Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

John R. Sconiers II

Lynchburg, Virginia
April 2021
Christian denominations generally have low growth rates and stagnant evangelistic programs. While churches struggle to evangelize new believers, evangelistic models that utilize small group methodology have shown various degrees of success. The purpose of the author is to conduct a church growth study of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church by developing, implementing, and evaluating small groups over a thirteen-week period to analyze its effect on quarterly growth rate. The author will define and implement biblical principles of small groups and measure the outcome of numerical and personal growth among participants. As a result of implementing small group evangelism into New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, there was an increase in numerical church membership, and personal growth and participation of established members. These insights can be utilized to develop strategic evangelistic programs based on the small groups evangelistic model that can be applied across ministry settings to improve growth rates and member participation.
Acknowledgements

To my wonderful wife, Nicole Sconiers, who lovingly and willingly gave of her time so I could complete work on this project, I simply say thank you. Without her love, patience, confidence and encouragement, my dream of completing the Doctor of Ministry would never have happened. Your cooperation and partnership in ministry and life have been a blessing to me during this journey called life.

To my children who missed me during this journey, without your support I could not have completed this task. To my mom, Maybell Sconiers, thank you or instilling in me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

To Dr. Lester Kitchens, who oversaw this dissertation. Thank you for your encouragement, guidance and prayer throughout this project.

To my church families at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and Voice of Hope Seventh-Day Adventist Church, who allowed me to move beyond theory and put into practice the principles in this DMIN action Thesis, I am forever in your debt and appreciate you.
## Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction**  
Ministry Context  13  
Problem Presented  17  
Purpose Statement  18  
Basic Assumptions  19  
Definitions  19  
Limitations  22  
Delimitations  23  
Thesis Statement  24  

**Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework**  
Literature Review  25  
Small-Groups  25  
*Evangelistic Capacity and Importance of Small Groups*  29  
Evangelism Mission and Small Groups  33  
Discipleship and Growth  37  
Evangelism and Small Group Issues  38  
Small Group Leadership  40  
Small Groups and Evangelism Gaps  40  
Conclusion  41  
Theological Foundations  41  
Jesus in small groups with His Disciples  41  
Small Groups in Acts  45  
Paul Ministering in Small Groups  46  
Numerical Growth as a Result of Small Group Evangelism  47  
Disciples, Discipleship and Evangelism  48  
Conclusion  48  
Theoretical Foundations  49  

**Chapter 3: Methodology**  
Intervention Design  50  
Setting  50  
Participants  51  
Recruitment of Participants  52  
Data Collection  55  
Small Group Evangelism  55  
Gatherings and Events  55  
Implementation of Intervention Design  65  

**Chapter 4: Results**  
Expectations  66  
Numerical Growth Areas  67  
Personal Growth Areas  67  
Greater Evangelistic Participation  68  
Report of Implementation  68
Tables (if needed)

1.1 Participant by Meeting ................................................................. 71
1.2 Member Participation by Quarter .................................................. 72
1.3 Before Vs. After Group Ministry .................................................. 75
1.4 Spiritual Life................................................................. 76
1.5 Member Interaction ........................................................................ 76
1.6 Enrichment of Personal and Spiritual Connections ..................... 77
1.7 Baptisms by Quarter ................................................................. 78
1.8 Participants’ Discipleship ............................................................. 79
1.9 Participant Break Down ............................................................... 80
1.10 Members Returning Because of Small Groups ............................ 80
1.11 Is the Goal of the Group Clear? .................................................. 83
1.12 Accurately Described Goal of the Group .................................... 84
1.13 Participants Who Intend to Continue in Small Group ................. 84
1.14 Participants Were Enriched from the Small Group ...................... 85
1.15 Average Number of Sessions Attended ...................................... 86
# Abbreviations (if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMIN</td>
<td>Doctor of Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUSOD</td>
<td>Liberty University School of Divinity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

After his resurrection, Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20:

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Jesus instructed His eleven remaining disciples and followers to evangelize and grow the church. However, to embark on this endeavor, Jesus promised the disciples they will receive supernatural assistance (John 14, Acts 2). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. Peter, one of Jesus’ eleven disciples, began to witness with boldness to the multitude that gathered and in response individuals’ hearts would be pricked as their conscience brought on a feeling of guilt and remorse. When the multitude asked what they should do in response to Peter’s witness, Peter replied be baptized. And that day there were three thousand people baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41). This would serve as the foundation of the New Testament church, where growth aided by the Holy Spirit, almost immediately started. This growth was started by a small group of disciples but was explosive and “added to the church daily” (Acts 2:47). This initial act served as the springboard that would propel the New Testament Church forward to evangelize and disciple others in the known world so that all might know the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament serves as a dramatic and fascinating description of the history of the first Christian Church after the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the Christian Church. The book of Acts describes what the Great Commission alluded to, God’s new work on earth did not end with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The work continues through the
Holy Spirit that pours out on faithful followers. The disciples would grow from a small, frightened group to become a dynamic movement, with Spirit-given power to turn “the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). The disciples’ work after Pentecost described in Acts, and the epistles record additional information about church growth, evangelism, and small groups. All of which, as Rick Warren asserts, is profoundly useful for church growth.¹

In today’s church, the mission has not changed. The church is still attempting to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the good news of Jesus Christ under the power and urging of the Holy Spirit to bring in new believers.² Over the years many churches across the country believe in evangelizing their community so that non-believers are aware of the second coming of Jesus Christ and their need to avail themselves of their only hope, Jesus Christ. This led churches to want to grow numerically and personally to participate in the mission to save souls. Today, growing the church numerically is still essential as it is still an outward indicator of the follow-through of the stated mission. However, most Christian churches today are either plateaued or declining.³ In a recent Christianity Today article, Ed Stetzer asks the question is “God stopping the church from growing because He seeks to discipline Her for not being faithful?”⁴ Later, he responds to himself, stating, “the church remains stagnant because we have failed to implement biblical principles in evangelism.”⁵ These principles would seem to include


⁵ Ibid
small groups, as even most individuals would often cite key verses, including Acts 2:41-47, as establishing the foundation for small group ministries.

While some church leaders acknowledge the importance of, and biblical principles associated with, evangelism through small groups, they have yet to implement them into their churches actively. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, has enjoyed sustained numerical growth in his ministries. Warren states, “Small groups are the center of our discipleship, the structure of our ministry, the launch pad of our evangelism, the enrichment of our worship, and the network of our fellowship.” He believes the small group’s purpose is the same purpose of the church, which is spelled out in John 17:3. Specifically, the purpose of a small group’s existence is so others know God and that God be known. The formula for Warren’s evangelistic success is heavily dependent on small groups. However, is this biblical? Warren writes, “Let me take you through the Book of Acts to show you the extraordinary growth of the church and then show you where they put all those people and how they cared for them and how if you will do that same strategy today, you will see exponential growth in your church.”

Warren’s contemporary, Bill Hybels, agrees with Warren but takes it a step further pointing out that Acts 2 is a clear description of small group evangelism where new believers were able to “break bread in their homes and ate together with gladness of hearts” (Acts 2:46).

The Christian church at large is genuinely in need of a solution for the continual demise of its stagnant evangelistic program and its inability to keep existing members in the pews. The

---


church struggles to evangelize new believers and to mobilize or keep its existing members. While the erosion of any church is generally a slow process that could take years, the inability to keep existing members, mobilize them in the community, and add new members means the church is in danger of becoming deceased. Could it be that small groups can provide the salve that propels numerical growth of the church, expansion of the Great Commission, and leads others to a relationship with Jesus Christ?

**Ministry Context**

The city of Gainesville, Georgia, originally named Mule Camp Springs, is named in honor of General Edmunds P. Gaines. General Gaines, who served for nearly fifty years, was a hero of the War of 1812 and a noted military surveyor and road builder. In 1818, the city was chartered and established as the county seat for Hall County. Textile mills, raw cotton, and shipping via railroads were essential aspects of Gainesville as they were the primary economic drivers. Gainesville was known for being progressive, having the first working telephone and street light system south of Baltimore.

Years later, after World War II, Jesse Jewell, a native feed salesman, began investing in the poultry business. He would sell farmers chickens and feed on credit. Then, after the chicks were grown, Jewell would buy back the adult chickens and resell them to multiple markets. Later on, Jewell would build a poultry processing plant and hatchery of his own.

---


As of today, poultry farming is still a driving force in Gainesville, comprising over sixty-five percent of employment in the community, and statewide revenues exceeding three billion dollars.\textsuperscript{13} Over half of the United States’ processed poultry comes from Gainesville, earning Gainesville the title of “Poultry Capital of the World.”\textsuperscript{14} Major poultry producers, including well known businesses such as Perdue Farms and Fieldale Farms, all call Gainesville home to all or some of their poultry farming endeavors.

Gainesville sits fifty miles northeast of Atlanta and is the twentieth largest city of Hall County, with an estimated population of forty-five thousand, covering approximately thirty-five square miles. About seventy-five percent of residents have a high school diploma, but less than twenty percent have a college degree.\textsuperscript{15} According to World Population Review, Gainesville is seventy-three percent Caucasian, seventeen percent African American, two percent Asian, four percent Hispanic, and four percent other.\textsuperscript{16} There is a low unemployment rate of three percent and a median household income of forty thousand dollars.\textsuperscript{17} However, the population living below the poverty level is almost thirty percent.\textsuperscript{18} Having such a high percentage of people living below poverty but with a high unemployment rate means that while there are jobs and employment available, most individuals are underemployed and not able to provide for their families.

\textsuperscript{13} Gannett, The Origin of Certain Place Names, 107.
\textsuperscript{14} Gannett, The Origin of Certain Place Names, 133.
Gainesville is firmly nestled into the region known as the “Bible Belt”. The “Bible Belt” is a geographical area of southern and midwestern states where protestant fundamentalism is not only widely practiced, but religion and religious practices are crucial influences of the local culture.\(^\text{19}\) According to a recent study by Data IO, seventy-eight percent of the Gainesville population identifies as religious, with the largest faith group being Baptist at thirty percent.\(^\text{20}\) However, in the same study, only thirty percent of the seventy-eight percent claim to attend church at least once a month. The large gap between attendance and identification leads to speculation that there is a large amount of “unchurched people” in Gainesville that only identify with a particular religion and are not necessarily actual members.

Nestled in the heart of the poultry processing area of Gainesville, is the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church was established in 1985 by several members living in the poultry processing area seeking to create a church closer to their home so they would not have to drive fifteen miles to the other side of town. Another reason for the formation of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church was so members could worship in a less restrictive climate. The church started with just twenty-five founding members under the direction of a lay pastor. Shortly after its creation, New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church purchased an unused Jehovah’s Witness facility to meet and worship. Two years later they received their first full-time pastor and had grown to almost fifty members. Over the next ten years, the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church membership grew by more than a hundred people, peaking in 2000 with slightly more


than two hundred members, most of whom were African American or Afro-Caribbean. New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church evangelized the nearby community and was known for having a vibrant service and community services department.

In early 2001, New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church’s original pastor retired. Over the next eighteen years, New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church would have six different pastors with the longest stint being seven years. This was attributed to the church having senior pastors that were in the late stages of their ministry, pastors having unknown health issues, or pastors taking ministerial calls to other churches. However, during this period, the membership of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church remained close to its height.

After the installation of a new pastor in 2017, there was a major split within the congregation due to differences in worship and ministry styles. While previous pastors were more liberal, the newly installed pastor was extremely conservative and called into question several of the church’s practices, including the use of drums and clapping during worship. The congregation was split on the pastor’s interpretations, and half of the church left to attend other churches or not attend church at all. Soon after the split, the pastor suffered from health issues, leaving the church to administrate itself for almost a year. When the pastor fully recovered, he ministered briefly before retiring in 2019. At that time, the church had a membership of fewer than sixty people attending church every Sabbath. In December 2019, a new pastor was chosen and subsequently installed, seeking to increase the numerical attendance of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church is currently a sixty-member church with ninety-five percent of the membership being African-American or African-Caribbean. The median age of church members is approximately sixty-two years old, with individuals between
the ages of twenty and forty mostly missing. The median household income of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church is approximately eighty-nine thousand dollars. Ninety-eight percent of the membership has a high school diploma, and fifty-four percent have completed a college education. Slightly more than half of the congregation do not physically live in Gainesville, but neighboring cities.

While New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church has several internal ministries, the church's main externally facing ministry is a bi-weekly food pantry that assists local families in the Gainesville area. Approximately two hundred and fifty families receive assistance from the food bank each month. Except for the community service ministry that engages in the food pantry ministry, New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church does not have any small groups and struggles to evangelize the neighboring community. The New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church had only nine baptisms over the last sixteen-month period, and most of those were member’s children or rebaptisms.

**Problem Presented**

Church growth, generally identified as numerical and not spiritual, often eludes most churches. In a recent study, LifeWay Research identified six in ten protestant churches as plateaued or declining in attendance, and more than half saw less than ten people become new Christians in the past twelve months. The percentages are considerably worse for smaller churches that have a weekly attendance of one hundred members or less. LifeWay Research has found in their research that eight in ten of these churches are plateaued or declining in

---

attendance, and more than seventy percent saw less than ten people become new Christians. While many pastors and lay people point to resources, space limitations, and leadership as reasons for stagnation, when carefully examined, these churches are lacking formal or informal small groups ministries.

