraw at any time, including destroying documents not included in the study. The participant received a copy of the permission and consent letter and copies retained for the researcher's records.

The two guidelines followed during the interview duration with participants ensured compliance with obtaining useable results and utilizing safety measures. The first guideline was to explain to the participant the importance of providing a truthful response to the questions. Participants were encouraged to be open and candid about all responses without administering intimidation or coercion. This researcher treated participants with respect, dignity and offered clarity of all information during the interview. Participants received reassurance that the interview results would be that of the participant and not distorted or plagiarized. The interview process excluded offensive, discriminatory, or unacceptable language. This course of action course represents implementing a more robust integrated program and provide less to remedy people joining and then leaving Cedar Crest.

Participant's rights and privacy protection, second guideline, were discussed in detail. Although the participants interviewed are adults, a written consent form documented proof of permission to use responses. Privacy protection allowed the participants the opportunity to stop the interview at any time or refuse any question contained in the questionnaire. Anonymity assigned to each participant ensured their responses were protected and eliminated, connecting them to personal information.

Ethical implications exist when conducting research involving human participants. Thoroughly explaining the process protected the participants' responses and probably the most critical issue discussed during this research. Participants understood the importance of having the

right to give their informed consent and complete disclosure of the process. The study represented integrity and objectivity towards participants during the interviews. The procedure included destroying all information used in the research after three years.

Depending on availability, a six-week timeline was reserved for scheduling and conducting interviews. Scheduling did not prove challenging since many individuals work from home, had access to computers and the internet. The original plan was to conduct in-person interviews; unfortunately, the Zoom website was the contact method because of COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines. Participants received a link to the website, which was made available before the interview.

After the interviews, the contents were transcribed and utilized along with the Zoom website's automatic recording. Zoom had specific privacy protocols for recorded meetings. Zoom required that hosts inform participants before recording and consent before the meeting occurs, as does the IRB. Zoom's updated privacy policy did not monitor any meetings or store the recordings after the session unless the host (researcher) requested it. Participants were automatically alerted both by audio and video at the beginning of the meeting of the conducted recordings. Participants could remain or leave the meeting if they refused or did not consent to the recordings. After recording the session, the host (researcher) option constituted storing the recording on their personal computer or in a Zoom cloud. The opportunity to store recording on a personal computer eliminated utilizing Zoom's cloud feature. See Appendix B Zoom Privacy Protocol for Recorded meetings¹⁴⁷ for a copy of the above information.

¹⁴⁷ Taken from Zoom Privacy Protocol for Recorded Meetings, <https://ethics.berkeley.edu/privacy-considerations-when-using-zoom>.

These two methods, transcriptions, and recordings were compared to determine any incoherence in the translations and provided more than one interpretation of the information. A hard copy was available during coding to choose any themes apparent in the interview process. These themes complied with the findings and conclusion of the final chapters in this thesis project. Transcribing and compiling the study contents contributed to additional time directed toward the data's assembling for the findings chapter.

A significant section of this research centered on the research questions, which provided the data needed to transcribe the recordings. Implementing a more robust integrated program that should minimize the number of individuals who join Cedar Crest and leave with a year starts with carefully selected questions. This research's objective was to comprise ten questions to address the worship service experience, interaction of members with the congregation, and an overall Cedar Crest Church assessment. Each question represented the responses needed to determine their reason for initially joining the church but at some point decided to stop attending.

Although the questions may have provided similar responses, the participants provided insight into their perception of meeting their spiritual needs at Cedar Crest. The questions were formatted to discover if what Cedar Crest had to offer was competitive to other churches in the area. The church's location provided a variety of places and denominations that an individual can attend, and therefore their reason for attending was crucial. Ministries such as hospitality, membership, and evangelism have specific duties, and accountability was pivotal for the church's leaders.

At the time of the interview, each question asked provided the participants the opportunity to respond accordingly. Utilizing open-ended questions and receiving helpful responses depended on the wording. The researcher administered questions with the desire to

maintain responses to each one. At the introduction of each interview, participants engaged in casual conversation to create an everyday conversation atmosphere. Some participants appeared to be nervous; however, the perception quickly subsided by the second question.

The recorded interviews symbolized one helpful tool was listening and maintaining eye contact with the participants during responses. A few of the participants' facial expressions assisted in the summation of the findings. The goal was to ensure the participant understood the significance of obtaining responses, which would provide a resolution to implementing a program to positively impact fewer people joining the church and then leaving within a year.

There was no special relationship between the researcher and the individuals contacted on the master membership list. Being Director of the Transportation Ministry, one of the job responsibilities was to help pick up many of these individuals for church activities, including Sunday worship service. Until their initial contact with the church, there was no association with the new believers, and since they left, there has been no interaction with them. The participants were encouraged to provide honest answers to contribute to the validity of the project. Additionally, there were no special promises or incentives made to anyone during the duration of this project.

Interview Procedures

Upon receipt of the master membership list from the church, the first task was identifying the individuals who are no longer attending Cedar Crest. One of the responsibilities of the Director of the Transportation Ministry includes picking up most of these individuals for Sunday service, which removed any difficulty in identifying their names. Besides, serving as an associate minister of the church for over fifteen years provides an insight into the members who have

consistent attendance. This list was essential in determining if the personal information, such as phone number, email, or home address, was accurate to make initial contact.

The potential participant received an overview of the research process and the need for their input to address the issue at Cedar Crest of attending and then stopping within a year. In the beginning, potential participants were hesitant to share their experience at Cedar Crest, but this researcher reiterated the study's importance. The task started with convincing potential participants of how valuable their information was in investigating the problem. Applying pseudonyms to their personal information to ensure there would not be any direct link to those who participated except by the researcher. Participants being comfortable with the interview required providing as much information as possible to prepare them for understanding everything shared was confidential and destroyed after three years of the program's conclusion. The interview format covered how long the process would take and the opportunity for participants to ask questions.

Two weeks before the interview, participants received in the mail a copy of the recruitment and consent letter to review at their discretion and answer any questions they had, including risks, protecting personal information and withdrawing from the study. Participants received the researchers' cell phone number, home number, and email address in the event questions arise at any time before the scheduled interview. The participant was required to sign and date the consent letter, which was returned in a self-addressed stamped envelope and filed for future reference in the combination lockbox. Upon receipt of the consent letter from the participants, this researcher conducted the interviews.

Both parties scheduled an interview at their convenience, allotting 45 minutes to an hour, depending on responses and the need to elaborate on specific questions. Scheduling interviews

was an open process that allowed for flexibility and the ability to receive the necessary responses within a short amount of time. No one else was permitted to schedule and conduct any interviews or interact with any of the participants. There was consideration to initially compensate participants; however, the IRB application idea prohibited this action method. Implementing these precautions eliminated the possibility of coercion or enticement in the recruitment process, influencing the participants' responses.

Two days before the interview, participants received test links to verify video and audio feeds were accessible and working correctly. In a few test runs, there were errors in web connections but quickly eliminated. Unfortunately, when dealing with other individuals' technology, there was no guarantee to the quality of equipment or that the interview would run smoothly at the scheduled time. The morning of the interview, a reminder of the afternoon appointment was sent to the participant via text to confirm they were available.

The formulation of ten predetermined questions in the interview relates to the participants' overall uniting experience with the church. The ten questions addressed the responses needed to determine why new believers joined Cedar Crest and were no longer attending within a year. Compiling questions in multiple formats provided the opportunity to understand participants' perspectives regarding their overall worship experience. The interaction between care leaders and new believers was also taken into consideration when designing questions. There were basic demographics of age, marital status, and the number of children documented and proved helpful during Chapter 4. By collecting demographic information, this process assisted in developing a program to integrate new believers. Knowing the community of individuals who visited and sometimes joined the church gave insight into their culture and how to appeal to their needs.

Before starting the interview, the participants reviewed the procedures and the importance of providing honest answers. The participant was allowed to ask any pending questions. During the interview, participants elaborated on practical questions to provide additional feedback and when compiling the findings. The participant could answer each question as they felt inclined despite an established timeline for each interview. After the interview, acknowledging participation was a part of the process after confirming all the responses given were to the individual's satisfaction. Before ending the interview, participants could ask any questions and incorporate any information they considered relevant to the research. Once the Zoom meeting was closed, the audibility of the interview recording was verified by reviewing notes to ensure accurate responses to “eliminate gaps” in the recordings.

Data Collection

Multiple avenues existed to collect data for this research project. Although the preferred method was questionnaires, to obtain the best results and a higher probability of participants', interviews were the selected choice. When related to new believers who joined Cedar Crest but, within a year, are no longer attending, open-ended questions provided the researcher with a unique perspective from participants to the problem. Additionally, open-ended questions allowed the chance to observe facial expressions during the interview and encourage more participation by evoking elaboration during the process. A casual conversation atmosphere allowed the participants to talk freely and provide more comfortable responses in an interview setting. While being open, participants provided some valuable insight based on their perspective of how they might have wanted Cedar Crest to integrate them into the body of Christ.

The decision to utilize a qualitative method for research was a three-fold process. Cooper & Schindler define qualitative as an "array of interpretative techniques seeking to describe,

decode, translate, and come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena."¹⁴⁸ Implementing a qualitative approach to Cedar Crest's issue provided the "why" of new believers experienced a period of initial unity with the church and stopped attending within a year. First, defining the problem established the direction in which the research would proceed. The next step required researching previous studies, which presented insight into the most effective method of collecting data. Additionally, previous studies pointed to gaps in current knowledge or unanswered questions, leading to future research.

Qualitative research methods emphasized exploring participants' reasons and viewpoints regarding their experiences while at Cedar Crest and why they were no longer attending. Qualitative methods were efficient regarding expenses and the amount of time allotted while interviewing the participants. The participants' feedback contributed valuable information, summarized in the findings chapter.

In this research, Cedar Crest represented the target population in which these individuals shared common characteristics needed in this research to draw a conclusion based on the findings. They were young adults (ages 18-40) searching for a church home/family and benefitted from the sermon on Sunday mornings. The sample size from the target population personified the new believers who joined but left within a year. The selection was easily identifiable since these individuals relied on the transportation ministry to attend Cedar Crest. The sampling utilized in this research, purposive sampling, required selecting individuals who provided the most relevant feedback and better understand why individuals would join the

¹⁴⁸ Donald R. Cooper and Pamela S. Schindler, *Business Research Methods* 11th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2011), 160.

church but stop attending within a year. Therefore with the qualitative approach, a maximum of twelve individuals was sufficient for this study to obtain valuable results.

After completing transcriptions, the process included coding the data. Although a specific platform did not exist concerning coding data, the research format was a more straightforward method when using raw data. Developing codes can be manually or by accessing various data analysis software that is available. However, manual coding is laborious but cost-efficient when research funds are limited. Coding required assigning quantifiable measures to the interviews to organize better all the information involved in the research. These measures represented symbols that were classified and counted. The coding came from the responses given during feedback of the research questions asked. Coding created future research in specific areas of interest of new believers related to integrating them at Cedar Crest. Following confidentiality protocol, each participant had already received a pseudonym during the transcription phase to omit names and inclusion on each interview spreadsheet. The spreadsheet contained questions listed in columns, and participant's responses were condensed to one to two answers to assist in the coding process.

A line-by-line coding technique identified more detailed codes, which lead to categorization. This method proved vital while converting qualitative data into information needed in assembling the findings in the next chapter. It was easier to interpret the responses given by the participants and summarize the results. Patterns such as word repetitions or keywords used in the context contributed to establishing themes and were referenced. Line coding continued throughout the interviews, along with finalizing themes. Multiple participants reiterated identifying themes relating to topics or ideas during the interviews. Classifying themes produced an underlying message or collaboration of ideas that repeatedly emerged during the data coding. These themes were readily identifiable during the responses to specific questions.

The literature review in Chapter 2 also represented a guide and exposure to themes found in the interviews. Previous scholars shared research that explored other churches with similar experiences as Cedar Crest. The literature review revealed some standard connections with the current research conducted at Cedar Crest by previous scholars. However, limited resolutions were given in the revealed findings but encouraged further research into the manner.

During the conducting of this project, there were certain assumptions that this researcher needed to address. Anytime there are human participants involved, and the researcher has a personal investment in the outcome, making conclusions can precede obtaining proof. Implementing a more robust integrated program resulting in fewer people joining Cedar Crest and then leaving within a year can undoubtedly develop thoughts on the reason. Once a new member started attending class, they may have learned some relevant things, such as the pastor's annual appointment or required financial obligations related to the church, which may be disheartening. A new believer's class revealed essential information, such as the pastor's appointed to his position for only a year at a time and can be reassigned to another church by the end of the summer. There are also financial obligations accessed to each member, each member's responsibility to pay within the conference year (August to July).

In the Cedar Crest Church environment, the pastor's delivery of a Sunday sermon may be more than the new believer anticipates. However, a disciple's duties extend beyond sitting in church once a week. A committed new believer discovers being a disciple means becoming involved in the community's work and what exists within the church's wall. A new believer's hasty decision to unite with Cedar Crest may equate with an act of regret.

The pastor challenges Cedar Crest members to invite family, friends, and coworkers periodically for special events and reach out to the unchurched. These individuals may not

understand the extent of the invitation and could misunderstand the members' motives. When the individual requires transportation, the situation may create an atmosphere of obligation to the member. The individual may feel "pressured" to reciprocate the gesture by joining the church when the pastor extends the invitation during the worship service. At some point, the new believer may have a "change of heart" and decided to stop attending the church.

Finally, there was the assumption that some individuals tend to be more relaxed and open once the interview begins. In contrast, others may be cautious due to the severe nature of implications the church or any of its members. Uncertainty exists about whether or not any of these individuals had intended to return to Cedar Crest. Participants must be willing to speak freely and elaborate on any question they deem necessary. The more information received, the better the process when implementing the design of the research. The intent of this research was never to seek out any damaging information related to Cedar Crest.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

One of the requirements for approval from Liberty University IRB was submitting a research study application. The detailed application described the research procedures, which included implementing confidentiality of participants' information for interviews. The wording of the procedures was precise and failure to comply resulted in the resubmission of the application. There was no specific timeline regarding IRB's approval; however, completion of the application and research began within three months. The IRB stipulation, defined in the application, successfully followed the guidelines to prevent procedure violations. The IRB protocol included completion of CITI training before approving the IRB. See Appendix A for IRB approval.

With a more robust integration program, there will be a positive impact on minimizing the number of individuals joining and leaving within a year. The plan to increase the probability of implementing a program required specific steps to address this issue. The intervention design explained how the coding process helped develop a format in the following reading material.

The purpose of coding was to organize and sort the data collected after the completion of the interviews. The importance of coding related to open-ended questions was to:

- Process and improve data to merge the meaning and responses given by participants.
- Identify themes or patterns that were present.
- Further, condense these themes or patterns to achieve the overall conclusion participants were trying to communicate.

During coding, the results included decreasing the amount of data collected during the research while maintaining the meaning and "thought process." Schindler & Cooper explain analyzing coding guards against the selective perception of the contents, which provides an accurate application of reliability and validity criteria when involving computers.¹⁴⁹ Coding was vital to research when the goal was to actively pursue an answer to the thesis question of new believers joining the Cedar Crest and, within a year, no longer attending.

Coding represented more than labeling words but linking data to concepts embedded in research. In coding, concepts did not automatically emerge but were just as crucial as the numbers involved when dealing with quantitative data. One necessary certainty in proper coding was considering findings factual because they represent the participants' feedback. The technique

¹⁴⁹ Cooper and Schindler, *Business Research Methods*, 411.

of coding required observing the text closely while noticing frequencies. This technique was accomplished by reading through responses multiple times.

After the completion of coding, research requires achieving data triangulation. Data triangulation utilizes two or more methods to verify the findings and results of the study. Data triangulation was a simplified method of using a diversity of information to expand results. Achieving data triangulation in qualitative research ensures the data was; ample, reliable, comprehensive, and well-executed. Therefore, the reasoning for achieving data triangulation in qualitative research was more confident that the findings are creditable and valid. The process established the findings to be confirmed by accurately reflecting the problem statement, and the findings supported the evidence. Applying data triangulation to achieve an integrated program resulting in fewer people joining and then leaving Cedar Crest required multiple participants responding to the same questions. The rationale was establishing a pattern from participants who contribute a unique and plausible worldview based on their perspective.

There were advantages to data triangulation when applied to creating an integrated program resulting in fewer people joining Cedar Crest and then leaving. Although time-consuming, especially when involving extensive data which require more significant planning and organizing, some of the advantages were:

- Creating ways to understand the thesis better with answers or results uncovered.
- Acquiring unique answers to research questions.
- Increasing the probability of validity in the findings.

Once the data was collected, coded, and analyzed, a better insight into the reasons of participants no longer attending Cedar Crest became apparent. One beneficial tool of data triangulation was ensuring the implementation of specific steps during the research process. The verification

process included ensuring all participants answered and responded to every question. The criteria established the participants from the master membership list, which contributed to the data's validity.

Sequence for Data Collection

The task at hand was to contact individuals who have united with the church and stopped attending within a year. Although the pastor granted permission to obtain a copy of the master membership list, the office manager provided the list. New believers give their personal information to the care leaders, and they share this with the church's office manager. The current list of names included addresses (physical and email), phone numbers, birthday, date united with the church, and emergency contact information compiled on a spreadsheet by the office manager.

The master membership list included African Americans with a mixture of males, females, and ages extending from infants to senior citizens. Most Cedar Crest members reside within the geographical location but based on addresses, a few commute within an hour of the church. The commuting length was vital because Cedar Crest has a high probability that individuals who visit the church live within the vicinity. In observing the church's events, local members participated more in activities than recently joined new believers. The master membership list included both active and inactive members but did not specify between the two. However, being an associate minister and van driver of Cedar Crest, it was easy to distinguish between individuals who attend regularly and those who no longer attend the church. Subsequently, a spreadsheet contained organized raw demographic data to make it more accessible and recognizable to code and analyze.

The first step in executing data triangulation was validating the data by checking to ensure each participant had scheduled an appointment before being interviewed. Appointments

were matched with the Zoom recording and transcription by name and then assigning a pseudonym to protect privacy. Second, the interview questions confirmed participants responded to each question with answers. Finally, the researcher corroborated names from the master membership to ensure following the research's chosen criteria.

Analyzing Data

After collecting and validating the data, the next step was analyzing. The purpose of analyzing data was to obtain adequate and applicable information regarding implementing a more robust integrated program that would result in fewer people joining Cedar Crest and then leaving. Analyzing qualitative data was challenging in this research project because the variables were words and responses and not numbers or values, which subsequently merged into meaningful data. Although many qualitative research analysis methods exist, content analysis, identifying, and labeling themes served the purpose.

Data classification requires transforming interviews into purposeful information. The statements of participants required precisely transcribing responses. The advantage of relying on the transcription from the website and having the digitally recorded session offered the reassurance of knowing the participants' responses. The transcription accuracy was vital since multiple reviews of the interview questions' responses to observe any patterns were vital.

After transcribing interviews, the procedure followed for analyzing the interviews began developing a thematic analysis that included generated codes present in the interviews. Word frequency processing allowed the researcher to locate repeated words or phrases to locate a common thread. Next, these codes, identified through a theme, were noted on the spreadsheet. Transferring this information to the spreadsheet made these codes more easily recognizable in

recording frequency occurrences. Completing these steps allowed the opportunity of moving to the next stage of compiling the results and, finally, the conclusion.