When utilizing the above criteria, New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church fits the profile of a small church that is declining in attendance and unable to grow numerically. Upon further examination, New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church lacks small group ministries as well. Seemingly, the problem is that the New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church lacks small groups to drive its evangelistic growth.

There are materials and conferences that church leaders can utilize to help facilitate evangelistic growth utilizing various methodologies. However, evangelistic growth through small group ministries is generally overlooked. This project utilizes a thirteen-week church growth program focused on implementing small groups at New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church to improve the quarterly numerical growth rate of its congregation. The problem that will be explored for this study focuses on how the New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church can implement small group evangelism to grow the membership of the church. The research study will provide a better understanding of the use of small group evangelism and determine the effect upon New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the author is to conduct a church growth study of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Gainesville, Georgia by developing, implementing, and evaluating an evangelistic small group over thirteen weeks to increase the quarterly growth rate.

---

22 Ibid.
The research question is: What evangelistic impact would a thirteen-week implementation of an evangelistic small group have upon the numerical membership of the New Gainesville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gainesville, Georgia?

This project is designed to impact the numerical and personal growth of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Gainesville, Georgia through a thirteen-week small group implementation. The project would include the creation and implementation of an evangelistic small group designed to affect participants on an emotional, cognitive, and spiritual level that would primarily focus on internal and external evangelism through witnessing and acts of kindness. The evangelistic small group will meet weekly on evenings for approximately two hours and receive specific assignments to put the specific internal discipline and external interactions into practice each week. The small group’s actions will be analyzed based on an observation of the numerical and spiritual growth of the group and church overall.

**Basic Assumptions**

There is an underlying assumption that New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church will support the research and action until completion. The primary assumption is that participants will be engaged in the formation and establishment of an evangelistic small group that meets with the goal of outward evangelism and spiritual growth. There is also an assumption that the current senior pastor of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Pastor John R. Sconiers II, will remain as the administrator through the duration of the research and action thesis.

**Definitions**

Throughout this project, the researcher will make use of terms that are often broadly used in various ways. To be completely clear, these terms warrant clarification and specific definition
of meaning in order to fully grasp the author’s intended purpose. While more than ten words are identified below, there are five key words in particular that need special attention and note based on their significance in the study. The words requiring special attention are the following: “Small Group,” “Evangelism,” “Church Growth,” “Small Group Evangelism,” and “Small Group Ministry.”

Evangelism: “Evangelism” will be defined as the sharing of the gospel by proclamation, acts of service, or any means that gives people a chance to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Evangelistic Small Group: An evangelistic small group is a small group of individuals that are dedicated to the primary purpose of sharing the gospel and displaying the love of Jesus Christ through Christian service to their fellow man. The group arranges their life around improving their ability to perform outreach in the community.

Disciple: The term disciple originates from the Greek word mathētēs, which refers to a learner or follower who is committed to a significant master.23 A disciple is a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ who adheres to biblical teachings and not only believes in, but works to hasten the second coming of Jesus Christ by spreading the gospel and being a living sacrifice.24 Disciples are also considered members of a church in which they regularly attend.

---

23 Michael Wilkins, Following the Master (city, state: publisher, year published), 38.
24 David Gushee, Kingdom Ethics (city, state: publisher, year published), 32.
Christian: For the purposes of our context, a Christian is interchangeable and identical with the term disciple.25

Discipleship: This term refers to the journey of becoming or continuing to be a disciple.26 It is the process by which a disciple grows in Jesus Christ and is equipped by training, knowledge, faith and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to overcome the pressures and trials for the present life to become more like Christ.27

Small Group: “A small group within the church is a voluntary, intentional gathering of 3 to 12 people, regularly meeting together with the shared goal of mutual Christian edification and fellowship.”28 Usually, small groups meet for a specific length of time and topic.29

Small Group Ministry: A group[s] of people who meet regularly for spiritual edification and evangelistic outreach with the goal of multiplication or discipling others. The group should function as parts of a local church, not as independent entities.30

Small Group Evangelism: A small group within the church that outwardly shares the gospel by proclamation, acts of service, or any means that gives people a chance to come into a personal

27 Sherry Weddell, Forming Intentional Disciples (city, state: published, year published), 71.
29 Ed Stetze, and Mike Dodson, Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Your’s Can Too (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 76.
relationship with Jesus Christ. Individuals come together as a small group with the sole purpose of presenting the gospel in an outward fashion.

Church Growth: Church Growth means “bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership.”

Unchurched: People who do not attend worship service with the exception of commonly accepted general services like Easter, Christmas, weddings or funerals. In the broader sense, being “unchurched” references people who identify as Christian but are not connected with a church. As of 2004, there were approximately 75 million people that were considered unchurched.

Personal Growth / Spiritual Growth: The process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ or enriching your relationship and closeness with Jesus Christ.

Member (Church Member): An individual who has formally entered into a covenantal relationship with church or religious institution, usually through baptism or profession of faith.

Limitations

The problem with the creation and implementation of small groups to improve evangelism is not limited to New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Because of the

unique socioeconomics, cultural backgrounds, and religious landscapes found throughout the United States, it is acknowledged that perceptions, stereotypes, and results presented in this project may be different or even opposite in some parts of the country. This project and its findings will be limited to the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Since the study is limited to New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and not inclusive of other same faith-based churches, this study may lack the ability to measure the effectiveness of small group evangelism upon other similar congregations.

Furthermore, the researcher is aware that some small group participants’ responses to a survey conducted by their current pastor may be influenced by their desire to affirm their individual status or the church’s status or role in evangelism. Negative feedback, while warranted, may be avoided for fear of being disrespectful or condescending towards the church, administrator or church leaders. Hence, qualitative data collected via surveys may unintentionally cover deficiencies in the church’s evangelistic efforts or issues found within the implementation of the research action project.

**Delimitations**

For this research, the collection of data will be restricted to New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Also, the initial small group participants chosen for this research will be isolated to adults between twenty and forty-five years of age. The demography of this sample includes characteristics that may differ significantly from other samples. Other influences may also affect the outcome of this study. However, the researcher assumes other influences to be equal.

Finally, the researcher does take into consideration the spiritual maturity of the evangelistic small group participants and the church, both of which are means of growth. While
researchers have found that small groups in churches have had positive effects on the numerical and spiritual growth of churches,\textsuperscript{34} true discipleship and growth cannot always be detected by measuring external behaviors. Jesus clearly expresses the idea during His Sermon on the Mount\textsuperscript{35} that external behaviors, including church growth, do not indicate spiritual growth. However, this author assumes that the absences of external indicators indicate a lack of spiritual growth which should also be correlated to numerical growth. Therefore, the measurement of external behaviors is considered an accurate way to compare the church growth of the participants and New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

\textbf{Thesis Statement}

If small groups are implemented in New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, then its growth rate may increase. If the purpose of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church is to evangelize according to the Great Commission, the church should be able to grow, as most current research suggests the implementation of small groups fosters numerical and spiritual growth. However, for this project, only numerical growth in terms of baptisms and attendance will be strongly emphasized, while spiritual and personal growth will be taken into account but secondary in nature.

\textsuperscript{34} Roger Walton, \textit{Disciples Together} (Atlanta, GA: Canterbury Press, 1994), Kindle, loc. 100.

\textsuperscript{35} Matt. 7:21-23.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Small group evangelism, especially in terms of small groups, is a complex and ever-expanding subject to be digested as there are multiple theories, methods, and notions. Several books, articles, journals, and thesis projects relating to church growth, evangelism, and small groups were reviewed and were relevant to the field of small group evangelism. While all of the sources made contributions to this study, the sources within the various themes below stood out amongst the rest. The author surveys each area's key to small group evangelism, which are divided down into subthemes.

Small-Groups

Various researchers differed in how they define small groups. Hiskia Missah suggests that small groups consist primarily of church members and should not go beyond twelve people. He argues that not only is that the number of Jesus’ disciples, but adding more than twelve will gradually decrease the effectiveness of the small group. John Wesley takes the same approach as limiting small groups to twelve but takes it a step further by suggesting the division of the small group if it ever goes over twelve individuals. Other authors generally arrive at a similar conclusion, usually stating a small group is between eight and twenty people.


Regardless of the size of the group, purpose is what drives a small group. J. Pierce describes a small group as a group within the church that is a voluntary and intentional gathering of three to twelve people, regularly meeting together with the shared goal of mutual Christian edification and fellowship. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson define a small group as a people who come together regularly for a common purpose and are led by a leader progressing toward Christ. Regardless of who’s perspective one uses to define a group, the purpose of the group is for spiritual enlightenment and evangelistic outreach with the goal of multiplication.

S. Severance believes small groups function as part of the local church and not as independent entities. Usually, there is a specific length of time the small group meets that is incorporated into its charter. The charter describes why the small group was created and its sole driving function. For instance, the group’s purpose may be literature evangelistic, feeding the homeless, etc. As long as the group includes God and stays centered on its charter, the small group can function as needed and not turn into a social club. Following these principles allows the small group to be the driving force behind evangelism and church growth.

According to Sandra Van Opstal, the term “community” has its roots in Latin and means “common,” “public”, “shared by all or many.” A community is a unified group of people who engage or embrace ordinary circumstances, beliefs, values, and differences. As pointed out by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, there is a great need for communities and relationships in today’s

---

38 J Pierce, *Small group ministries at MPC* (Mandarin Presbyterian Church Online, Retrieved February 2020)
39 Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 236
40 S. Severance, *How to lead small group ministry* (Adventist News Network, Retrieved February 2020)
culture due to the interconnectedness of society through social media platforms, cross
information sharing, and interest groups. While there may not be a connection or relationship
between one and their neighbors, social media has connected individuals on a broader spectrum
that now imply natural and intuitive. There is a clear desire for community and closeness that can
be effectively provided by small group engagement. Howard Patridge expounds heavily on the
desire for community by describing how even large corporations attempt to boost profits and
their bottom line by engaging in small group communities.

Connected small group communities are the life-long blood of churches and, in some
ways, were previously organically driven. Kurt Johnson likens small group communities to be
places where community needs are met by love and support. The community effectively assists
in a single need area, grief recovery, for example, and establishes a support system. The
community deals with the temporary need, bringing individuals together to rally around those
affected.

Similarly, Donahue and Robinson see small groups as a place of community that
provides love, friendship, fellowship, and discipleship. The small groups have additional
privileges and advantages that others within the church do not. The small groups live in a
relationship enjoying meaningful friendship and encouragement. Donahue and Robinson offer
the reasoning that in a regular church service, people may visit before or after service, but this

43 Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture (Sisters, OR: Multnomah publishers, 2004), 21.
46 Donahue and Robinson, Building a Church of Small Groups: A place where Nobody Stands Alone (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) 23.
47 Ibid.
barely meets the definition of fellowship. There is little to no warmth, caring, sharing, or healing. However, when involved in a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere of a small group, the same individuals not only receive the items missing from church fellowship but also openly discuss and fellowship in a more meaningful way.

Many Christian authors emphasize that forgiveness and reconciliation can more easily be fostered while in the community of a small group than in larger settings. Richard Peace discusses how many who struggle with forgiving individuals find it difficult to talk about the situation with large groups of people but, in small groups, they feel safe and can talk about their hurts, problems, and healing. Garth Icenogle points out that the small group is essentially the church but has exceptional influences and power in reconciliation. Christian Schwartz encourages churches to utilize small groups to be healing centers allowing all topics without boundaries, thus allowing individuals to be shaped and healed like the grafting of a limb to a plant.

Due to cultural dynamics, small groups are purposefully driven to be sustained. Schwartz strongly emphasizes that these church communities are connected by what they do for each other and what they do for others outside of their community. The communities created by small groups allow individuals to connect in and receive the healing that embraces their engagement and foster an environment of acceptance. There has been a significant amount of research on small group communities; however, there must be a stronger emphasis on how to

---

48 Donahue and Robinson, Building a Church of Small Groups: A place where Nobody Stands Alone (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 29.
51 Christian Schwartz, Color Your world with Natural Church Development: Experience All That God Has Designed You To Be (St. Charles, Illinois: ChurchSmart, 2005), 116.
revitalize these communities within the church. There is still a need for continuing to develop communities of small groups within churches, where individuals can lock arms on their journey in modern times.53

Evangelistic Capacity and Importance of Small Groups

One of the main themes observed in various literature is the evangelistic capacity that small groups have when correctly formed and utilized. According to Frank Lincoln Fowler III, the first use of the terms “small group movement” or “small group evangelism” can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s when Calvary Episcopal Church in New York City utilized several small group principles to grow their usage with the specific purpose of engaging unbelievers.54 While Calvary Episcopal’s usage of small group evangelism is perceived as the key to growing their church over the next thirty years, the small group movement is viewed as an underground movement that was more suitable for outside organizations or parachurch groups. In the 1960s, small groups developed through anti-establishmentarianism with individuals seeking to evangelize without the use of forms, structures, or large-scale events. Elizabeth O’Connor recounted how small group movements increased in popularity, mainly because of this paradigm shift and the evolving way that churches saw themselves as a dynamic community.55 O’Connor continued to point out the emergence of a commitment to Christ, and one another propelled their outreach into places they had not previously visited. Over the last thirty years, there has been another significant movement towards small group evangelism to ensure churches seek,


understand, and harness the efficiency of small groups. Unlike before, the mainstream church is leading the charge of utilizing small group evangelism to further the cause of God.