After analyzing the data, coding all responses, and the interviews were no longer needed, the participants' hard copies, and all the material, including research tools, were stored in a combination lockbox. The IRB established this course of action in the approved unaltered application. No one had access to the combination lockbox besides this researcher; therefore, the contents unavailable. The thesis project's approval protocol criteria required retaining the lockbox content and combination for three years. After this period had elapsed, shredding the hard copies of the interviews and erasing digital recorders included all spreadsheets related to participants' pseudonyms.

The purpose of this chapter of methodology was to provide a systematic approach taken to gather valuable information, which pointed to some logical steps to implement a more robust program that would result in fewer people joining Cedar Crest and then leaving. The chapter began with explaining how the design aligned with this project and the research question. Describing the process of collecting and analyzing data revealed a strategy applied to the research question. The information included the research tools needed, the criteria for selecting participants, and safety protocols.

The discussion moved to implement these elements while dealing with bias and assumptions. At the beginning of this paper, the protocol referenced limiting assumptions and bias when conducting the interview. The findings were based entirely on gathering the methodology's data, which justified implementing the intervention design. In the next chapter, the results focused on analyzing the interpreted data to report the research findings.

Chapter 4

Results

This research's impetus began assessing a membership issue at Cedar Crest Church who joined the church and then stopped attending within a year. The church's issue needed addressing because the members were mandated in the Great Commission to make disciples by baptizing and teaching individuals. A strategy component required obtaining a list of the new believers and recruiting them to participate in an interview consisting of questions about their overall experience during worship service and the congregation members. The significance of the responses by the participants remains vital to the outcome of this research project. The accuracy of contact information represented the preeminent factor in outreach to the potential participants. Scheduling participants' interviews covered six weeks due to the participants' availability. After conducting the interviews, scheduling participants encountered minimal problems.

Once receiving approval from the pastor, the church's master membership list contained inactive individuals' names. Originally ten participants were selected for the study; however, two more individuals consented to participate, which improved the information needed to address the problem. Participants were hesitant to answer some of the questions, but they did respond after a pause, especially when asked, "what is the one thing they would change about the church." Participants' feedback from this question can be interjected into a strategic plan to assimilate new believers within the church effectively.

The researcher declined to purchase a personal digital recorder since Zoom's website provided the opportunity to record the transcripts. Due to the sensitive nature of the information and the reluctance to repeat sessions with participants, the decision favored utilizing the Zoom site recording. The safety protocols established with the IRB during the application approval

process remained in effect for the Zoom site recordings. When reviewing the Zoom recording, participants were visible and had audible voices. The remaining interviews proceeded with minimal errors or glitches.

Before recording the results, this researcher utilized coding to transform the participants' answers into themes. A spreadsheet was compiled, which described the participants' names with a two-coded combination of a corresponding alphabet and number. Notations on the spreadsheet represented reminders of the participants' reactions to specific questions. Each column contains a brief summation (three to four words) of each question. The spreadsheet became a vital tool while comprising the chapter's contents since it was a condensed version of the twelve conducted interviews. During the conversations, participants express the importance of including anonymity in their answers. Although there was a fluctuation between the participants' responses, specific keywords were noticed and recorded when compiling the findings'.

The desire to have all interviews recorded was entirely the decision of the participants. Eight of the twelve participants agreed to the digitally recording of interviews scheduled within five weeks on the Zoom website. As stated earlier, the final decision to record the interviews was with the participant, and therefore the four members that declined prove to be challenging. The nonrecorded interviews approach was strenuous due to slowing down the responses to questions to take notes. Fortunately, taking notes during recording was explained to the participants in detail, and they were patient during this period.

Resolving technical issues related to headphones occurred at the beginning of the interviews. Happy Scribe transcriptions for the Zoom interviews proved vital yet challenging since the site had technical limitations when interpreting words. Each participant was assigned a code to conceal the identity, as stated at the beginning of the research. When coding the data,

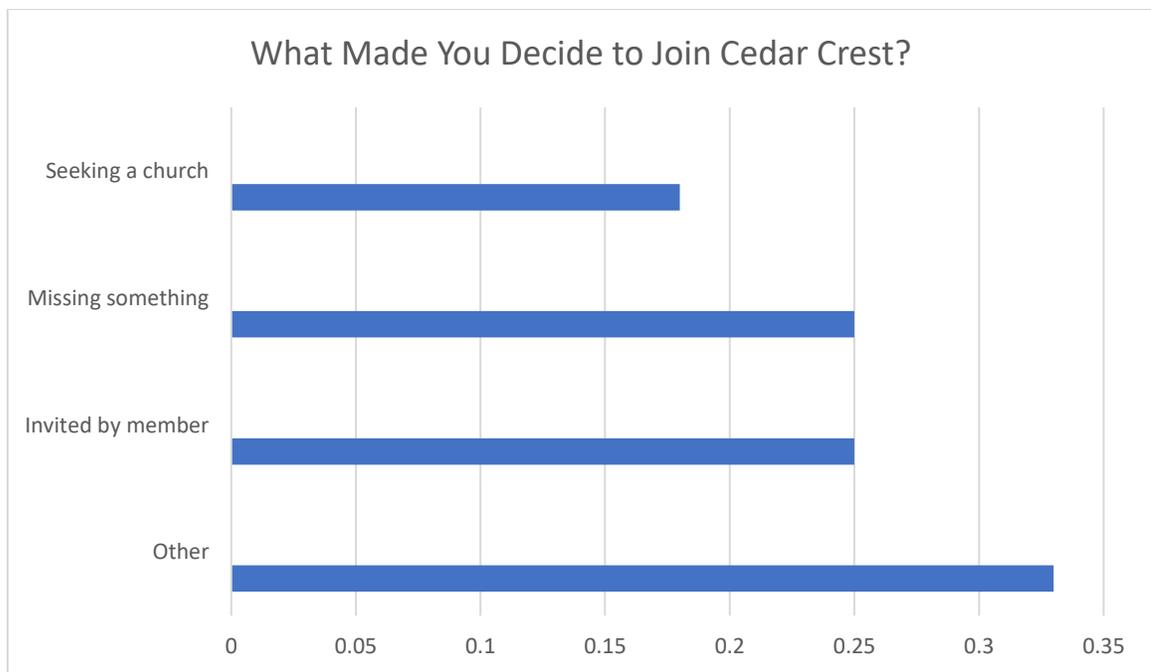
multiple reviews of the interviews ensured responses were correct in carefully determining any "keywords or phrases."

When making initial observations, the raw demographics data had to be analyzed. Participants consisted of ten females and two males of the African American race. The age range was nineteen to fifty, of which three were single parents (female) with children under 17. The master membership list design maintains this type of information about every new believer uniting with Cedar Crest.

In analyzing the transcriptions, the difficulty abides with participants' responses and the level of hesitancy in answers. Despite everyone's reassurance, observing the participants' facial expressions in the recordings provided a different perspective. Persons' facial expressions demonstrate a type of communication with another individual. A smile, smirk, frown, or raised eyebrow can define what an individual may think or feel. On the other hand, the inability to make eye contact or sit still can represent an uneasiness to an asked question. Some of the participants exhibited these movements when the question "what they would implement if they were on the Membership and Evangelism ministry" was asked. A sense of uneasiness was present in an overwhelming majority of the participants. The participants' responses made it difficult to stay neutral and not prompt them into elaborating during the interview.

In the first question asked regarding what made the new believers join Cedar Crest, the participants' supplied multiple answers. For clarification, the participants in this research are individuals who joined Cedar Crest with the intent of being there permanently. These twelve individuals stated they wanted to become active within ministries. At no point did they consider themselves just members. Two individuals stated they were looking for a church to attend regularly. As young children, church attendance was mandatory while living at home; they

neglected to seek a church for themselves once they moved away from home. While three others cited something was missing, their current actions did not appear to be working for them, and they decided to choose a different path. After attending a few services on Sunday, they concluded that hearing sermons were the missing element. They were experiencing some challenging times and arrived at what some had described as "forks in the road." The opportunity to return to church was based on the need to get through their life circumstances and realized that the people in their lives provided very little to help their situation. Instead, many were dealing with similar problems and coping with an identifiable pain themselves. Three individuals shared a member from Cedar Crest extended an invitation to visit the church. However, a new believer who had recently joined invited them to attend as their guest, not realizing a disciple's responsibility was inviting others to hear the gospel. These individuals believed they found something and subsequently desired to share it with others in the same predicament.

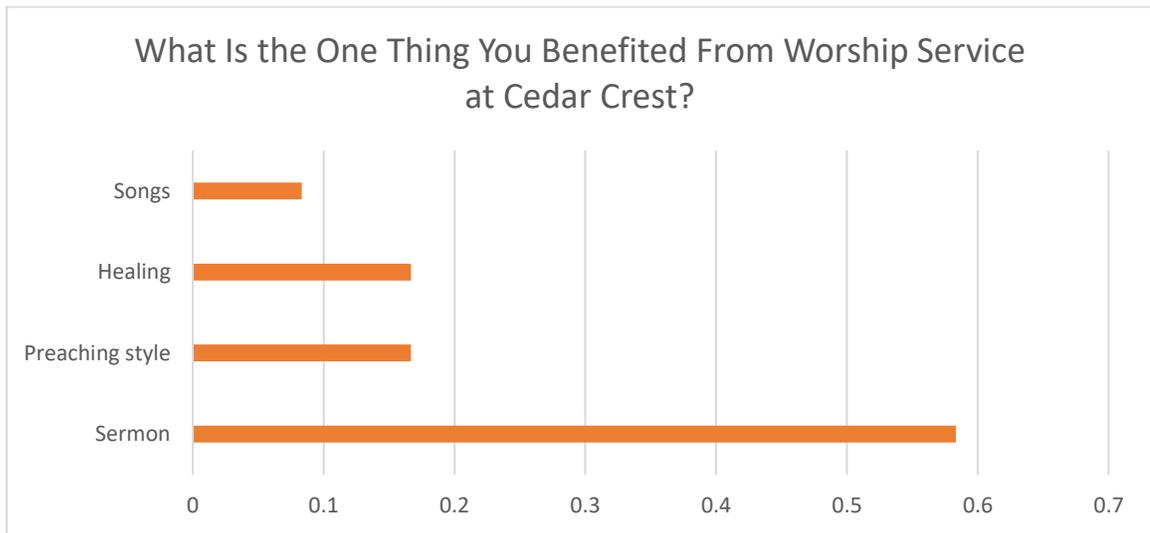


When presented the question as to what was the one thing that the new believers benefitted the most from the worship service, there was an overwhelming consensus that the

pastor's sermon was the reason. When asking the question, each participant's face immediately portrayed a smile, which was indicative of the amount of joy they experienced during this time. Descriptive terms such as "awesome," "on point," "spoke the Word," "healing message," and "relate" were terms used by the participants who agree their experience had a tremendous impact on their life. As a Cedar Crest member for 18 years, this researcher is biased when related to the pastor's sermon on Sundays. His sermons reference the Bible and explain in such a way that develops a yearning to hear more. Whether during worship service or the eulogy delivered at funerals, feedback about the pastors' sermon is valuable when sharing the gospel's message because people felt convicted in a personal way. All the new believers' focus was to learn more about God and pursue a relationship with him, and they were able to satisfy this aspect of their life through the preaching received during worship service. These individuals commented on the effectiveness and time well-spent because of the encounter at Cedar Crest.

One participant shared her experience with the pastor's sermon and the problems endured during the week leading to Sunday. A noticeable expression used suggested she was comfortable with responding to this question. She smiled, took a deep breath, and stated that although she was hesitant to go to church initially, the sermon managed to minister to a particular issue that she was struggling with before arriving. The participant's reference to a healing message may have assisted in dealing with the problem and learning how to make corrections with herself and her family. The more she attended, the enjoyable the atmosphere became, focusing on the service and the need to discover comfort in troubling circumstances. While attending Cedar Crest, she compared each worship experience as "new" and not replicating the previous one. Her voice's passion indicates the sermon's critical contribution to her struggles and the desire to seek resolution.

Many participants acknowledged a similar experience when compared to the pastor's perspective of interpreting biblical scriptures. The pastor's ability to utilize everyday events and applying them to the Word of God provides the opportunity for many to find a level of comfort in a lonely place. The participants were impressed with how they could connect to the pastor since he was willing to "be honest and candid" when speaking from the pulpit on the importance of seeking a relationship with God. Many of the participants acknowledged the importance of the sermons "speaking" to them and their lives. As some participants shared, their church experience had lasting results and dealt with topics they found relatable. The pastor's sermon motivated the discovery of God's expectations regarding their lives. In previous church settings, participants expressed the level of disconnecting from ministers that referenced issues that had very little, if any, meaning in their lives with today's challenges.

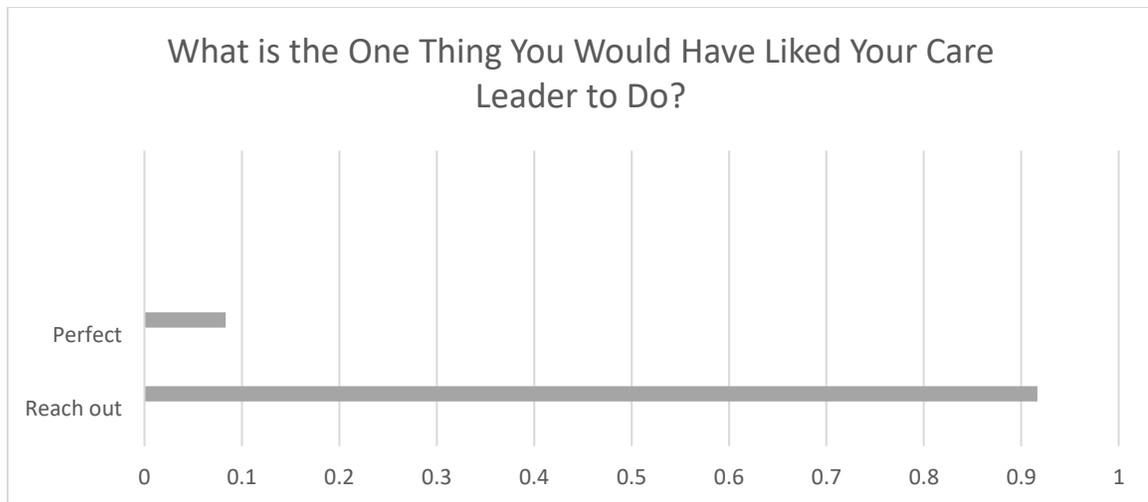


The third question highlighted assigning a care leader to all new believers and inquired about how they would rate their performance. Only one participant among the twelve was pleased with their care leader and provided her name. She provided admiration and enthusiasm for this individual, which described the work done when she attended the church. The participant explained how her care leader reached out to her with multiple phone calls and text messages. In

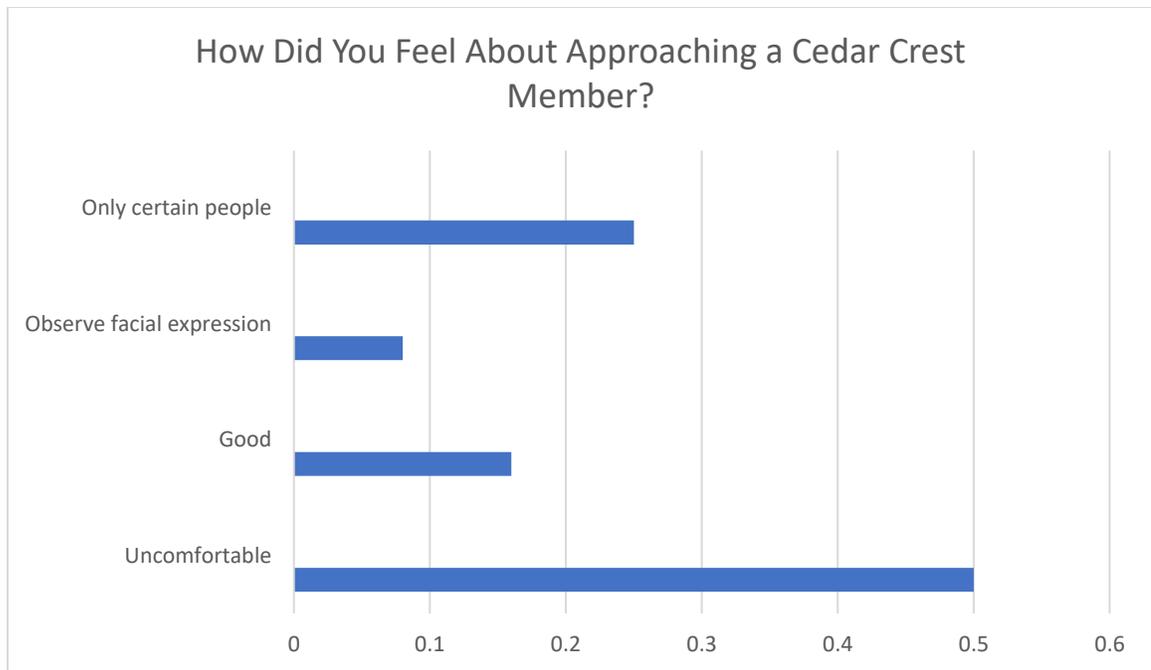
the few times the participant needed someone to talk to, her care leader was available and prayed at the end of the conversation. She concluded her care leader went "above and beyond" the participants' expectations.

The remaining individuals state they would have loved the care leader to connect with them more instead of the new believer making the first gesture. Care leaders who do not reach out to the new believer are disturbing to this researcher when defining their assigned duties. The level of disappointment is apparent in their voice when listening to the participants speak on the matter. Some of the participants mentioned they have a reclusive personality, and reaching out to someone is problematic. Nonetheless, one of the pastor's statements during service is that the care leader is available to them when the pastor is unreachable. Care leaders are responsible for acquiring new believers' contact information and compiled it with the master membership list. Care leaders should initiate a connection when new believers are absent from church on Sundays and periodically during the week. According to most of these participants, the pastor should instruct care leaders to reach out to every new believer regardless of personal conflicts.

One participant shared they were unsure whether the care leader had some personal issues that needed resolving, which contributed to them not reaching out. Members of the congregation have established relationships with individuals within the church, unlike new believers.