Many researchers believe that small groups are the perfect place for evangelism. Although small groups may be small in size, their impact in terms of collaboration is highly effective. These dynamics provide interaction among both believers and nonbelievers who have not yet committed their lives to Jesus Christ. Russell Burrill discussed how small groups have an overwhelming effect of fostering secure connections and community bonds that otherwise would not exist.\(^\text{56}\) These bonds create an environment that is non-threatening and provides an opportunity for people to connect in a natural way to form relationships and feel comfortable in asking questions.\(^\text{57}\) As these bonds are established within the given community, the dynamics bring unity of thought and action. Icenogle has found that evangelism from small groups will increase our capacity to reach more people. When Christians follow the biblical method of small group evangelism, they are more likely to evangelize in relationship with other disciples than evangelizing in isolation.\(^\text{58}\) Jeffrey Arnold alludes to the fact that too often Christians focus on an individualized approach to Christianity, but Christianity is designed to share in community, like a meal. Group members of a small group intend to participate with Christ in building His ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals that are within the small group and believers in the world. The bonds that are developed are strengthened by an atmosphere that allows integration that is difficult to accomplish in an individualized or larger setting. A small group can

\(^{56}\) Russell Burrill, Recovering and [is this supposed to be ‘an’?] Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998), 63.


centralize the focus of emotion, energy, time, and effort towards one goal. By mixing existing members with new members and inviting them into a personal setting, a small group provides intergenerational and intercultural opportunities that foster shared experience and growth. Arnold declared that this overarching dynamic is yearned for by new and existing members of the small group.\footnote{Jeffrey Arnold, \textit{Small Group Outreach: Turning Groups Inside Out} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 23.} Robert Lewis concurs with Arnold, stating that believing Christians want to be part of a group where the goal is not knowledge or application, but a personal and external transformation that connects other individuals with truth.\footnote{Robert Lewis, \textit{The Church of Irresistible Influence} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 251.} This dynamic permits small groups to experience a connectedness that is difficult to achieve in a larger setting and is difficult to obtain on an individual basis. Donahue explained how this type of connection creates a shift in thinking that leads small groups to have a more significant impact than any other evangelistic endeavor. With small groups working together in the proper evangelistic mindset, others will connect with the small group community, and continue a relationship with God. This type of engagement will be encouraged to follow wholeheartedly after the Lord. Members of the group will feel drawn to actively participate regardless of their role or status. Thus, leading to bonding together to survive as a living collective, able to overcome obstacles and impediments together.

Small groups are flexible and can adapt to all types of situations and minister in many different settings and ways. Burrill emphasized small groups’ abilities by developing a litany of examples, chief among them is their ability to engage and teach the new believer how to study the Bible, how to pray, and how to witness.\footnote{Burrill, \textit{Recovering and Adventist Approach To The Life and Mission Of the Local Church}, (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998) 123.} He declared that Jesus recognized a small group...
approach as a way to accomplish his mission, and not effectively utilizing small groups is to reject biblical counsel. Burrill believes it is God’s plan and Jesus’ desire for Christians to grow in small groups. Small groups are places where people can share their life in Christ and receive affirmation and discipleship. Burrill linked his ability to interest, attract, and maintain new believers directly to small groups. Burrill noted that by involving Bible interests in a small group before a nonbeliever joins, he solved his retention problem and assimilated new members to biblical truth and doctrine.

W. Milton Adams shared the same thoughts. However, he declared that small groups are foundational to the structure and success of the New Testament Church and the church of today. Adams believes small groups provide opportunities that allow individuals to minister to each other, utilize their spiritual gifts, and grow together based on his understanding of the New Testament Church’s usage of small groups and how it assisted in the development of spiritual gifts. Adams purports that the growth of spiritual gifts is considered an essential factor for developing small groups. Dennis McCallum agreed that the use of small groups helped those early church members develop their spiritual gifts. To facilitate the use and development of spiritual gifts within church members and operating within churches, small groups must be called upon to complete this mission. Otherwise, the church will fail to mobilize the power of the Holy Spirit, which would facilitate growth numerically and spiritually. Spiritual gifts build others up

---

62 Burrill, Recovering and Adventist Approach To The Life and Mission Of the Local Church, (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998), 123.


to be a blessing to the church and to help unbelievers establish a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Small groups that form and engage in evangelistic activity are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Another area of importance for small groups is their transformative power. Multiple authors believed that small groups have the power to change lives. Donahue characterizes this position by alluding to small groups’ ability to disciple and encourage biblical truth to intersect with humanity and human relationships. At Willow Creek Community Church, small groups are the core organizational strategy that allows the transformation of character mind and soul. They become vehicles to reach each other and the lost world, bringing individuals into the subjection of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism Mission and Small Groups

Evangelism is a significant theme of thriving churches. While the importance of evangelism to thriving churches should seem natural, evangelism is a culture motivated by a desire to live life with the purpose that God requires and to save as many people as possible. As a church becomes mature and centered around God and the hope of Jesus Christ, there becomes an internal longing to tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ. This longing is like “fire shut up in one’s bones” (Jeremiah 20:9) that compels the believer not to want to see anyone unaware or to perish.

Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird emphasize the correlation between the emotional maturity of a church and its evangelistic thrust. If a church or individual proclaims to be a

---

65 Bill Donahue and Willow Creek Community Church, Leading Life-Changing Small Groups [Book review] (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 76.

Christian but lacks passion for souls, that indicates a lack of spiritual maturity. Scazzero and Bird described that passion for souls as exuding from the belief that evangelism and discipleship are the most crucial aim of Christianity. The believer accepts the Great Commission as a commandment and performs at the urging of the Holy Spirit.

Hull agreed with this sentiment, explaining how the challenge to go out and disciple others compels the church to move forward as it becomes the motivating factor by which believers live and are judged. The church’s mission of discipleship paves the way for its members and others they are in contact with to become active followers of Jesus Christ. Churches that are not mature, seemingly have a form of Godliness, deny the power thereof as they try to be a Christian without true discipleship.

The mission, as described by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, draws a line of distinction where without believers fulfilling the mission that Jesus Christ called everyone to, there are no such things as being a Christian or Christianity. The thought of being a Christian without fulfilling the mission Christ called you to is lunacy. Just as the word Christian is derived from Christ and cannot exist on its own, the church is not a church without the mission of discipleship. This mission is paramount and should be at the forefront. Robert Lewis is leery of small groups and advised churches not to become enamored with small groups devoid of the mission. He infers that some churches have fallen into the trap of forming small groups while attempting to be cultural or seeker sensitive as the mission of reaching the lost should be at the forefront. Methods can change, but the mission stays the same. If the mission changes and the church is not actively

---

seeking the lost, then the church becomes no more than a social club.\textsuperscript{70} Steve Smith describes the problem with churches like this as the church having missed its mission to go, teach, and baptize.\textsuperscript{71}

Small groups, as well as the churches themselves, need to be intentional. Churches and their members should bathe themselves in prayer. However, even the prayer should be intentional. Jonathan Graf makes the startling statement that the church has been severely weakened by unintentional prayer that is more about the ones praying than about God or the people not in worship.\textsuperscript{72} Our prayer should be intentional and this includes prayer for the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit’s help in guiding, planning, and serving as evangelistic ambassadors of God.\textsuperscript{73} By being intentional in the evangelistic strategies of the church, the church will emphasize being biblically sound and seeking to grow the kingdom of God through new converts.\textsuperscript{74} After all, sin has created a gap between man and God. While Christ has filled that void reconciling people to Him, the church should be a bridge to heavenly things that intentionally point others to Christ. Ed Stetzer takes it a step further by stating when the church intentionally engages in this type of bridge-building, the resulting evangelistic thrust becomes more effective and far-reaching.\textsuperscript{75} He goes on to mention how the priorities of the church revolve around matters not focused on winning souls. Some churches are more concerned about the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} Lewis, \textit{The Church of Irresistible Influence}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 21.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Steve Smith and Ying Kai, \textit{T4T: A Discipleship Re-revolution} (New York, NY: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 96.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Jonathan Graf, \textit{Restored Power: Becoming a Praying Church One Tweak at a Time} (Terre Haute, IN: Prayer Shop Publishing, 2016), 84.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Steve Smith and Ying Kai, \textit{T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution} (New York, NY: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 183.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 5.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ed Stetzer, \textit{Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church that’s Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture} (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2016), 40.
\end{itemize}
design of building or the make-up of the service. Rico Tice also shares the similar concerns that the church's lack of intentional evangelism and self-centered mindset is a significant failing that, in essence, is idol worship.76

Small groups that are outwardly focused and evangelistic are thriving in many churches. Individuals accomplish this in the small group by experiencing the connectedness of other individuals to accomplish what the early New Testament Church was able to accomplish. In today’s world, small groups are the primary option for disciple-making and outward-facing growth because they allow direct individual evangelism in loosely formed organic structures. This methodology is strategic and depicted in scripture.

When looking at evangelism in small groups, a key component is indicators of success. The first item is to understand that the task of the church and, subsequently, its members is not to convert people but to witness to them about Christ. Christians should not view conversion as the mark of a fruitful witness. The church’s engaging in witnessing is an indicator of success, regardless of the method utilized. The church has not failed if it has explained the gospel of Jesus Christ and it has been rejected.77 Conversion is required for a sinner, but conversion is a function of genuine faith, which is given by the spirit and not by man. Evangelism, at its core, is teaching the gospel intending to persuade one, while not taking into account success or failure.78 If conversion takes place, then the church should rightly give credit where credit is due, to the Holy Spirit, less the church should boast believing they are the reasons for conversion.

77 Ibid., 56.
78 Ibid., 26-27.
Discipleship and Growth

At the basis of evangelism and church growth is discipleship. Jesus calls those that would follow him to abandon all earthly desires, even their family. As individuals pick up the mantle to follow Jesus Christ they instantly become justified, however there is a process of sanctification that requires a lifetime. While justification is a declarative and instantaneous process, sanctification is a transformative process of the character and condition of the individual. This means that it’s an individual matter of progression with people after having professed Christ, being at various levels. This progression, referred to as discipleship, where one takes on the characteristics of Christ as impowered by conviction and the Holy Spirit, is the aim of all Christians. Bonhoeffer and contemporary Christian authors believed that without discipleship or progressing in Christian character, there truly is no Christ in the Christian.

The Church’s main goal as instructed by Jesus Christ; the goal is to intentionally multiply through the means of disciple making and discipleship. Discipleship grows the individual into greater maturity in Christ as well as pointing the same individual to be a witness of the gospel to others. In his book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, Larry Eims argues that discipleship shows continual spiritual growth in four stages: conversion, basic spiritual growth, missionary minded, and the leader trainer stage. Ellen White offers the opinion that there should be a well-

---


organized plan for the upbuilding of churches.\textsuperscript{84} This is to include training Christians on how to conduct the work required for winning new souls to the kingdom and to actually sending individuals out to experience the work firsthand.\textsuperscript{85}

However, many today believe that the modern-day church is failing at making true disciples and assisting members in spiritual growth.\textsuperscript{86} Instead, churches and their members have replaced discipleship with simple attendance and embracing values and ideas that are unbiblical and contradict the gospel.\textsuperscript{87} Robert Coleman takes it a step further and says that not only are churches failing to disciple others, but discipleship can be better achieved utilizing small groups.\textsuperscript{88} This view leads us to the fact that growth should not only occur in terms of numbers from baptisms, but growth should occur in one’s personal life and the numbers of those participating in small groups.

Evangelism and Small Group Issues

Many of the problems that emerge in churches that fail to execute evangelism can be linked directly to the membership. The membership of most churches may attend church but spend little to no time each day seeking to become better acquainted with God.\textsuperscript{89} There is no daily devotion, prayer, or seeking to spend time one-on-one with God. There is a struggle for the members’ time, generally allocated to work, family, and recreation rather than getting better

\begin{footnotes}
\item[84] Ellen White, volume. 9, \textit{Testimonies for the Church} (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1989), 117.
\end{footnotes}
acquainted with God. How can one who struggles seeking to acquaint himself with God better lead others to Christ? Simply stated, it is impossible. One must personally understand and experience the concept of peace that is offered through fellowship with Christ to want to lead someone else to the same peace. When there is a disconnect between a Christian and God, evangelism cannot take priority, and a problem ensues. The disconnect between a professed believer and God also plays into a growing theme where individuals consider themselves spiritual, which in their minds makes them Christian even if they are not attempting to develop a relationship with God.

There are negative factors that can impact small groups. If structured carelessly, small groups can hinder growth, exclude people from participation, and provide platforms for harmful or destructive impact. Although not emphasized in the text, most researchers would collectively agree that proper training and strong group dynamics are critical to the health of small groups. For small groups to succeed and achieve their goals, there must be intentional design, care, and feeding. By the absence of these components, small groups can damage the church and hinder the work of evangelism by causing strife and division.