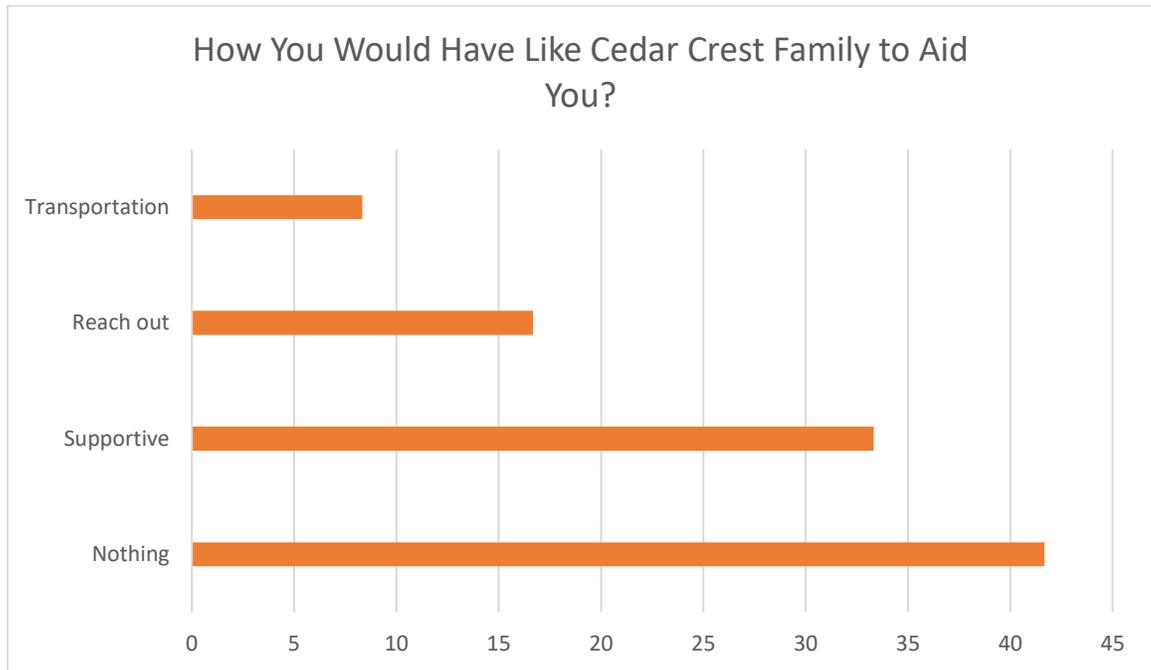
During the interview, new believers commented that they felt out of place when they initially united with the church unless they had family members attending. The question that focused on the importance of the congregation's role was how the new believers addressed approaching someone at the church. There was a three-to-three split to the response of being uncomfortable and nervous. When interpreting being uncomfortable or nervous, the participants stated these emotions related to their insecurities and the members' lack of enthusiasm. These individuals shared a person's facial expressions were the determinant in concluding whether the church member was unapproachable. Some participants stated their custom of observing whether someone was smiling, sad, or angry factor into the level of feeling welcomed. Participants used facial expressions to determine if initiating social interaction with a church member was appropriate. Finally, only two individuals responded that the members were like family or felt comfortable approaching them. They also communicated they have an extravert personality, and meeting individuals was a positive characteristic they possess.



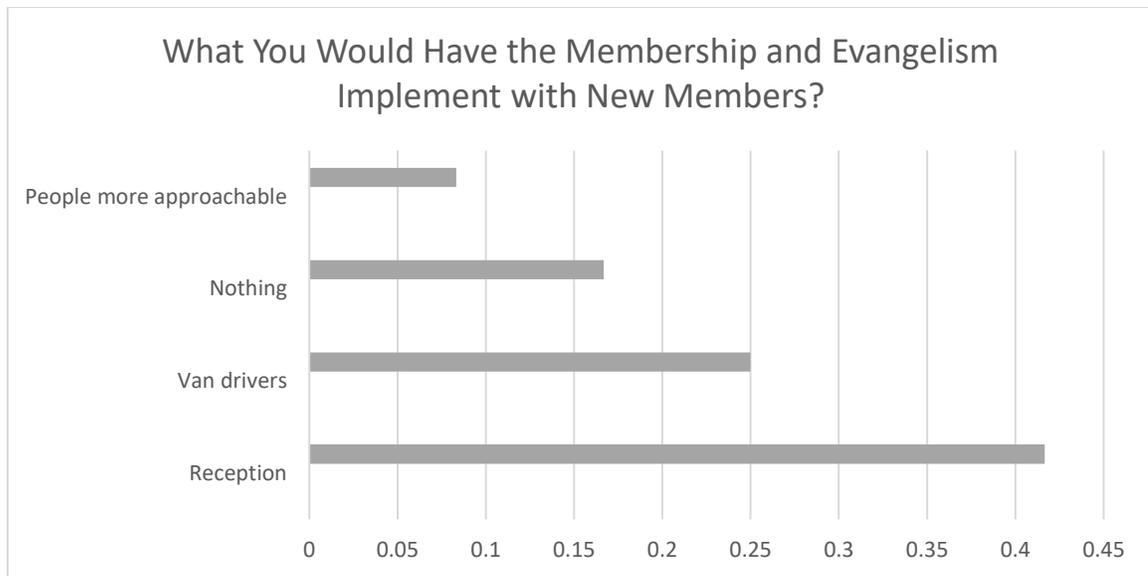
When discussing the level of approachability between new believers and church members, the overwhelming response was either uncomfortable or nervous. The participants shared once they received the impression that church members did not want to be "bothered" or had a look of solemnness that doused any interaction changes between the two groups. In these circumstances, participants preferred Cedar Crest members to genuinely make the initial contact to demonstrate a sense of caring, creating an atmosphere of being welcomed.

New believers automatically meet the pastor, First Lady, and care leader once they unite with the church but the next question referenced how they wanted the church as a whole to aid them and their families. Almost half of the participants stated they did not attend or expect the church to assist them in any way. They were looking for something spiritually and not monetary or material. Emotional support and connecting to the participants were responses given through elaboration on the question. In the past, newcomers to Cedar Crest developed a "reputation" for visiting and seeking monetary contributions to some degree before leaving. Some of the

congregation members have expressed an opinion of pessimism regarding their presence in the church. The congregation demonstrating demoralization among new believers may be the origin of their reluctance to approach anyone.



Participants provided some enlightening responses when asked what changes they would implement if they were members of the Membership and Evangelism ministry. The question related to implementing an idea if the participant was on the Membership and Evangelism ministry provided interesting responses and insight. An overwhelming five individuals suggested a fellowship luncheon or welcoming reception would be ideal for new believers. These individuals shared an opportunity to integrate with the congregation in an easy-going atmosphere can be the icebreaker needed to build lasting relationships and strengthen the bond of discipleship. One participant shared while riding the bus, one of the drivers often made derogatory comments about the church, which was unacceptable for any member's actions.

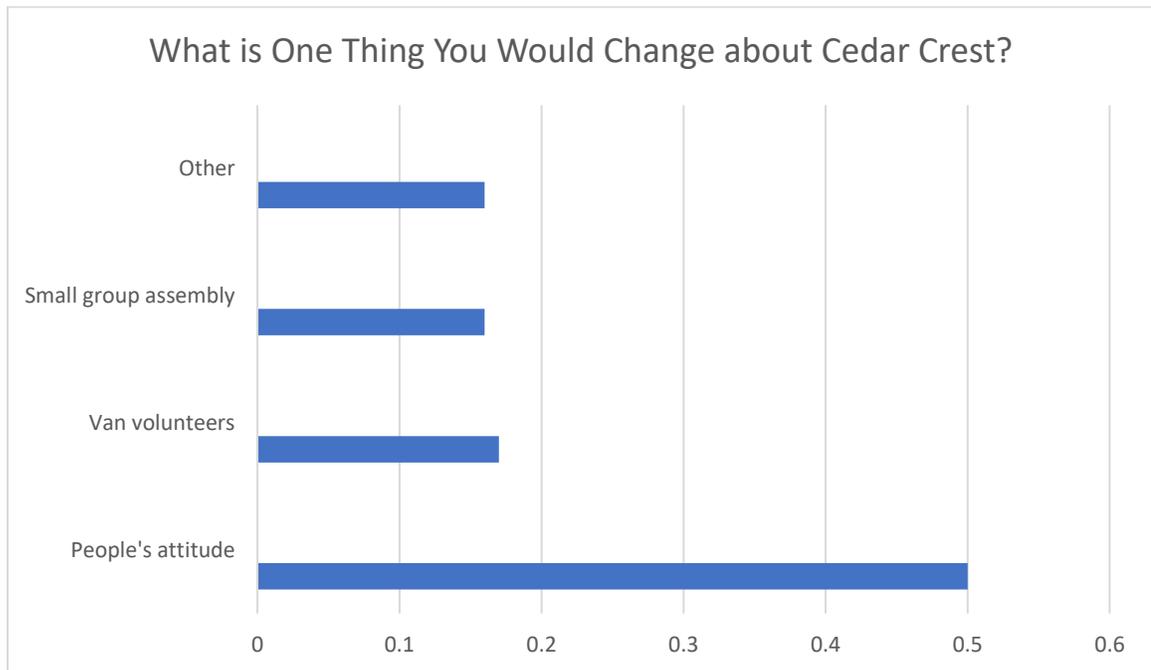


The remaining four participants respond by stating nothing, adding community outreach, or making church members more approachable. The individuals who referenced nothing appear to have little knowledge of the Membership and Evangelism ministry responsibility, which may be related to the amount of time they attended the church. Another possibility points to why many attended in the first place, looking for some spiritual guidance. Regardless of the reason, there is very little concern to new believers (two) to change any aspect of how the church conducts itself. However, making church members more approachable may be an issue that needs addressing during training. Under the pastor's guidance, ministry leaders can share monthly meetings that enhance the awareness of their gestures and introduce preconceived notions.