Small groups have to be intentional in recruiting as well as include the process for directing and joining in a simplified manner. The rationale is that there must be an atmosphere that fosters camaraderie and vulnerability. The planning and execution of a group should be intentional but organic to foster the needed chemistry and to remain faithful to this process to avoid pitfalls. There will be mistakes that cause issues among small groups; however, the

---


importance of reducing these errors in leading and focusing on fostering healthy small groups is essential for its success.

There are also issues within small groups that appear to be cultural. These issues include groups consisting of couples, reaching men that are both married and single, as well as logistical issues like providing childcare, limiting group sizes, and recruiting leaders. These groups generally suffer for various reasons that exist outside of the norm. As pointed out by Suratt, small group communities based on couples typically struggle with being open and vulnerable or opening up in front of their spouse.92 Men groups plummet, typically because of their lack of commitment.93 The logistical struggles mentioned may appear easy to overcome; however, they destroy most small groups before these groups form. Cultural norms, logistics, and other challenges should be taken into consideration when creating and facilitating small groups.

Small Groups: Leadership

Small group leadership is essential because small groups need strong leadership that works in conjunction with church leadership in leading the congregation. The congregation will react based on the style of these leaders. For example, a pastor who is not engaged in the community will ignite separation in the community. Likewise, a small group leader not engaged with the church or its overall mission will also cause separation. Leaders should be sound doctrinally and able to command the respect of others while staying safely under the umbrella of the church.

Small Groups and Evangelism: The Unintentional Gaps

---

93 Ibid.
Several books have been written about evangelism and small groups independently, but few that have implicitly and directly connected them. Articles and dissertations tend to synthesis the two concepts together more frequently. The synthesis of these two areas may seem counter intuitive. While small groups are necessary to evangelism, many churches do not see the correlation between the two to make a logical and direct point.94 Many churches that have been successful in evangelism have organically grown small groups without directly stating that small groups were the initial goal of the group forming. Organic formation of evangelistic small groups has led to a disconnect in understanding the relationship between small groups and evangelism. Some churches already have small groups, but they are often unorganized and un-purposed. By redirecting them, growth ensues.95 However, while this area is heavily researched and written about, directly correlated data within the church is often not available nor identified.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the relevant literature and key authors that have impacted this project were examined. Without the influence of these contemporary authors, the author’s understanding of how to conduct this project would have been lacking. Each of these areas of concentration proved to be vital for the success of this project.

Theological Foundations

This section suggests a theological foundation for the scriptural mandate for growth developed in small groups. Several theological approaches are crucial to the issues of church growth, particularly concerning small groups. The Bible offers several examples, illustrating the

---


95 R. Bane Angles, “Positioning for Growth: An Impact Study for a Small Group at First Christian Church, Roanoke Rapids, NC” (Doctoral diss., Ashland Theological Seminary, 2016), 212.
importance of organizing God’s people into small groups. However, the most significant examples concerning numerical church growth come from the New Testament, where several stories about soul winning through small groups exist.

**Jesus in Small Groups with His Disciples**

The New Testament demonstrates the actions of the ministry of Jesus Christ from the beginning when He called twelve disciples for His ministry. In the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the twelve disciples constituted a small group. Jesus called this small group for spreading the gospel into the entire world. He started by calling four fishermen, followed by a tax collector. Then Jesus appointed seven others.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Mark 3:15-19; NIV, see also Matt 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16).

Jesus knew the importance of small groups and ministering in the context of small groups through his disciples. Jesus appointed twelve, designating them apostles that they might live in community with Him and be sent to evangelize others. Many disciples followed Jesus, but He chose the twelve apostles as the small group who could accomplish His mission. Jesus could have chosen more, but instead, he kept the group limited in size. Before sending out His disciples

on their first mission, Jesus spent time teaching and training them. Because Jesus knew the importance of support, He did not send them out alone but divided them into smaller groups of two: “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits” (Mark 6:7, 12-13).

Often, Bible readers see Jesus meeting with and teaching the disciples throughout His ministry. Jesus regularly ate with his disciples and encouraged open dialogue. This also occurs during the last supper, where He asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup until His Second Coming, for them to remember what He had done for them.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

During other times Jesus sent out the twelve or a larger group of disciples (the seventy-two) for evangelism. Jesus knew the importance of what an evangelistic small group could do rather than a big group. Jesus sent seventy-two disciples out on a mission trip two by two: “After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’” (Luke 10:1, 2).

Jesus and His disciples continued to study, pray, eat, and minister together in an evangelistically centered small group. Jesus is also with various disciples in small groups at different homes. These home meetings played a significant role in the early church, with some of the most quoted interactions happening within them. One of the essential things about small groups occurring within homes is that it develops deep relationships among the members. Notice
the following activities involved in small gatherings and small group activities: Jesus prayed in a small group (Mark 14:32-41); Jesus ate dinner in a house with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32); Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8); Jesus healed a paralytic in his home (Matt. 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12); Jesus healed many persons at Simon Peter’s house (Matt. 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41); Jesus stayed at the home of Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10); Jesus visited Martha and Mary in their home (Luke 10:38-42); Jesus forgave a sinful woman at the Pharisee’s home (Luke 7:36-50).

In summary, in the small group experiences that Jesus had with His disciples, certain themes can be observed: The group visited in the home of group members and became part of a new family (Mark 1:29; 2:15; 3:31-34; 6:1-16). Jesus healed a group member’s relative and sent out the group to heal and cast out evil spirits (Mark 1:30-31; 5:1-13; 6:7-13; 16:7); occasionally the group lived with Jesus in isolated places (Mark 1:35-37; 1:45); officials questioned the group about their activities and behavior (Mark 2:16). The group lived under constant scrutiny and criticism (Mark 2:18; with large expectant crowds: 3:7-10). The group shared the message and ministry of Jesus, but sometimes failed (Mark 3:13-15; 6:30; 9:17-29; 9:38-41). The group often went hungry for lack of space or time to eat (Mark 3:20). The individuals in the group were taught secrets that the crowd could not bear to hear (Mark 4:10); the group often lived in danger, fear, and conflict and was accused of breaking the law (Mark 2:24; 4:37-38; 7:5-12; 8:31-33; 10:13-16).

The group experienced the power of Jesus over the elements and the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 4:39-41; 11:13-25; 14:32-34; 14:43-48; Acts 1:8). The group left villages and regions to feed large crowds with few resources, and to maintain confidentiality with Jesus
The group shared in rigorous travel (Mark 5:21). The group coped with Jesus’ intense sense of reality (Mark 5:30-34). The group was called away by Jesus to rest (Mark 6:31); the group was sent out alone without Jesus (Mark 6:45). The group was shocked by Jesus’ surprising words and actions (Mark 6:49-50). The group missed the point of Jesus’ teaching (Mark 7:17-19).

The group served the crowd at the direction of Jesus (Mark 8:6-8); the group entered into dialogue and discussion, answering questions posed by Jesus (Mark 8:16, 27). The group asked Jesus for insight about how to do healing (Mark 9:28-29). The group was often alone when taught by Jesus and often misunderstood His teaching (Mark 9:31-32; 9:35-37; 10:23-26). The group argued about who was the best leader next to Jesus (Mark 9:33-34; 10:35-45; 14:10, 11). The group did theological reflection with Jesus (Mark 10:10); the group was surprised with Jesus’ direction (Mark 10:32). Jesus directed the group members to perform specific actions and say specific words (Mark 11:1-6). The group participated in learning processes with Jesus (Mark 13:1-4). The group engaged in observation and reflection with Jesus (Mark 13:1-4). The group prepared for and participated in special celebrations (Mark 14:12-16). The group regularly ate together, experienced difficulties together, and sang together (Mark 14:18; 14:22-25). Jesus confronted the group with the truth about themselves, the world, and their lack of truth, loyalty, and faithfulness (Mark 14:16-21; 14:27-31; 16:14). The group fell asleep in the middle of Jesus’ most difficult emotional pain (Mark 14:35-41). The group deserted Jesus when he was arrested (vv. 50-72).

Small Groups in Acts

The book of Acts describes various kinds of activities by the apostles as they worked to fulfill the Great Commission. The Holy Spirit was with the small group of apostles, assisting
them to convert many people to Christianity. The New Testament book of Acts addresses the importance of evangelistic small groups and mentions that many of the early experiences took place in small groups within homes (or the upper room): the commissioning of the apostles (Acts 1:8); replacing Judas (1:15-26); giving the gift of tongues (Acts 2); organization of new churches (6:1-8); spreading the gospel beyond its original cultural, national, and racial groups (Acts 10); and changing church practices (Acts 10). During the New Testament era, there were often small group gatherings that met in private homes. During that time, Christians used the temple and their houses for prayer meetings (Acts 2:41; 5:42). The conversion of Lydia and her household most likely took place in her home (16:14, 15). The Philippian jailer and his family were converted in their home (16:23-32). Paul repeatedly refers to house churches and their meetings (Rom. 16:3-5; Col. 4:15; Acts 2:46; 12:12; Phil. 2). Small groups in the book of Acts and their meetings in homes were important in the New Testament for worship, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, and devising evangelistic strategies. Small group meetings in homes and other places outside the temple provided a dynamic setting for fellowship, worship, and of course, evangelism. They were natural places that enabled Christians to gather and share their faith with nonbelievers. As a result, God added daily to their number.

97 Tom Jones, ed., Church Planting from the Ground Up (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 55.


Paul Ministering in Small Groups

In Paul’s evangelistic journeys, he worked with Priscilla, Aquila, and Barnabas. These four people formed an evangelistic small group for ministry in which everyone was free to use his or her talents in God’s work. Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila worked together in reaching many areas with the gospel. They preached the good news in synagogues, established new churches, and visited new groups of believers—all steps that make sense in the area of church growth.

With Barnabas, bible readers see God choosing people for His mission. Acts 13:1-3 is an example of the role played by the Holy Spirit in selecting a person for mission. The Holy Spirit appointed Paul and Barnabas for God’s work. Together they were the core of an evangelistic small group that followed God’s direction in leading new believers to Christ.100 Their small group evangelism led to an evangelistic growth rate that in today’s terms would not only be successful, but extraordinary.

Numerical Growth as a Result of Small Group Evangelism

After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to spread the good news everywhere. As a result, the church grew. Acts 1:15 establishes that there were 120 disciples in the upper room. After that, God added 3,000 new converts (Acts 2:41, 42), and soon 5,000 men were numbered as believers (4:4). Acts 5:14 discusses how more and more people are believing, and the number of believers increasing (Acts 6:1, 7; 9:3). The churches were planted (16:5), and many thousands committed their lives to Jesus (21:20). Luke’s description of the numerical growth of the church is scattered through Acts. As readers follow the pattern of Acts 1:8, the church traces this growth, beginning in Jerusalem (2:47; 4:4; 6:1, 7), through Judea and Samaria

---

100 Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim, Both-And: Living the Christ-Centered Life in An Either-Or World (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 74.
(9:31; 12:24), and into the uttermost parts of the earth (16:5; 19:20) and seemingly all due to the evangelistic power of small groups.101 David Githii confirms that a small group in the church facilitates new additions and influences many souls to come to the Lord.102 Churches see this play out again and again, even when coming together as a small group to perform the mundane things like distributing food to Hellenistic widows. God used that small group in action to complete a simple task to bring about spiritual results that the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.103

Disciples, Discipleship and Evangelism

Jesus Christ makes it plain that the central focus of the New Testament Church is to disciple others by going and teaching all that they have been commanded (Matthew 28:20). As such the effectiveness of any Christian effort, such as evangelism, can be measured in the spiritual maturing of members and the creation of new followers. This requires the church to directly invest in the spiritual formation of its members, nurturing those who are believers and seeking new believers through acts of evangelism.104 While individuals are responsible for their own spirituality and use of the talents God gives them, Paul clearly outlines the church as being responsible for its performance in the disciple making process (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Conclusion

The study of biblical small group evangelism or evangelistic small groups in New Testament churches establishes a wealth of examples. Small group evangelism was important to

101 Ibid., 66.
103 Steve Barker, Judy Johnson, Rob Malone, Ron Nicholas, and Doug Whallon, Good Things Come In Small Groups: The Dynamics Of Good Group Life (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1985), 110.
104 Jim Wihoit, Spiritual Formation As If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Academic, 2008),14-17.
the growth and development of the New Testament Church as well as the surrounding communities. God has utilized, functioned within, and had a purpose for small group evangelistic ministries in the Bible and continues to want them to function today. The New Testament church of today has a responsibility to assist others in training, spiritual development and the discipling of others.

**Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical basis for this thesis begins with the premise that the theology of small group evangelism informs present-day methodology. The church consists of small groups: families that come together to form a larger group that is broken down into evangelistic ministry groups based on connections. Evangelism is designed to be the focus of the church at large and small ministry groups. Small group evangelism is the core of the church and should be the basis of its evangelistic thrust.

To support this contention, there will be a review of scripture, especially those passages that apply to the hermeneutics of small group evangelism. A definition of small group evangelism is posited. It will be necessary to define and understand the evangelistic nature of the New Testament church.