Participants' gave a variety of responses to what they would change about Cedar Crest. One-third of the participants wanted to change some of the church members' attitudes, facial expressions, hearts, or just being friendly. Participants expressed they expected the congregation to demonstrate characteristics of having a "Christ-like mentality." Loving, giving, friendly,

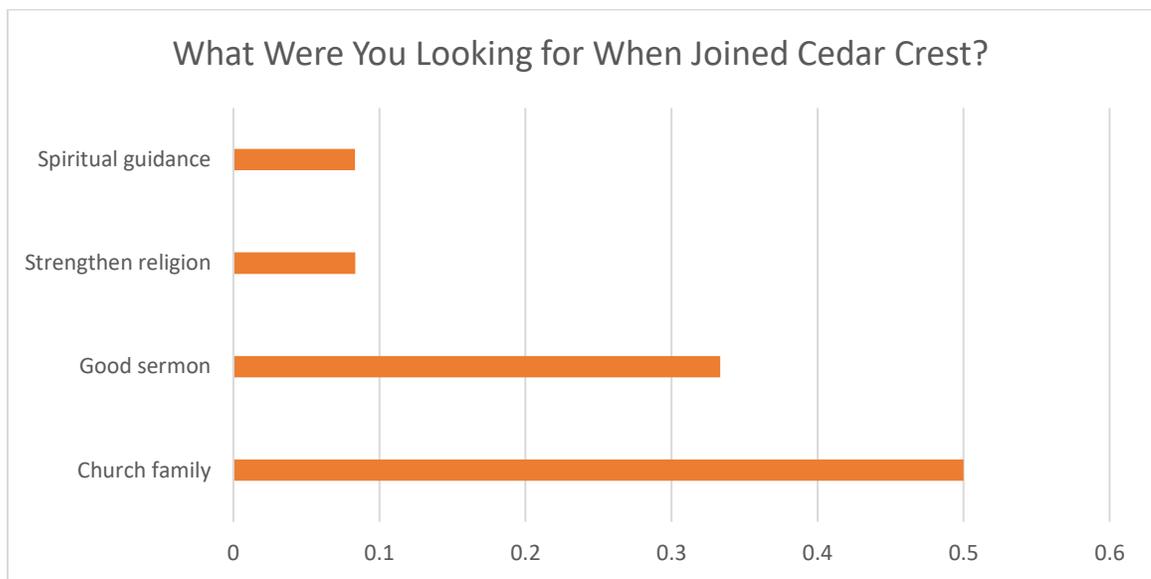
humility, and obedient were a few of the words to describe their interpretation of what it meant to demonstrate actions directed toward their neighbor.

The participants' responses also varied in nature to implementing Cedar Crest changes, including two referenced small groups or cliques. Members have mentioned cliques periodically to this researcher regarding the reluctance to participate in ministries within the church. Cliques tend to present a picture of disassociation with other individuals rather than a united group. Disassociation contributes to the lack of acceptance and contributes to a participant's belief that they would not change anything. One participant suggested the pastor preach a sermon on treating visitors in the church. As mentioned earlier, sometimes members can be too comfortable in their setting and not realize other people's perception is different. This participant's response and facial expression demonstrated someone who was deeply affected by others' actions.



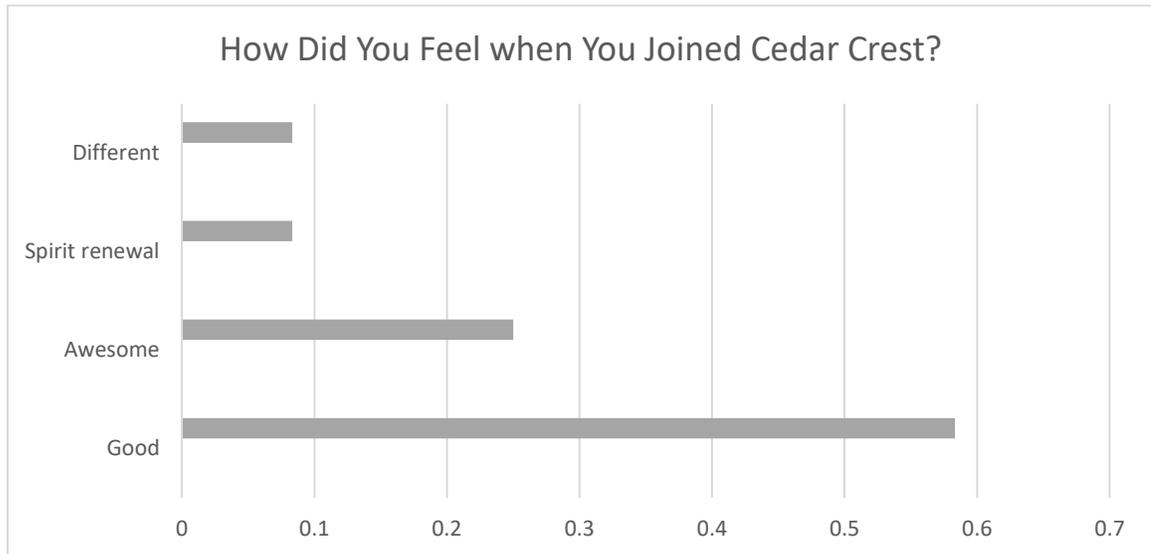
When asking what participants were looking for when they joined Cedar Crest, their responses were almost identical to why they decided to join. Four participants responded with benefits of what the church offered concerning the sermon, which they witnessed during worship

service. When mentioning the pastor's deliverance on Sunday morning, the participants' expressions reiterated his capability to create individuals' need to pursue a relationship with God. According to these individuals, the subjects delivered during the worship service were a reason to keep coming back. Three individuals desired to obtain a family/friendly people environment to not be among strangers but connect lovingly. These participants sought a home church or place to belong, representing a desire to be a community member for an extended time. Finally, one participant wanted to strengthen their religion, which was recognized by becoming a Cedar Crest member. The participants' consensus in this question explains the seriousness of why they became a part of the congregation.



Many participants united in responding to the overall opinion regarding the feeling received when attending church. Seven concluded they felt good, and the remaining divided answers with "glad," "excited," "different," "spiritual renewal," and "awesome." These responses are interesting when this researcher listened since they agreed that the actual worship service experience was positive, and it was an overwhelming majority given by the participants. The participants' facial expressions represented individuals who are happy with the memories they

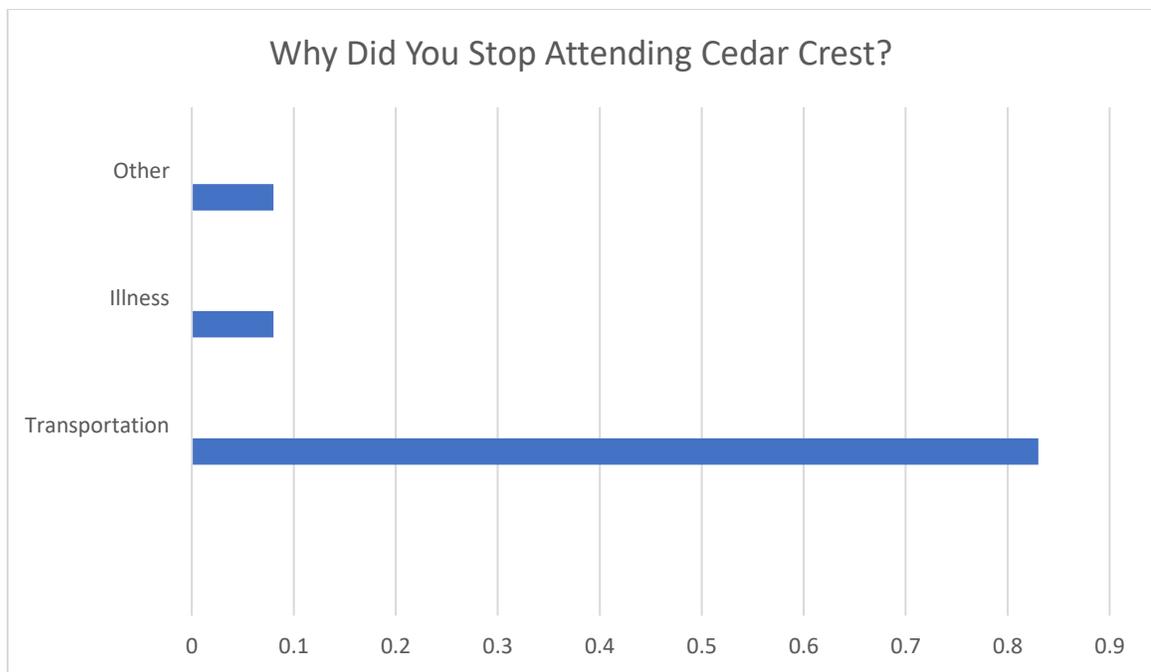
have with Cedar Crest, and the pastor preached a sermon that made an impact. Their willingness to be forthcoming with this question provided usable feedback about why they joined but not why they stayed momentarily.



The final research question, why did the new believers stop attending Cedar Crest, was the most important question asked during the interviews. If this researcher learns anything that will clarify the plaguing question, the answer relates to their responses. Transportation was the majority answer given by ten of the participants. They shared many relocated to an area outside the church's immediate radius and had mixed emotions regarding their continued attendance. They were reluctant to administer the "burden" on what they perceived as a struggling problem within the transportation ministry. The individuals that originally attended service came to know the one consistent person who was the driver. This driver was introduced to them as the Director of Transportation, one of the Men's Sunday School teachers, and was also an associate minister of Cedar Crest. This individual, the researcher of this thesis project, responsibility included picking people up for Sunday service and taking them home afterward. Some participants shared

this process as disturbing to have one individual responsible for most transporting people to church, considering the large attendance of members on Sunday mornings.

The remaining two participants stated illness was why they stopped attending, and with the ramifications of COVID, they currently have no plans to resume soon. One participant experienced an asthma attack during morning service due to the scent of an excessive amount of perfume. After coughing uncontrollably, she excused herself from the service and remained in the foyer. The participant concluded that staying home was more comfortable than the uneasiness received from members within the congregation during the service. This participant also shared the degree of being uncomfortable when approaching anyone at Cedar Crest. The other participant's sentiments echo the ability to implement empathy toward someone they do not know. Although the participants cannot control how their system reacts under certain conditions, they can decrease the ability to be disruptive during worship service.



The interviews conducted for six weeks provided some insight regarding the participants and their thoughts on their experience during the time spent at Cedar Crest. The participants spoke freely and honestly when responding to the interview questions. Although bias and assumptions can be an issue, this researcher maintains impartiality when the participants' responses were unexpected. As each participant gave their answers regarding their experiences while attending Cedar Crest and encounters with the members, the reason for no longer attending relates to something the church did not do. In the next and final chapter, five, analyzing the findings may develop a possible solution.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of the DMIN action research thesis, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the reason for new members that left Cedar Crest church and discern a course of action to resolve the issue. This writer shared scriptural verses to correspond to the mandate of God's instructions for his people. Hebrews 10:25 points to God's desire for his people to not take for granted the opportunity to assemble as one body.

The people of God are reminded in James 4:8 that Christians must draw near to him before he can draw near to them. The believer's action signifies his/her desire to establish a relationship with God to carry out his kingdom building. In John 13:34-35, he stresses to readers that his disciples' identity is their love for one another. However, the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 reveals God gives the authority to disciples to baptize and teach individuals in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as he commanded until the end of the age. McClendon and Lockhart emphasize the importance of the Body of Christ gathering represents a conformed people of God that love God and each other.¹⁵⁰ The Great Commission represents the foundation of evangelism and how disciples put their faith into action.

One responsibility concerning the Director of Membership and Evangelism is to determine how to implement a resolution to improve the assimilation of new believers into the body of Christ by taking a closer look at the matter to achieve God's results. Therefore, this research intended to rely on the findings and minimize personal opinions that may transpire. After conducting the study and reporting the findings in Chapter 4, the research's conclusion

¹⁵⁰ P. Adam McClendon and Jared E. Lockhart, *Timeless Church: Five Lessons from Acts* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 43, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6234258>.

aligns with the results. Interviewing twelve individuals who have not attended the church for quite some time can be stressful. At the beginning of this project, there was no indication of the individuals who would consent to participate in the research or the presence of reliable contact information. Fortunately, this would not be an issue, and enough individuals agreed to provide an insight into the thesis question.

One area of consideration included how the results obtained during this study compared to information reviewed from previous literature. The writers' consensus in past research pointed to the results revealed during this project, reassuring. According to Boone,¹⁵¹ Christian leaders must share God's word through preaching, teaching, training, encouraging, and instructing potential disciples. They have no power to make them "live out" God's word but can only operate within the abilities which God has endowed upon them. McClendon and Lockhart believe the church gather design evolve amid the worship and discipleship of a Christian, which can convict and choose to acknowledge Jesus when exalting the risen Savior.¹⁵² Christians should focus on the Great Commission's importance and God's commandment, representing the importance of his church's work. Once new believers have exposure to the Christian atmosphere, the church must commit themselves to develop a personal relationship, which Durey¹⁵³ believes inspires them to stay and puts them on a spiritual formation path. An individuals' desire to establish a spiritual connection with God was common among the new believers at Cedar Crest Church.

¹⁵¹ Jeffrey James Boone Sr., "Acts of the Holy Spirit in Leadership: A Case for Holy Leadership in the Church." 237.

¹⁵² McClendon and Lockhart, *Timeless Church*, 45.

¹⁵³ Durey, "Attracting and Assimilating," 131.

Milburn¹⁵⁴ revealed in a study, and churches must work together as a team to accomplish the goals of discipleship and assimilation. The church members should be committed to ensuring new believers provide an opportunity to become members of small groups, Sunday School, choirs, and praise teams. Attebury¹⁵⁵ states that the early period of first uniting with a church is the most critical and upbeat speech. The treatment of new believers can represent signs of Christian maturity and spiritual growth. Analyzing the research conducted at Cedar Crest cites care leaders initiate contact with new believers. Care leaders making a connection with new believers is essential in the future.

In this thesis's theoretical framework, referencing multiple passages connects with the problem statement associated with Cedar Crest. Matthew 12 reminds readers when disciples do not share God's Word with other individuals; they will be held accountable. God acknowledges the work toward the Great Commission when disciples fulfill assigned duties. In the Old Testament, God called Abraham, Moses, and Noah, who demonstrated faith, which allowed them to start on a mission and become examples of the type of disciples he needed. Although these individuals may have encountered difficulty and controversy in the mission, the commitment to God outweighed the reluctance that may have been present. Besides, God sent them out as disciples with spiritual gifts sharing with the body of Christ and other individuals.

Cedar Crest must face the challenge which exists to fulfill the Great Commission even in the 21st century. Their ancestors depicted a spirit that depended on God to see them through heartaches and pain. Despite the many obstacles they faced with the building's physical structure, they persevered and continued to move forward. In today's society, God expects

¹⁵⁴ Milburn, "Connecting with One Another," 92.

¹⁵⁵ Philip Attebury, "In Their Own Words," 10.

dedicated Christians to study his word and strengthen their relationship with him. Their mission cannot be taken lightly or create excuses when circumstances are not as "favorable" as they would desire. A true disciple means learning and teaching others to continue the completed work of God. Cedar Crest represents God's image, and that image must depict the nature of God. In God's natural order, God instructs man; man listens and obeys, which results in the saving of souls. God's people are a chosen generation of individuals predestined to proclaim the good news of Christ. Christians can effectively proclaim the gospel when they faithfully attend through worship and other assemblies as instructed in the New Testament. When believers attend intermittently, they limit the level of spiritual teachings they receive and risk the removal of spiritual gifts endowed to them by the Holy Spirit.

Surprisingly, a few lessons were learned during the implementation and conclusion of this project, ensuring care leaders are more accountable for their assigned duties. For instance, many new believers stated the hesitancy in approaching Cedar Crest's members due to their demeanor and facial expressions. Scripture reminds Christians in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us: we must be reconciled to God for we act on his behalf. Simultaneously, an individual who has friends must first be friendly (Proverbs 18:24). Perhaps there are circumstances in which individuals are dealing with personal issues and not conscious of their temperament. Unfortunately, in a church setting, Christians are in the "spotlight" and are subject to more critical conclusions when their actions do not match individuals' preconceived notions. Therefore, the Cedar Crest pastor is often put in a predicament because he is not powered to change an individual's mind but can provide training to stress the importance of members' contribution to assimilating new believers into the congregation.

The research pointed out that new believers who joined the church were not looking for specific handouts such as money or food. Although the study covered a period before the pandemic, this revelation was indeed a welcoming surprise. Perception of this response is a comfort to know that people were not at a place of physical desperation, which can sometimes hinder the ability to be open to God's word. People often focused on receiving living assistance and get "caught up" in the mentality that Christianity is about what God can give them and not what they can do for themselves. People may get the misconception that being a Christian means receiving and not giving. The majority stated they were not expecting the church to aid them in any way.

However, the new believers were searching for a place to strengthen their knowledge about God and, during the process, perhaps find a church family that would embrace them and encourages their growth. Adults who grasp God's deity and some young adults exposed as children now need to know more for themselves. In life trials and tribulations, new believers state as a child, they remember what a parent instills, and now the next step was up to them. Unfortunately, based on the participants' responses, Cedar Crest still has work to perform regarding how more congregation members received them with open arms. A concept absorbed is incorporating the idea that all church members are disciples and not just the officers or ministry leaders.

Perhaps the most promising outcome from this research was that transportation was why most new believers stop attending Cedar Crest. Many years ago, the church purchased two relatively new passenger vans. Unfortunately, there was intermittent use of the vans since most of the members possessed personal transportation. However, the need increased for an active transportation ministry and van drivers'. The problem became a roster of individuals with either a

list of complaints, reluctance to perform the assigned duties, or a faithful few. Some of the negativity overflowed in conversations heard by passengers they were transporting on Sunday mornings. Even with the issues and shortage of drivers, these conditions continued when they attended the church.

One result of the research that was not a surprise was the participants' overwhelming consensus of how the pastor preached God's word. The delighted participants expressed the fact that the pastor's sermons were the best they had ever heard. The pastor's ability to understand a Bible that no one else demonstrated was short of remarkable in their opinion. Many visitors express how the pastor can preach God's word in any context, with any subject, and with clarity. The participants were excited about Sunday morning worship service and hearing something from the pastor, whom they felt was being led by God, guiding them through a situation they were currently dealing with in their life. Circumstances beyond their control forced them to move further outside a comfortable radius of the church. Once this country began dealing with the pandemic, church transportation was no longer an option. For those individuals who have the desire to perhaps one day return to Cedar Crest, the ability to hear a sermon in person is an encouraging thought.

During the formulation and implementation of this research, a significant concern was assembling enough individuals to participate in this project and whether they would provide honest answers. As stated earlier, individuals sometimes hesitate to participate in surveys, primarily when related to church issues. The lack of survey participation multiplies when they are currently attending the church, or the possibility is great for them to one day return. Despite that, the participants agreed, and they appear to give answers to the best of their knowledge, mainly when reiterating the process's confidentiality. Even relying on computers and cell phones

to conduct interviews, compile code sheets and responses, a minimal number of problems occurred. The participants' cooperation in the scheduling of the interviews allowed completion within a reasonable amount of time. Even in religious settings, individuals are willing to provide insight into issues that can benefit the church in the future despite any conflicts that may present themselves in the process. There is further optimism that individuals exist in the corporate and political arena who are willing to apply the same concept.

Future Research

Future research related to this project would inquire about a church environment with diverse congregation members. At Cedar Crest Church, the individuals who participated comprised one ethnic group and single-parent households. The participants' initial desire to return to worship at Cedar Crest reference the pastor's sermon and preach God's Word. There would be a level of curiosity involving a difference in participants' responses if Caucasian; other minorities or transportation would not be an issue. Although this research focuses on new believers, future research would prove interesting if members in a congregation were the participants and inquired into their perception of attitudes/actions toward individuals uniting with the church for a short time. After conducting research, this thesis's findings may serve as a training tool for churches unaware of a new believer's concerns with the congregation.