The church is composed of people who have decided to give their lives to Christ. Smaller subsets of the church gather in a variety of settings, including worship. Other meetings of the church comprise subgroups, called small groups. When these small groups revolve around outward ministry, the natural byproduct is numerical growth.
Chapter 3

Methodology

For readers to understand small group evangelism, they must first understand the research question. The intent of the author is to learn whether the implementation of small group evangelism at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church would positively impact the growth rate of a given quarter. The purpose of this research was to analyze and implement small group evangelism within New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, a church that is struggling with evangelism and church growth. The significance of this project was to help New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and similar churches, address their problems with their underperforming evangelistic efforts.

Intervention Design

Setting

This particular study will be conducted in the city of Gainesville, Georgia. Specifically, this research project will be conducted at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, located at 1813 Floyd Road Gainesville, GA 30507. New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church is a small-sized church associated with the Seventh-Day Adventist Denomination organized under The South Atlantic Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists. New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church offered four weekly services. The church service times consisted of a Wednesday evening prayer meeting, a Saturday morning enrichment class, referred to as Sabbath School, and a late morning worship service. There is also a youth service that occurs periodically on Saturday evening called Adventist Youth.

In the worship service of this church, formal attire is most common. There is a blend of traditional and contemporary worship styles, along with printed worship bulletins. The church’s
common practice is to conduct quarterly communion services for the congregation. New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church practices congregational readings and altar call sessions. The ministries and programs offered include youth ministries and community services, as well as a food pantry ministry.

The significance in selecting the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church in conjunction with research is that the church exhibited stagnation in terms of evangelistic church growth and attendance over several quarters. Moreover, New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church was chosen as it is a local congregation, with familiarity of the traditions of African American Adventism, and the association with this church. Additionally, this particular church is an example-ship of size and socio-economic diversity that most commonly describes evangelistically struggling churches. The membership of this church consisted of a strong core of sixty people, which varied in age and educational standing. The primary leaders within the church were that of the pastor, elders, and elected board members. The remainder of the church entailed women, men, and young children who occupied smaller leadership roles in and around the church.

Participants

Participant selection criteria includes identification as part of an underserved and underrepresented age group of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The selected group of participants that were chosen for this research will be approximately twelve members consisting of adult men and women that are members in good and regular standing at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The ages of the participants will be eighteen through fifty. The precise reasoning for choosing this population is the group has been identified as a currently underserved and underrepresented age group of New Gainesville Seventh-Day

52
Adventist Church, as well as there is a lack of specific programs directed towards this group. Participants will be both single and married with various historical, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the population of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, all members of the core group will be African American. In an attempt to understand small group evangelism, the participant selection will not be limited to leaders of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, nor will the sample size exceed twelve participants. While more than the twelve core members may start attending the functions growing the small group, utilizing the recommendation of Missah, the core of the small group will be kept at a maximum of twelve individuals.\textsuperscript{105} Hopefully, this study will further aid the academic scholarly community on the research of small group evangelism.

The systematic method in choosing twelve participants will be that of a non-laboratory setting. Each participant will be first made verbally aware of the research topic at hand and the requirements to be part of the core members. After verbally explaining the research topics, conditions, and requirements of being considered for the core team, participants will be asked to agree to participate and commit themselves to the entire thirteen-week process.

Recruitment of Participants

To proceed with a projected scheduled research time frame, permission will be requested by the church board to approach respondents who actively participate at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and meet the participant criteria. The initial step was to submit a permission request form to contact members of the church to invite them to participate in said study. The details within the permission request will be that participants will be asked to complete a brief survey to determine their interest and commitment as well as filtering for the

\textsuperscript{105} Hiskai Missah, "Small Groups in Youth Ministry," (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Harold, 2005) 28.
participant requirements. Participants chosen for the core team will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. It will be made clear that participants who take part in this study would do so voluntarily and would be able to discontinue at any time. Through the use of the church permission request form, credibility will be established to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable research behavior. One study explained, “research often involves a great deal of cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines and institutions, ethical standards promote the values that are essential to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness.”

Following approval from the church board, announcements will be made to secure participants. Interested parties will be asked to complete a brief survey to identify the proposed participants’ age, availability, general time requirements, etc. This will create a pool to establish participants as well as trim down applicants.

The second step in the recruitment process will be to call each participant and give a brief overview of the research project and execution of the process. It will be made clear that participants will not receive compensation for taking part in the research project. The reasoning for non-compensation will be to ensure that participant’s responses will not be influenced by incentives. Participants will rate their interest, ability to, and commitment in participation on a scale from 1-10. [Consider referencing what “1” and “10” entail: i.e., with 1 being not interested and 10 being very interested] The individual three scores will be tallied to provide a strength rating. The twelve respondents with the highest cumulative scores will be asked to affirm their participation in the core team. If a respondent does not choose to participate, the next highest scoring respondent will be asked until twelve respondents have confirmed. This study will

---

proceed, provided the confirmed participant list reaches at least six. Should the participant list be below six, another round of survey requests will be conducted.

After confirming a viable list of participants, recruitment letters and welcome packets will be disseminated. The packet will include a consent document to be signed and returned, along with a calendar of events, and meetings, policies and procedures. Participants will be required to sign and return the consent document. Participants will be informed that the risks of the study will be minimal, equal to the risks one would encounter in everyday life. Contributors will be informed about the direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in the study. The benefits will be the experience of increased community within the church and actively evangelizing the local territory.

The confidentiality clause within this study will state that the records of this study will be kept private. It would be made clear that the results may be published; however, there will be no information included that would make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the study data. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Data will be stored in a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Five years after completion of the study, all electronic records will be deleted. The document will further explain that notes taken during meetings and events will be recorded and transcribed but will follow the same procedure as for other data. Only the researcher will have access to any data.

The voluntary nature of the study will be made clear, and that participation decisions will not affect their current or future relations with Liberty University or New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. If one decides not to fully participate, he/she would be free to withdraw
from the study at any time. It will also be explained where and how to reach the researcher if participants should have any questions later.

Data Collection

The method to collect the necessary data for this study will be survey questions as well as documents and records related to attendance, participation, and church participation at worship services. The rationale for this method is the ability to weigh the effect of small group evangelism, participation of core participants, and those who choose to join the small group after its inception. By collecting and preserving this data, it is hoped that a direct correlation will be seen between the small group’s effectiveness and the results.

Small Group Evangelism

The aim of the author is to investigate and conduct a church growth study of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Gainesville, Georgia by implementing a program for increasing the evangelistic thrust and quarterly growth rate. After completing the study, if the results are positive, other institutions that seek to improve their growth rate can utilize a similar intervention strategy.

Gatherings and Events

The basics of the study on small groups require a commitment to both personal community gatherings and weekly evangelistic events over a thirteen-week period. There will be two weekly meetings. The first meeting will be a core group gathering to build community and discuss evangelism. These meetings will take place on Saturday afternoons and be scheduled in either the church fellowship hall, the Gainesville Park, or a participant’s home. At each core team meeting, participants will share a full meal, including an entrée, refreshments and snacks. Multiple options will be made available for those that have specific dietary concerns. After
eating, the core curriculum will be taught to emphasize evangelism. After the first meeting, individuals will be able to join the core team meeting. This meeting will take approximately two hours for the meal and curriculum.

The second meeting each week will be a community outreach event. The outreach events are designed to take the core small group out into the community to evangelize and assist in particular community-based efforts. The end goal is to allow people to work towards the good of another and share their faith while working as part of a small group. The outreach events will occur on Thursdays or Sundays and usually last for two to three hours. These events can be planned and executed by the small group researcher independently or by a third party. Even if part of a greater effort, the group will attempt to stay together as much as possible.

Within the thirteen weeks, there will be a total of twenty-six meetings and a conclusion worship service that occurs at the church. The total order and goals of the twenty-six meetings are as follows:

1. Week 1: The goal for week one is to discuss the goals of the training group, its schedule, and the obligations for each meeting. The group’s aim is to learn the ideas and skills to do small group evangelism; to develop a warm, caring group to encourage outreach and to participate in all weekly group events.
   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. Getting to Know One Another (30 minutes): Provide name and answer and ice breaker question that will be provided.
iv. Principles of Evangelism (40 minutes): Talk about the topics below:

1. Great Commission
2. Every member is a minister
3. God’s role in evangelism
4. Hopes and fears of evangelism

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM at New Gainesville SDA Church

i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

2. Week 2: Continue to develop group dynamics as well as have each member identify their spiritual gifts and how they can be effective in evangelism.

a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service

i. Meal (45 Minutes)

ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)

iii. Spiritual Gifts

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

2. Principles of Spiritual gifts (20 minutes)

3. Spiritual Gifts and Evangelism (20 minutes)

4. Spiritual Gifts Survey and Scoring (60 minutes)

5. Concluding Remarks (15 minutes)

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM

i. Food Pantry Food Distribution
3. Week 3: This week will be focused on witnessing. Each member needs to understand the principles of inviting someone to Christ and developing their own personal testimony that they can share.

   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. Witnessing
         1. Introduction (5 minutes)
         2. Principles of invitation (20 minutes)
         3. What is my witness (20 minutes)
         4. Developing your witness story and invitation (60 minutes)
         5. Concluding Remarks (15 minutes)

   b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
      i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

4. Week 4: This week will be about learning how to share and listen to others and their life experiences, how to share personally what each one is experiencing and how to listen and encourage by providing feedback without judgement.

   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. Christian conversation
         1. Introduction (5 minutes)
         2. Listening Exercise (20 minutes)
3. Caring Exercise (20 minutes)

4. Sharing Exercise (60 minutes)

5. Concluding Remarks (15 minutes)

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
   i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

5. Week 5: This week focuses on what prayer is, how to intercede on someone’s behalf, and group prayer. At the end, the small group will choose and plan an activity to perform during Week 9 that is of interest to the group.
   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. Prayer and planning
         1. Introduction (5 minutes)
         2. Principles of Prayer (20 minutes)
         3. Group Prayer (20 minutes)
         4. Planning Outreach Event(s) (60 minutes)
         5. Concluding Remarks (15 minutes)
   b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
      i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

6. Week 6: During this week the small group will put prayer as a group into practice. Then they will spend a small amount of time talking about the group and how things are going thus far. Finally, they will plan an outreach activity to perform during week 10.
a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
   i. Meal (45 Minutes)
   ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
   iii. Prayer, Process and Plan
       1. Introduction (5 minutes)
       2. Group Prayer (20 minutes)
       3. Discuss the Group (20 minutes)
       4. Plan Outreach Events (60 minutes)
       5. Concluding Remarks (15 minutes)

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
   i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

7. Week 7: During this week, the group will seek to get a better understanding of Jesus and the gospel. Why is His death and resurrection good news, and why are they important? What exactly did He accomplish and how it’s both corporate and personal?

a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
   i. Meal (45 Minutes)
   ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
   iii. Evaluation (10 minutes)
   iv. Who is Jesus to me?
       1. Introduction (5 minutes)
       2. Who is Jesus in the Bible? (10 minutes)
       3. What did Jesus accomplish? (15 minutes)
4. Why is that important? (10 minutes)

5. Making Jesus Personal (15)

6. Concluding Remarks (5 minutes)

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
   i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

8. Week 8: This week is about discussing how we can enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ and what has changed. The goal is to get people to see that while all in the group have a relationship, it can mean different things.
   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. Personal Journey
         1. Introduction (5 minutes)
         2. How did you get to know Christ? (40 minutes)
         3. What can you say about that to others? (20 minutes)
         4. Concluding Remarks (5 minutes)

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
   i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

9. Week 9: This week is about praying and again discussing the group. Two-thirds of the research project is now complete. What has been accomplished, how does everyone feel, and what still needs to be done? Another planning session will take place to discuss an outreach event for Week 11 of the group’s choosing.
   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
i. Meal (45 Minutes)

ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)

iii. Prayer, Process and Plan II
   1. Introduction (5 minutes)
   2. Group Prayer (20 minutes)
   3. Discuss the Group (20 minutes)
   4. Plan Outreach Events (60 minutes)
   5. Concluding Remarks (15 minutes)

b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM

i. Provided by group from Week 5.

10. Week 10: The goal of this week is to shift to a book that focused on Christ. The study and emphasis will be on Chapter 1 of the book *Steps to Christ* that expounds upon God’s love for man. (He sent his only begotten son, etc.)

   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. *Steps to Christ* Book Chapter 1
         1. Introduction (5 minutes)
         2. Group Prayer (10 minutes)
         3. Discuss the Book (45 minutes)
         4. Concluding Remarks (10 minutes)

   b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
      i. Provided by the group from Week 6.
11. Week 11: The goal of this week is to continue the group study on the book *Steps to Christ*, where Chapter 2 expounds on the sinners need of Christ.

   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      
      iii. *Steps to Christ* Chapter 2
      
      1. Introduction (5 minutes)
      
      2. Group Prayer (10 minutes)
      
      3. Discuss the Book (45 minutes)
      
      4. Concluding Remarks (10 minutes)

   b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
      
      i. Provided by the group from Week 9.

12. Week 12: The goal of this week is to continue the group study on the book *Steps to Christ* where Chapter 3 discusses repentance.