Recommendations

The purpose of this DMIN research was to formulate and implement a strategy to evaluate the reason for new members that left Cedar Crest church. As the leader and shepherd of Cedar Crest's congregation, two recommendations emphasize this project's research and findings. First, new believers' spiritual needs are being met 100% by these individuals based on the participants' responses. Cedar Crest's pastor demonstrates the fulfillment of his responsibility,

God's mandate to preach and teach the gospel as ordained by the CME Church and carried out during the Day of Pentecost. However, training with congregation members related to being more friendly when interacting with new members and visitors may be beneficial in the future. Training could begin with leaders of the ministries and expand to their monthly meetings. Second, the pastor should take a closer look at the members of his care leader team and congregation regarding how they respond to new believers once they unite with the church. The pastor should consider additional training and obtain feedback from these individuals in follow-up phone calls and hospitality protocol extended to visitors.

As ministry leaders of Cedar Crest, they must share some of the misconceptions that members may have when referencing new believers' treatment during worship service. As demonstrated today in the political arena involving politicians, if members witness leaders' actions, it is easy for them to assume this is acceptable behavior and continue the pattern. Unfortunately, people can base and justify their actions during any given situation. In all fairness, all individuals do not intentionally act negatively toward other people, and when the matter draws attention, there are adjustments. During the training process, individuals can see what others see and how misinterpretations send the wrong signal. Training provides leaders and followers the opportunity to understand the appropriate procedures and the importance of everyone involved in unity. Although the participants stated that the primary reason they stopped attending was related to transportation, the provided responses regarding the lack of "reaching out" cannot be ignored.

In addition to the recommendations previously mentioned, there are some much-needed suggestions for the Membership and Evangelism ministry. The Director should have full access

to the master membership list of Cedar Crest. In the CME 2018 Book of Discipline¹⁵⁶, paragraph 525 suggests implementing special projects when updating membership records, organizing a reception/fellowship of new members, discovering and enlisting their talents for activities. Although the church has care leaders to connect to new believers, the Membership and Evangelism ministry should record any follow-ups. At the beginning of the research, one concern was an outdated master membership list that noticed some deceased individuals' names still on the role.

The Membership and Evangelism ministry should move forward and compile representatives from various ministries with electing officers to oversee meetings. Even with the pandemic, ZOOM or conference calls can ensure participants' safety while continuing the mission of spreading the gospel and nurturing the spiritual needs of Cedar Crest. Amid a pandemic, individuals need a connection that provides hope and reassurance they are not alone and better days are ahead. The Membership and Evangelism ministry must take an active role in obtaining new believers' information the Sunday they unite with the church. A representative from the ministry should be one of the individuals introduced to them and exchange contact information. However, until members can be assigned, the duty falls upon the Director of the Membership and Evangelism ministry.

As Director of the Transportation Ministry, the next issue addresses the inability to meet individuals' needs requesting a ride to church activities. Cedar Crest requirements for a fifteen-passenger van driver are a current driver's license and listed on the church's automobile insurance policy. Despite multiple names originally being placed on the van list, there were ultimately only three committed individuals. Individuals cannot be "coerced" into performing duties they

¹⁵⁶ Reddick, *The Book of Discipline*, 142.

initially agreed to do in the first place. One area of interest implemented is recruiting and training some younger adults into the ministry. The growth of the Young Adult ministry within Cedar Crest Church “provides the opportunity to commission individuals to take the responsibility to love, serve, and encourage one another and enact biblical membership” (Dever).¹⁵⁷ Christians are responsible for leading by example and assisting those in need if they have the resources. A person can only hope that in the future, volunteers will strive to follow the model established by Jesus and be a true disciple and not one in name only. A manifest will include distributing duties equally to all drivers.

One of the critical elements in this research is that preaching God's Word can impact listeners' lives. At the Day of Pentecost, the people were of one accord and in one place. When individuals encounter the Holy Spirit and preaching the gospel is present, baptizing and salvation of souls occur. Cedar Crest can contend the concept of spreading the gospel is taking place. Whatever issues that arise, resolution exists when the church comes together to address them and is determined to ensure everyone has an opportunity to develop their spiritual life as God desires. Biblical teachings allow new believers and members of the church to learn and subsequently teach others. This design continues by disciples at Cedar Crest and throughout all churches that operate under the protection of God's authority extending until the "ends of the age." Members of the congregation must support ministries', pastors, and leaders in participating in new believers' assimilation. Scripture reiterates in 1 Corinthians 12:12 although the body has many parts, it is still only one body of Christ. Just like the human body, the body of Christ cannot go in separate directions but must work as one to accomplish the work assigned.

¹⁵⁷ Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 630.

In achieving the work assigned, I have learned a few lessons to move forward toward the assignment commissioned by Jesus. The responses provided by the participants and the results in this thesis provided a better insight and understanding, which can help others to grow in the Lord. First, the research demonstrated the need to expand the questions asked to at least 20 and interview a larger group of people. The more individuals providing feedback, especially when there is a diversity of participants, would demonstrate the better quality of representation in the community which exists today and address the needs that represent God's community. This action would produce more data and the potential to pursue a plausible solution for individuals with a strong desire to remain at the church despite challenging circumstances.

Second, I learned that as the Director of Membership and Evangelism, Transportation ministry, and Hospitality ministry, the best way to get to know is by using the frame mind of Jesus. Jesus spent time in the New Testament getting to know the people to identify with him. Perhaps they developed a connection that presented a feeling of someone who cared and was interested in their experiences. Whether the people were Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, males, or females, he shared his Word with anyone willing to listen. People today need words of encouragement even during circumstances when the pastor is unavailable. Although care leaders are a source of contact, the duty cannot fall solely on these individuals. Making a schedule and implementing it, including reaching out to those, especially in the technological age of cell phones, texting, and Zoom minimizes the reasons at the forefront of thoughts and responses.

Finally, proactive responsibilities include creating an exit interview, when possible, to determine if resolutions exist to prevent the member from terminating their attendance at the church. Even in circumstances where individuals stop attending, a follow-up phone call could be beneficial and assist in a resolution that could change their minds. As Director of Membership

and Evangelism, establishing and maintain a personal log of new believers with their date of unity at Cedar Crest provides an easily accessible date to intercept the possibility of terminating their attendance and eliminating the need to conduct interviews. Unfortunately, situations present themselves where some individuals may be unable to share their information before leaving.

During this dissertation's writing, the world deals with a pandemic that has disheartened the core of individuals' existence. In this country, as leaders struggle to meet organizations' challenges, many churches find themselves at the forefront of many discussions. Fortunately for Cedar Crest Church, the pastor decided to remain open but only with an audience of fewer than 15 members. Since the beginning of lockdowns in March 2020, worship service, Sunday School, church conferences, and ministry meetings are held via Zoom, Facebook, and teleconferences. As this country begins to discover hope in administering vaccines and reaching 23%¹⁵⁸ of immunizations as of April 2021, Cedar Crest looks to the later part of 2021 for in-person worship. The pastor's decision stipulates that the actual numbers reflecting infections must demonstrate a downward coronavirus case trend and zero reported in-house infections while alternating Sunday worship attendance with a 50-capacity limit. The Director of Membership and Evangelism's responsibility is to take the findings of this research and create a plan to find individuals to ensure every effort exists for new believers to commit to becoming a disciple and fulfill their obligation mandate of the Great Commission. As Christians and disciples, following the mandate is implemented while remembering Cedar Crest will continue to grow with the belief God is still in control.

¹⁵⁸ Taken from "What's the Nation's Progress on Vaccinations?," <https://usafacts.org/visualizations/covid-vaccine-tracker-states/>.

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Appendix A

Research Questions

- 1) What made you decide to join Cedar Crest?
- 2) What is the one thing you benefitted the most from the worship service, and how?
- 3) The church assigned all new members a care leader who was to assist and answer all questions or concerns you may have. What was the one thing your care leader not do that you would have liked?
- 4) How did you feel when it came to approaching someone at the church?
- 5) Other than the pastor, First Lady, and the care leader assigned to you upon joining, how would you have wanted the church to aid you/your family with?
- 6) If you were on the Membership and Evangelism committee, what is the one thing you would want to implement?
- 7) What would you change about the church if you were given the opportunity?
- 8) What were you looking for when you joined the church?
- 9) How did you feel the times you attended Cedar Crest?
- 10) Why did you stop attending Cedar Crest?

Appendix B

Zoom Privacy Protocol for Recorded Meetings

E. Privacy Data Protections with Zoom

Zoom's Updated Privacy Policy (link is external) states:

We do not sell your personal data. Whether you are a business or a school, or an individual user, we do not sell your data.

- Your meetings are yours. We do not monitor them or even store them after your meeting is done unless we are requested to record and store them by the meeting host. We alert participants via both audio and video when they join meetings if the host is recording a meeting, and participants have the option to leave the meeting.
- When the meeting is recorded, it is, at the host's choice, stored either locally on the host's machine or in our Zoom cloud. We have robust and validated access controls to prevent unauthorized access to meeting recordings saved to the Zoom cloud.
- Zoom collects only the user data that is required to provide you Zoom services. This includes technical and operational support and service improvement. For example, we collect information such as a user's IP address and OS and device details to deliver the best possible Zoom experience to you regardless of how and from where you join.
- We do not use data we obtain from your use of our services, including your meetings, for any advertising. We do use data we obtain from you when you visit our marketing websites, such as zoom.us and zoom.com. You have control over your own cookie settings when visiting our marketing websites.
- We are particularly focused on protecting the privacy of K-12 users. Both Zoom's Privacy Policy (attached) and Zoom's K-12 Schools & Districts Privacy Policy are designed to reflect our compliance with the requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), and other applicable laws.

August 17, 2020

Allen Scott
Seth Bible

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-411 New Believers: Committing to Faith to Sustain the Life of the Christian Church

Dear Allen Scott, Seth Bible:

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