   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      
      iii. *Steps to Christ* Chapter 3
      
      1. Introduction (5 minutes)
      
      2. Group Prayer (10 minutes)
      
      3. Discuss the Book (45 minutes)
      
      4. Concluding Remarks (10 minutes)

   b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

13. Week 13: The goal of this week is to finalize the group’s activities: take surveys, comments, suggestions, etc. Invite everyone to the following week’s worship service to celebrate and plan for future small groups.

   a. Small Group Gathering: Saturday at fellowship hall directly after service
      i. Meal (45 Minutes)
      ii. Introduction (5 Minutes)
      iii. What’s Next?
         1. Introduction (5 minutes)
         2. Group Prayer (10 minutes)
         3. Discuss the Group and Surveys (10 minutes)
         4. Plan What’s Next (60 minutes)
         5. Concluding Remarks (5 minutes)

   b. Outreach Event: Thursday 6PM-8PM
      i. Food Pantry Food Distribution

c. Sabbath Worship
   i. Congratulate and replicate results

   At the culmination or conclusion to the thirteen-week session will be a “Friends and Family” service on the thirteenth Sabbath. During this Sabbath’s worship program individuals will be recognized for their achievement and participation in the thirteen-week session. All individuals involved will be recognized including the core team, people who joined the effort and those that may have participated in response to the efforts.
Implementation of the Intervention Design

The program is designed to yield researched-based results that are twofold. First and foremost, the program engages current members of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and provokes them to utilize small group evangelism. Secondly, the program engages the community in hopes of reaching lost souls. The project consisted of twenty-six meetings over a thirteen-week period and a worship session at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The initial implementation of the intervention design will be executed using the conditions described above during a thirteen-week period. Each session is scheduled to take place on Thursday evening and Saturday afternoon with the final worship service to occur during church service on Saturday. Thursday sessions will last two hours, which is scheduled from 6PM-8PM. Saturday sessions will start directly after the Saturday worship service and last for two hours. Generally, this will occur between 1:30PM and 3:30PM. The ending worship session will occur at the church’s 11:30 worship service on Saturday following the last outreach event. The significance was to create a successful program that was based on strong characteristics and qualities that would be sustainable over time while still being measurable.

Chapter four will provide a deeper understanding of this research project. It will analyze and present the findings of the surveys and observations, as well as detail the results of the research project’s intervention plan and describe the results which the intervention plan yielded. Several details of what occurred during the quest to create an evangelistic small group will be thoroughly discussed as well.
Chapter 4

Introduction

The focus of this action research project is to create an opportunity for New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church to actively engage in directed community evangelism utilizing a biblically centered approach of small groups. By the participants merely engaging in the study, greater personal awareness and focus on the importance of evangelism will occur and address the basic problem of lack of evangelistic impact and growth. The participants will have been instructed in key areas of evangelism and given opportunities to immerse themselves in a community-driven by a singular purpose. By way of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) and the reinstatement of Peter (John 21:16-18), Jesus instructs individuals and the church at large to go and demonstrate God’s love to others as a way sharing the good news.¹⁰⁷ Yielding their bodies as a living sacrifice, the participants prepared spiritually to be used of God.

Utilizing the hermeneutic approach that preceded this chapter, the expectation is that the theological underpinnings would breed a successful methodology that provides positive results. As alluded to by Ralph Neighbor, there is an importance of developing core values that encourages theology to breed methodology that empower the church, instead of creating exclusive and ingrown groups that do not yield fruit.¹⁰⁸ With this thought in mind, the desired conclusion of this project is to address the problem, the lack of evangelism and church growth, by utilizing small group methodology derived from theological conclusions. The caveat to the conclusion is the clear understanding of Acts 1:8 where the Bible clearly affirms that power,


¹⁰⁸ Ralph Neighbour, Christ’s Basic Bodies: Embracing God’s Presence, Power, and Purposes in Holistic Small Group Life, Cell Groups, Home Groups, Life Groups, and Biblical Communities (Houston, TX: Touch Outreach Ministries, 2009), 60.
including that to evangelize, comes from the Holy Spirit provided by God and not from Christians and the derived methods of men.

**Expectations**

At the onset of the study there were three main areas the researcher expected positive results: numerical growth, personal growth, and greater participation in evangelism. These areas were identified as both quantitative and qualitative means that could be measured and presented as key data points. The researcher carefully crafted the survey and data collection as to identify key statistics based on the expectations, however additional data points were also recorded in order to fully corelate any or identify other areas.

**Numerical Growth Areas**

The researcher expected the numerical growth in multiple areas that should be viewed quantitatively. One of the first indicators will be weekly attendance of small group meetings. As the study continues, other individuals will want to participate and be part of the small group. Thus, the size of the small group will grow larger than the original core team. The expectation was to see the number of participants grow weekly throughout the entire study.

The two other areas the researcher expects numerical growth are the number of people attending the worship services and number of new members at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. As the small group takes part in evangelism, it was expected by the researcher that more people will attend church worship services. As a direct result of higher attendance there should be a direct correlation to new members being brought into the church. The number of new members brought into the church will be higher than those of the previous quarter or the same quarter in past years. The difference yielded should show that a properly coordinated, small group-based evangelism team is capable of driving results.
Personal Growth Areas

The researcher expected qualitative personal growth as well in multiple areas. These areas were analyzed and are later presented thematically to extrapolate data that easily lends itself to showing improvements. Some of these qualitative themes include the building of a stronger community within New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the participants’ sense of fulfillment with the study. By utilizing small groups, there was also an expectation that participants that are engaging will begin to bond together and build better intrapersonal relationships. Additionally, because the participants were actively involved in leading others to Christ, it was expected there would be a better sense of fulfillment in individual lives. These qualitative results were to be measured utilizing surveys or specific themes coming from participants.

Greater Evangelistic Participation

The researcher expected greater participation in evangelistic endeavors. Don Whitney points out that in most churches, less than ten percent of the congregation are actively involved in evangelism.\(^\text{109}\) The expected outcome is a qualitative improvement in the amount of people actively engaged in evangelism based upon the previous quarters estimated numbers.

**Report of Implementation**

**Introduction**

Upon receiving authorization from the church board of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and IRB approval, the implementation phase of the project commenced. The church was made aware of the study and advertising commenced. Participants were properly

---

screened to enforce the required criteria and a group of eleven participants were chosen. The actual implementation commenced approximately two weeks after securing all approvals and notifying participants of their selection.

After completion of the thirteen-week implementation, participants were given the post-participation questionnaire to complete. The survey questions were broad enough to explore several topics and provide enough detail to be reflective in nature as to include not only hard facts but personal feelings, opinions and experiences not directly available to the researcher in observation.\footnote{Tim Sensing, \textit{Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects.} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 103.} The main areas of the questions were to adequately describe the participant, the small group, their experiences, pre-implementation status and outcomes. In order to gain more in-depth insight into specific areas, some participants were also asked supplemental questions that resulted in better data correlation. Approximately, sixty-two participants of the evangelistic small group returned surveys. There were additional participants, approximately six, that did not meet implementation requirements because of age but participated with their adult guardians. Per the implementation criteria these individuals were not surveyed.

Using the results of the study and the questionnaire, multiple data points were identified and presented below in quantitative and qualitative aspects. The researcher does acknowledge there is a possibility that not all data points collected in the questionnaires could be relied upon as the responses and actual behavior may differ due to what sociologists call the “Halo Effect.” The “Halo Effect” is where people tend to report what they usually do, or what they would like to think they usually do, rather than give an objective report of their actual behavior.\footnote{Kirk Hadaway and Penny Marler, “How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week,” \textit{Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion}, 44 #3 (2005): 308.} This is


why the researcher has sought to correlate other data points in conjunction with the participants’
questionnaires so that participants will be limited and not over report as found in other
conclusions or even under report what they believe is socially undesirable behavior.112,113

Theme 1: From a Slow Start to Being Overwhelmed

According to Peter Wagner, when the church puts its priority on evangelism and uses
effective evangelistic methods through similar minded people, the church will mobilize and
perform effective and productive works for growth.114 Having carefully crafted the
implementation with that theme in mind there was an expectation that growth in the group and
church would be a natural result, but the initial start would prove otherwise. At the introductory
meeting that took place prior to the implementation there were eleven participants. All eleven
participants made the first scheduled meeting. However, by the second meeting five participants
did not show up leaving a total of six initial participants who attended. At the third and fourth
meeting there were only five participants that showed up. Then at the fifth meeting participation
doubled to ten individuals showing up, three of which were new participants not with the original
group. At the sixth meeting, thirteen participants showed up with only eight of those participants
being part of the original group. Based on the chart below, after the fifth meeting there was only
one week where participation dipped and on the final two meetings the total group participants
had grown from the eleven initial participants to sixty-two participants in total with only ten
being original.

113 David Olson, The American Church in Crisis, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), p212.
114 Peter C Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (city, state: publisher, year published), 78.
The growth of the group was dramatic over the twenty-six meetings as it ended with over four times the original number of participants. What is also of note in the above chart is the number of non-members who joined the group by invitation or simply asking during outreach activities. Participants who were non-members roughly made up thirty-eight percent of the group by the end of the implementation. The evangelistic small group was serving man and sharing
their faith, which demonstrated God’s love to fellow man, which also indicated the evangelistic small group’s health.\textsuperscript{115}

The implementation of the small group with an outreach-based theme was successful in mobilizing members of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. When compared to the previous quarters, the number of members who participated in the outreach event more than doubled. By approaching evangelism in a small group more people participated. Stephen Robbins points out that increased participation in small groups is often due to increased confidence and self-esteem when working with groups and the reduction of concern of failure.\textsuperscript{116} While this was not a direct report from participants, many who took part expressed excitement that working within a group construct enriched their experience.

As more participants began to attend and take part in both the onsite small group and focused evangelistic outreach meetings, the group became too large to adequately track and


facilitate. The “small group” became a “large group” that while active could have been more effective. There were several examples of inefficiencies. The onsite meetings nearly became as large as the active church service. In order to provide adequate space, especially during the era of COVID-19, the group was moved from the fellowship hall to the church’s sanctuary. Planning for the feeding of the group during the onsite meetings became a much larger task than anticipated with multiple people having allergies or dietary constraints. Initially, to foster personal interaction, the participants would come to the church and then commute to the evangelistic outreach meetings together using a carpool system. Transporting the entire group would later become dysfunctional and near impossible. Communicating the simplest things such as homework, time and date changes, or basic information to all of the participants became a chore. Not only were there too many participants, but each preferred a different communication approach. For example, some participants did not have email or regularly check their email to get updates, while others were not comfortable with text messaging.

The intervention design did not adequately factor in the group’s growth rate nor the resulting issues it would cause. Jim Egli and Dwight Marable rightly identify that the size of the group can be a factor that impacts small groups. Other literature identified that small groups should be no more than twelve to twenty participants.\textsuperscript{117} While the results were not negative, a proper intervention would have started with less than eleven participants and accounted for spinning groups out of the initial group to continue to keep the numbers small. This would result in a more complex intervention plan, but the intervention possibly would have been more effective. According to R. Fujishin, effective small group behavior involves moving a group

\textsuperscript{117} Jim Egli and Dwight Marable, \textit{Small Groups, Big Impact: Connecting People to God and One Another in Thriving Groups} (Saint Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2011), 10-15.
from being a secondary group association to a primary group association. A primary group includes the communities and participants that mostly interact with each other often while a secondary group is referred to as groups where individuals do not know each other very well. By creating smaller groups that engage as a primary group and increasing interaction among participants, groups become more beneficial to participants by helping them connect emotionally, focus on the group’s goal as well as overcome stress and personal conflicts. By implementing smaller groups in the intervention, the groups could have taken advantage of the additional synergies and been more effective. Had smaller groups been utilized during the implementation, the groups could have segmented across areas where intersectionality existed across the participants: for example, a men’s group, women’s group, marriage group, singles’ group, etc. This would have allowed commonalities to exist and form increased synergy.

The questionnaire for participants keyed in on the individual’s connection with the church and other participants before and after attending the group. Several respondents that were already connected to the church noticed an increase connection to other participants in the small group and the church as well. The chart below depicts a significant increase in positivity in connection with the church and others in the group.

---


Theme 2: Is Growth Membership or Discipleship?

The increase in growth that the small group experienced allowed for greater accomplishments among the group. Also of note is the group’s response to additional questions about their spirituality and influence from the small group implementation. When asked “After attending the group, how did you feel about your spiritual life,” overwhelmingly participants responded that the small group positively affected their spiritual life from before. Also, when asked “Did the small group help enrich your spiritual connection,” almost all participants answered in the affirmative.
### Spiritual Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before Group Ministry</th>
<th>After Group Ministry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Member Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before Group Ministry</th>
<th>After Group Ministry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The implementation’s effect on areas of discipleship and spirituality increased in the participants, including those church members that were active for the quarter. There was also increased interaction outside of the small group setting among participants. However, this phenomenon did not translate into increased numerical membership. The overall membership of the church was increased by two souls over the course of the quarter, which was exactly the same numerical growth in new membership as in the preceding quarter and the same quarter of the previous year.
Evangelism and numerical growth, while often thought to be directly correlated, are not. The Institute of Church Growth defines evangelism as proclaiming and persuading others to become responsible members of God’s church.\textsuperscript{120} The key words are “proclaim” and “persuade”. The implementation strategy allowed the small group to reach out to the churched and unchurched individuals by proclaiming and persuading. The lack of numerical growth correlating to baptisms is not indicative of an individual’s choice to commit to God. A disciple of Jesus Christ confesses (1 John 1:9), repents (Luke 13:3), and is converted (John 3:3). However, this journey does not necessarily lead to baptism and is only the beginning of their journey with God. While quantitively the results do not show baptism, based on pointed questions about teaching, spiritual experience and prayer, among all participants there was an increase in discipleship and spirituality.

Theme 3: Lost Sheep Return

One unexpected result of the implementation was the amount of missing or sparsely attending members that participated. Of the participants that were members, close to half would be categorized as missing or not regularly attending. Most of the members left under previous administrations. However, after learning of the meetings and the outreach that was taking place, several participants came on board and now attend the church regularly. This has resulted in the overall attendance of the church increasing even though there have been a limited number of baptisms. When participants that were non-attending members of the church were asked to elaborate on why they returned and joined the group, ninety percent of the respondents directly or indirectly were influenced to return because of the evangelistic small group or the ability to work in the community.
By looking at the responses in the chart, the catalyst for the resurgence in attendance directly correlated to the creation and implementation of the evangelistic small group. Attendance is not only up because of those who were participating, but also those they have influence with are returning. For example, one participant who was a non-attending member and has returned now attends with a spouse and two children. That means that one single participant has now increased the overall attendance of the church by four people. Lost sheep are returning and being given a sense of fulfillment by working for the kingdom!
Theme 4: Alternative Interests and Self Replication

According to engineers and biologists, self-replication is any behavior of a dynamic system that yields construction of an identical or similar copy of itself.\textsuperscript{121} Biological cells, or even computer programs, given suitable environments, reproduce via cell division. This process is where the DNA, the carrier of genetic information used in the growth and development of a living organism, is replicated and transmitted to offspring during reproduction.

The DNA contains the molecular building blocks that make people who they are. Churches as a living organism, also have DNA. This DNA is the foundational information that makes the church what it is including its beliefs, values, purpose, mission and rules of operation.\textsuperscript{122} The participants in the evangelistic small group literally changed the DNA of New


\textsuperscript{122} Thomas Rainer, The Book of Church Growth (Brentwood, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 34.
Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church from being stagnant and not engaging unchurched individuals to growing and self-replicating. By simply changing the values and purposes of a subsection of believers in the church, new DNA values were able to spring forth and develop an operation that is growing.

As growth occurs, self-replication will lend itself to the creation of new groups that provide others with opportunities based upon their evangelistic focus. The data that warrants this replication process comes from the questions concerned with improvements in the small group. Multiple responses indicated a willingness or want to do other evangelistic group efforts towards different specific interests. This includes areas such as health and wellness, senior citizens and incarcerated individuals. While the study itself did not include replicating into different groups with different focus, the suggested data implies that replication is not only possible but warranted. This is thought to lead to leveraging more resources, involving more participants and providing even greater growth.

Theme 5: Not Sure Why I’m Here, But I like It and will Stay!

The evangelistic small group was successful in being living proof of the gospel by stepping into the lives of non-Christians and creating relationships that not only expanded personal interests but also the reach of the gospel. In carrying out the groups, great care was taken to continually provide direction, goals and group vision to the participants. In fact, the same appeal with the goal and the vision were stated at the beginning and ending of every meeting with the hopes that repetition would deepen the impression. The researcher believed that by providing a constant vision and goal not only would the participants press towards the mark

---

but would be successful in doing so as without vision the people would perish. However, an unexpected discovery was made. Two questions on the survey were “was the goal of the group clear?” and “what was the goal of your group?” While all respondents stated the goal of the group was clear, less than half of the respondents correctly responded with the actual goal of the group as stated by the researcher. The goals of the group were stated:

- Grow the congregation numerically through witnessing and ministry.
- Improve our and others personal relationship with God.
- Invite others to join and take part in the ministry working for our fellow man.

However, this was not reflected in their response.

124 Proverbs 29:18a.
Of note however, was the enthusiasm of the participants in the group as not only did they intend to continue participating in the small group effort but they thought the experience was encouraging and enriching to their lives. For the researcher, this data point shows that by engaging in small group evangelism, the evangelistic pool of participants would not only grow but stay engaged. Not to mention those who participated felt the experience was enriching to their lives.
The researcher believes the lack of clarity of the group’s goal was a byproduct of the evangelistic small group’s large participant number and group think. With the larger than normal group size, direct interpersonal communication was not always possible. Thus, leading to lower-than-expected clarity. Group Think is the psychological model developed by social psychologists in the early seventies that describes how faults in the group can occur because individuals within the group share similar opinions or background that override the groups agreed upon goal.\textsuperscript{125} As the purpose was not clear to all participants, the majority of the participants felt the need to not only continue with the group, but they felt improved and enjoyed the evangelistic small group. In future settings it is of the upmost importance to revolve the idea of the group, regardless of focus, around the purpose, presence and power of Christ as this will ensure that the central focus and goal revolve around Christ and the transformation of lives.\textsuperscript{126} As


\textsuperscript{126} Ralph Neighbour, Christ’s Basic Bodies: Embracing God’s Presence, Power, and Purposes in Holistic Small Group Life, Cell Groups, Home Groups, Life Groups, and Biblical Communities (Houston, TX: Touch Outreach Ministries, 2009) 88.
the evangelistic small group recognizes the purpose of the small group is Christ, the group will lean less on traditional influences and become more effective.\textsuperscript{127}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{average_sessions_attended}
\caption{Average number of sessions attended}
\end{figure}

Conclusion

The implementation of evangelistic small groups at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church shows growth in church attendance, spiritual growth and discipleship. While the rate of baptism has not substantially grown based on previous quarters, souls for the kingdom have been persuaded to have or improve their relationship with God. The positive results were real, tangible and directly point to the implementation of evangelistic small groups. Intentionally engaging a small group in ministry activities similar to those seen in the New Testament Church can positively effect community engagement, and the spiritual lives of those ministering and being ministered to. By being mission minded and lifting up Jesus Christ, others will be drawn to not only attend the local church but to be a living sacrifice and serve God in ministry regardless of the peripheral focus type. This gives the world an opportunity to encounter God through us.

and experience God where they previously haven’t.\textsuperscript{128} While there were a few opportunities to improve the implementation plan to address specific issues, the overall outcome of the study yielded results that can be built upon and studied further.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research contributes to the limited literature on the direct implementation and deployment of small groups within the church as a means of evangelism. As noted in chapter 4, understanding and utilizing evangelistic small groups can benefit the local church, its members and those that are unchurched in the community. This study made use of qualitative and quantitative assessment, specifically making use of anonymous surveys conducted at the conclusion of the thirteen-week implementation of the evangelistic small group at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Subsequent research could address utilizing the small groups as a means to discover and develop one’s spiritual gifts, implementing various types of small groups and their effect on reaching people, or creating leadership teams to lead evangelistic small groups.

The results of implementing evangelistic small group as experienced at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church were overwhelmingly positive. New associations with the community were cultivated, missing or not regularly attending members were awakened, and spirituality and discipleship greatly increased. The results were in line with other similar studies and the published works that were previously analyzed. One glaring aspect of the study was the lack of baptisms from the implementation. Numerical growth through baptisms was not only expected but considered a foregone conclusion as every fallen human being should seek salvation in Christ the Lord.\textsuperscript{129} The lack of significant baptisms could stem from several issues including how large the group became, the focus on outward evangelism and not emphasizing

baptism as a goal for non-members who become part of the group, or the time allowed for the implementation. It is the firm belief of the implementor that seeds of the gospel have been and continue to be planted on the ground provided and it appears to be good ground. When there shall be a harvest is not based on the plans of man but on God and the Holy Spirit’s work in convicting each one of us of the need we have for a savior. God is working in and around our life. In Isaiah 55:1, God says, “My word that proceeds from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and it will prosper where I send it.” This scripture indicates that the Word of God is powerful and effective enough to produce its intended result. By following the biblical principles set forth in the Word of God, we assure ourselves that God, not man, will prosper and provide results.

While New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church has its own culture and specific attributes, the results should equally apply at similar religious institutions seeking to engage its membership in evangelistic activities. In fact, those entities may see an economy of scale by implementing the additional measures discussed in the previous chapter. There are several potential improvement opportunities to improve the implementation in specific ministry contexts that would allow the implementation to be adjusted and maximize the results. Some of the important activities to consider are leadership planning, resource allocation, and the creation of multiple groups.

During the implementation process the researcher learned the basic logical framework required to implement the project as well as several other key findings. The contemporary church

---

adopted small groups ministries and effectively utilized them as the primary effort for growth.\textsuperscript{131} Research, including this project, shows that while participation utilizing small groups has increased over the last thirty years, numerical growth has not been accompanied with group and spiritual growth as only one percent of American Christian leaders say their church is doing well discipling new believers.\textsuperscript{132} This study acknowledges the difficulty in turning participants into baptized members. However, the observed external behaviors and questionnaire responses positively concludes increased growth in spiritual maturity and the effectiveness of evangelistic group synergy.

During the onset of this project, it was the researcher’s goal to mobilize an evangelistic small group that was outward facing working for the good of others. The researcher was following the thought that God sent his son Jesus Christ to be a missionary,\textsuperscript{133} and outward evangelism is at the center of not only the gospel, but effective church and personal growth.\textsuperscript{134} The purpose of the evangelistic small group was to preach the gospel,\textsuperscript{135} using works to proclaim that Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins and we wait on the Lord serving Him in our daily lives by helping others.\textsuperscript{136} The use of mobilizing evangelistic small groups that possessed multiple spiritual gifts yielded results and allowed for a system to have continual multiplication,


\textsuperscript{133} J. Herbert Kane, \textit{Understanding Christian Mission} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 15.


\textsuperscript{135} Michael Green, \textit{Evangelism of the Early Church} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B eermans Publishing Company, 2003), 70-78.

which is a direct means of avoiding stagnation of the local church, in particular New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist.

Based on the experience obtained in implementing this project there are several recommendations that should be considered when attempting to utilize small groups.

1. Remember small groups are not new and should be implemented in different areas:

   Surveying most churches there has always been the presence of evangelistic small groups though they may not have been directly referred to by that name. The Dorcas society or Deaconess board, named after Tabitha and described in Acts 9, was an evangelistic small group in charge of community service and looking after the underprivileged in the community by providing food and clothes. Sunday School was an evangelistic small group of multiple classes brought together to study the word of God and perform various projects. The choir was an evangelistic small group brought together to minister by proclamation through song. Vacation Bible School was an evangelistic small group that held summer activities to educate youth about God. All of these were evangelistic small groups that were, and continue to be, utilized in many churches regardless of denomination. Churches should not be afraid to implement small groups as they already have them. However, the implementation of an evangelistic small group should be directed in other areas of ministry where individuals with different gifting and interests can labor for the Lord. By increasing the number of total groups and the ministry area in which they operate, more people will participate and have a greater impact.

2. Small groups should be “small”: As evangelistic small groups are implemented in traditional church structures, great care should be made to limit the number of
participants in a small group. It is the opinion of the implementor that group size should be approximately twenty to twenty-five participants as the maximum unless there are special circumstances. When too many participants are allowed in the group, communication and social interaction of the group will decrease. This will lead to the group being less effective and the inability to foster group dynamics that promote group cohesion and interdependence.

3. Train leaders that are capable of managing a small group(s): Creating an evangelistic based small group is a worthwhile idea for pastors and ministry leaders. However, in the planning of even one small group, additional leaders need to be trained and available to lead, as well as be able to spin off or create additional small groups. Small group leadership plays a crucial role in protecting the groups’ interests, providing group direction and holding the group together.\(^\text{137}\) Also, as the small group grows there may be a desire to spread into different areas of evangelism that will require new leaders to direct. In Exodus 18:17-26 Moses created leaders at his father-in-law’s behest to share in the work and direct as many people as they were capable. Likewise, leaders should identify and train new leaders to emerge as small groups self-replicate. This may mean investing in organized seminars, training programs, spiritual gift inventories or one-on-one direct training.

4. Remember the primary goal is spiritual growth not numerical growth: The Great Commission as given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:16-20. It commands the body of Christ to make disciples, baptize, and teach. While this directly implies replication or

\(^{137}\) H. Elmo Pienaar, Julian C Muller, “The Practical Theologian as Decentered but Influential Facilitator,” HTS Theological Studies 68 (volume 2) art. #1307: (2012), 6.
multiplication of numbers, the growth can not only be measured numerically in baptisms. Growth can occur in attendance, increased laborers for the field, relationship with God and others or spiritual maturity. This growth will still take place as a direct result of implementation of small groups, but simply numbering the amount of people we baptize is a short-sighted approach to evangelism and furthering the gospel. Like David in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, we should repent at the thought of numbering the people for our own ego or motives and simply trust in God to do what He said He will.

5. Create multiple diverse groups based on intersectionality and interests: The creation of an evangelistic small group in itself is a great endeavor, but in order to create an effective small group ministry multiple groups must exist with different points of intersectionality and interests. People are as varied as the sand on the sea; they have different experiences, backgrounds and values. Likewise, their interests or points of intersectionality in evangelistic small groups will be different. People will have a burden for ministering to the homeless, underserved or disenfranchised. Others will endeavor to minister to youth, men, women or senior citizens. Yet another subsection of people may wish to minister a health and wellness or healing capacity. While each group will minister to different areas or demographics based on their preferences, the approach may be different, but the goal should be common. As small groups are formed, they should be created with a purpose and care to allow individuals to express their desire for ministry in different capacities.

---

6. Identify and utilize spiritual gifts: As multiple evangelistic small groups are created and pressed into service in the local church, spiritual gifts of participants should be identified and utilized. According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and Ephesians 4:11-13, spiritual gifts are gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit to be used in the service of God. What makes spiritual gifts so important is that they are given of God and not learned or cultivated. When individuals operate using spiritual gifts, greater success in God’s endeavors occur. Thus, as small groups are being planned and executed, placing people in natural areas of giftedness yields greater results. God has given us spiritual gifts for the direct benefit of others and not ourselves.  

7. Successful small group practitioners should create resources/curricula: While there are several books, articles and various literature about small groups and utilizing them, the majority do not include specific step-by-step, fill-in-the-blank, or how-to curriculum that allows churches to understand and utilize small groups. What is needed today is for someone to build a small group curriculum that trains and identifies the specific step-by-step implementation of a small group into an existing church structure. Basic items include choosing the goal of the proposed small group ministry, creating charges, choosing leaders, etc. need to be explained and detailed so more churches can understand and effectively create evangelistic small groups. The curricula should also include discussion of baptism, repentance, basic Christian doctrine and even assimilation into the church as a new believer. While the content of the used curriculum utilized by New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church was

---

great for mobilizing members and non-members, the unchurched non-members saw the need for assisting others but not for personal baptism and repentance. The researcher believes that specific topics about accepting Christ would be highly favorable. Also, upon accepting Christ the new believers themselves would be a small group that could meet separately with the goal of assimilation into New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and further improve disciple-making efficiency and facilitate a culture of inclusion and involvement.140

8. Provide additional group time: The majority of the time the group met was either in service to our fellow man or studying specific biblical based content. Based on various feedback, the participants in the evangelistic small group wanted group activity and interaction time that allowed them to create and explore relationships within the group. For instance, several participants wanted group outings that allowed for recreation like bowling, painting, or simple interaction games that allowed group members to know more about other members. The researcher believes adding additional group time would have been effective in creating additional group synergies and possibly creating an inviting environment for non-members to feel accepted and possibly join the church through baptisms.

The above recommendations to maximize the effectiveness of implementing evangelistic small groups stem from the research conducted at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and are currently being implemented and revised based on further assessments of it’s operating practices. Opportunities to add additional breadth and depth to this study exist and

should be considered through future research. For instance, efforts could be made to identify if the implementation could have different results if the duration was longer than thirteen-weeks and/or implemented material specifically geared towards gaining a decision for Christ.

Secondly, further research could explore the utilization of biblical methods of personal evangelism. Specifically, research into individual characteristics of personal one-on-one evangelism utilized by biblical characters including negative and positive characteristics, meaning and purpose of personal evangelism, and witness examples. While this was touched on in the current curricula, more attention was placed on group synergy and witnessing. Adjusting the curricula to provide specifics from biblical characters like Jesus, Andrew, Phillip or Paul, could amplify the results and drive even better discipleship realizing both quantitative and qualitative results.

Thirdly, the researcher noticed significant interest in the area of health and fitness. Most of the participants responded to health as being an effort to focus future small groups on. The group engaged in assisting health facilities but did not gear curriculum efforts towards teaching health habits, health related goals or creating group synergy around health. In the course of the ministry of Jesus Christ we find the ministry of healing the sick and ill to be a prime goal. Jesus met their specific health need for restoration then bade them to follow him.  

The disciples on their first missionary tour were told to “heal the sick.” Based on the fact that health is a universal concern that crosses most boundaries, including socio-economical statuses, further research that specifically utilizes health based evangelistic small groups should be completed.

---

142 Matthew 10:1-8
Finally, efforts can be made to utilize secular literature, theories and social media into small group evangelistic groups. There have been several advances in secular literature concerning small groups, specifically in the areas of sociology and psychology. This includes, but is not limited to, group behavior, conflict resolution, group think and communication. Could infusing the biblical methods of small groups with key points from non-biblical sources yield results that could further develop the implementation of evangelistic small groups into a tailored solution that is even more effective? This is a question that should be answered with further research.

Evangelism should be organic, inherent and the main force behind any church. The church’s main function is to go and tell others about the gospel of Jesus Christ, inviting all who will to join in the glorious news. However, the church has been bogged down. Whether similar to New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and in decline, or a church that is just getting off the ground, evangelism is the crucial idea that all members must not only agree, but make primary in their life. While evangelism can occur in many ways, it the responsibility of the church to facilitate evangelism in a biblical-centered fashion that yields the expected results of bringing others into a knowledge of Jesus Christ. While some purport seeker-sensitive or mission-driven practices to get the message of Jesus Christ to others, the purpose of this action research project is to identify a clear biblically mandated option that yields quantitative results.

Growing the church through personal evangelism and evangelistic small groups led by the power of the Holy Spirit is not new territory.\textsuperscript{144} Evangelistic teams and their deployment with needed development and community nurturing, present a unified message that has been the

\textsuperscript{144} Peter C Wagner, \textit{The Gift Of the Holy Spirit and the Church Growth} (Eugene, OR: Regal Books, 1990), 185-190.
calling card of multiple effective ministries,¹⁴⁵ most of which utilize similar plans involving selection, community, devotion, delegation, supervision and regeneration.¹⁴⁶ However, utilizing evangelistic small groups, to regenerate stagnant, but already developed churches as in this study is a different approach that has allowed renewed evangelist focus at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

Based on data collected, this research concludes that small group evangelism, as defined in this project, is a method that produces numerical and qualitative based results for evangelism. Specifically, the researcher experienced an increase in members by way of attendance of worship services and attendance at small group sessions. The data also showed a greater sense of individual fulfillment, spirituality and discipleship among participants. Participants also experienced more robust interpersonal relationships between members and the church. Thus, based on the outcome experienced, the researcher believes small group evangelism is a key option if not the missing ingredient to further a church’s evangelistic mission. This would challenge many of the different trends within the field of evangelism stating that people are seeking entertainment styles of worship but one that is relational among people and speaks to the desire of knowing God and being in God’s service. This confirms that it is time for churches to get back to basic biblical practices of small group evangelism and working for the good of others.

With this in mind, the next steps to hasten the soon coming of our Lord and Savior is to move forward utilizing the small group evangelism method. While this might look different based on the size, structure, and character of each church, the results of the success of New

Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church point to a new understanding of spreading the gospel. The body of Christ must not fail to adjust and address the relational needs of the largest generation in the United States as that will prove to be catastrophic.\textsuperscript{147}

Bibliography


[________]. *Life Basic Training*. Houston, TX: Touch Outreach Ministries, 1997.


Pienaar, H. Elmo and Muller Julian C. The Practical Theologian as Decentered but Influential Facilitator,” *HTS Theological Studies* 68 (volume 2) art. #1307 2012.


Appendix A: IRB Approval

Subject: IRB-FY20-21-180 - Initial: Initial - Non-Human Subjects Research
Date: Friday, November 20, 2020 at 10:17:18 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: irb@liberty.edu
To: Sconiers, John, Kitchens, Lester D (School of Divinity Instruction)
Attachments: ATT00001.png

November 20, 2020

John Sconiers
Lester Kitchens


Dear John Sconiers and Lester Kitchens,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) evidence-based practice projects are considered quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

Please note that this decision 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 non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
Appendix B: Permission Request Letter

September 1, 2020

Board of Directors
New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church
Gainesville Ga,

Dear Board of Directors:

As a graduate student in the Seminary at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the purpose of my research is conduct a church growth study of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Gainesville, Georgia, that can inform other ministry leaders but not be generalized to society by developing, by developing, implementing, and evaluating small groups over thirteen weeks to increase the quarterly growth rate.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church and utilize your membership list to recruit participants for my research.

Initial participants must be 18 years of age or older, a member of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and agree to meet twice a week during the thirteen-week period.

Participants that come after initial start must meet the same criteria with the exception of being a member of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

Participants will be asked to be part of a thirteen week study on small groups that meets twice a week (once on Saturday afternoon and once on Tuesday evening), a wrap up meeting in the last week of the study and be willing to complete surveys and undergo a one on one interview with the researcher about their experiences. The data will be used to better understand the evangelistic nature of small groups in the church setting. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

John R. Sconiers II,
Pastor
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- A member of New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist church? Are you willing to attend two meetings a week over a 13 week period?
- Can you complete surveys and an interview about your experience?
- Do you want to participate in a small group study designed to bring you closer to God and other people?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a ministry research study.

The purpose of the study is to conduct a church growth study of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Gainesville, Georgia, that can inform other ministry leaders but not be generalized to society by developing, implementing, and evaluating small groups over thirteen weeks to increase the quarterly growth rate.

The study is being conducted at
New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church
1813 Floyd Road
Gainesville GA, 30507

(***Unless Local Government guidelines do not allow meetings in which case meetings will be held via conference call or zoom***)

John Sconiers, a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact John Sconiers at [insert contact information] or [insert contact information]

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

111
Appendix D: Participant Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to conduct a church growth study of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Gainesville, Georgia, that can inform other ministry leaders but not be generalized to society by developing, implementing, and evaluating small groups over thirteen weeks to increase the quarterly growth rate. I am seeking to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Initial participants must be 18 years of age or older, a member of the New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and agree to meet twice a week during the thirteen week period. Participants that come after initial start must meet the same criteria with the exception of being a member of New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in two meetings twice a week (once on Saturday afternoon and once on Tuesday evening), a wrap up meeting in the last week of the study and be willing to complete surveys and undergo a one on one interview with the researcher about their experiences. It should take approximately four hours a week (52 hours total) to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me directly in person or at [Contact Information] for more information or to go through the screening process.

Should you meet the requirements for participation, a consent document will be emailed or directly given to you one week before the start of the research. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the focus group.

Sincerely,

John Sconiers
Student Researcher
Appendix E: Recruitment Pre-Screen

Participant Screening Survey Prior to Admittance

Please respond to the below questions in. Please write legibly.

1. Are you a member of New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church?
2. Are you 18 or older?
3. Can you commit to meeting twice a week, once via zoom and once in person for thirteen weeks?
4. On a scale of 1 – 10 what is your commitment level?
5. On a scale of 1 – 10 what is your interest in small groups?
Appendix F: Participant Post Questionnaire

Questionnaire for All Participants

Please respond to the below questions in two sentences or less. Please write legibly.

1. Are you a member of New Gainesville Seventh Day Adventist Church?
2. Approximately how many small group sessions did you attend?
3. Before attending the group, how did you feel about your connection to the church?
4. Before attending the group, how did you feel about your connection to other people in the church?
5. Before attending the group, how did you feel about your spiritual life?
6. After attending the group, how did you feel about your connection to the church?
7. After attending the group, how did you feel about your connection to other people in the church?
8. After attending the group, how did you feel about your spiritual life?
9. Was the goal of the small group clear?
10. What was the goal of your small group?
11. Did the group help enrich your personal and spiritual connections?
12. Please describe the teaching methods used during your group’s Bible study time.
13. As a general impression, how would you describe your group’s view of Scripture?
14. Were your group study sessions and activities helpful?
15. What role(s) does prayer play in your group?
16. Describe the extent of your social interaction (i.e. home visits, lunch dates, sporting events, day trips, phone calls, etc.) with group members beyond regular group meeting times.
17. In what specific ways does your group make guests feel welcome?
18. In what specific ways has your group cared for you, if applicable?
19. In what specific ways has your group encouraged you, if applicable?
20. Does your group serve together (i.e. church events, mission projects, food pantries, etc.) outside of your regular meeting time? If so, how and with what frequency?
21. In the 13 week group sessions, approximately how many guests have you brought to your group?
22. What is your spiritual gift (if known)?
23. How often did you attend the planned group meetings:
   ( ) 90% of the time or more
   ( ) Between 60% and 89% of the time
   ( ) Between 30% and 59% of the time
   ( ) Less than 30% of the time
24. What is your group’s average attendance?
   ( ) Less than 10
   ( ) 10 - 19
   ( ) 20 – 29
   ( ) 30 – 39
   ( ) 40+
25. Has the group grown since your first attendance?
26. How many did the group start off with?
27. How many members of the group are new to the church?
Appendix G: VITA

John R Sconiers II

Educational

BSIT: University of Phoenix
MISM: Lewis University
MAPMIN: (MDIV Equiv). Andrews Theological Seminary
DMIN: Liberty University

Ministerial

Ordination: 2016

Professional

Chaplain, Lutheran Social Services 2005-2012
Chaplain, South Suburban School 2010-2013
Communication Director, Lake Region Conference 2014-2015
Associate Pastor, Multiple Churches 2015 – 2019
Senior Pastor, South Atlantic Conference 2020 - Present