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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Addressing the Issue of Low Discipleship Among Adults

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by

Sylvestre Bea

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Fred H. Smith, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Online

Jones M. Kaleli, Ph.D.

Adjunct Faculty of Global Studies
Professor of Intercultural Studies
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Sylvestre Bea

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2022

Mentor: Dr. Fred H. Smith, Ph.D.

This research aims to help EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries identify the root causes for low levels of adult discipleship. It supports the church's collective construction of measurable actions that members can implement to fulfill its disciple-making mandate effectively. The literature review reveals that many churches experience this problem, identify common causes, and discuss diverse solutions that better fit churches with predominantly North American culture. However, EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries is composed of mostly African immigrants and their families, and no literature specifically addresses its immediate context. As a result, the remedies proposed to tackle the discipleship challenge are not fully applicable. The investigation's stages included problem identification and description, data collection and analysis, findings sharing, collective construction of solutions, and the development of an action plan. The researcher used a triangulation data collection procedure that involved questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. In addition, the investigation held a two-hour weekly training class centered on expanding participants' understanding of the Great Commission and increasing their awareness of the critical practices needed to be meaningfully involved in its fulfillment. The research attempted to analyze ECDM's disciple-making issue through the lens of its members' African roots and cultures and explored how to adapt some of the discipleship practices discussed in various books. The findings are applicable to local churches with similar cultural backgrounds in the United States and beyond.

Keywords: disciple, Great Commission, disciple-making, discipleship, adults, small groups.

Dedication

This doctoral research project is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave me a clear understanding of the church's mandate, the Great Commission, who provided profuse grace to undertake and finish this project, and who will use it to help ECDM and many other local churches fulfill their discipleship mandate effectively in these end times. To Him goes all the glory.

To my loving, encouraging, and supportive wife, Esther, thank you for believing in and bearing with me from the start to the end of this journey. To my mom and dad, who went back home long before I embarked on this journey, and who would have cheered what the Lord has done, thank you for teaching me the ways of the Lord and instilling in me the values of courage, strength, and perseverance, which have contributed to who I am today.

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Lastly, I express my deepest gratitude to the thirty ECDM congregants for their participation in this project. Thank you for your treasured contribution and trust. May your involvement in this doctoral research work inspire you to live out the Great Commission with passion and confidence.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
ECDM	<i>EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, Jesus told His Father, “I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do” (John 17:4). Jim Putman et al. explain that the work Jesus claimed to have completed was that of making disciples who were ready to go and reproduce. The author's reason is that if Jesus had died on the cross for the sins of humankind but had not made disciples who could carry on the torch, no one would have heard the good news.¹ Jesus, before he ascended into heaven, confirmed that His disciples were ready to fulfill the Great Commission. He told them, “As the Father has sent me, I also send you” (John 17:21). Jesus ordered them to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing and teaching them to observe all the things they heard from Him (Matt 28:19–20). Jesus’s command was not only for His disciples then; it is for those who believe in Him and will believe.

From the Day of Pentecost until now, followers of Christ have followed the imperative to “make disciples” in different ways and with varying amounts of success. Bill Hull notes that while orthodox Christians have universally accepted the necessity of reaching others since the beginning of the faith, the impulse to fulfill the Great Commission has increasingly taken on a mechanical or programmatic feeling. Hull contends that this feeling has created a marketplace model of church and society.² Dallas Willard concurs and points out that the consumer mindset has progressively drawn the church away from its divine mission. He reminds believers that the focus of the church should be on using God’s all-encompassing power and authority to win the

¹ Jim Putman et al., *Equipping Disciples Who Make Disciples: Real-Life Discipleship Manual* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 12.

² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 27.

lost, and then equip and deploy them into the harvest field. Willard laments that Christianity tries to make converts and baptize them into church membership without discipling them all too often.³

Hull further explains that the main characteristic of this modern-day non-discipleship Christianity is the commonly-accepted idea that people can be Christians without submitting to and following Jesus.⁴ Thus, there is a widespread dwindling appetite for discipleship in many local churches in general, particularly in EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries (ECDM). The problem is so acute that maintaining the status quo will become synonymous with premature death. Accordingly, this project seeks to systematically and holistically investigate factors that contribute to a lack of hunger for discipleship in the ECDM church and identify a course of action that church members, particularly adult congregants, can implement to address the identified problem. This project aims to engage the entire ECDM congregation in the process of inquiry to design a customized but adaptable disciple-making strategy that will help the church fulfill the Great Commission and benefit other local churches experiencing similar challenges.

Ministry Context

General Demographics

Rockville, home of EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries, is located in Montgomery County, the most populous county of Maryland, adjacent to Washington, DC. Official statistics show that from 2010 to 2019, the county's population increased by eight points (from 971,777 in 2010 to 1,050,688 in 2019). The five largest ethnic groups in Montgomery County are White (43

³ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Claiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 5–7.

⁴ Ibid., 41.

percent), Black or African American (18.1 percent), Hispanic (17.59 percent), and Asian (14.4 percent).

Montgomery County is included in the metropolitan Washington D.C. area, which encompasses Washington D.C. proper as well as parts of Maryland and Virginia. According to recent statistics, the area is home to about six million people, who can travel from one edge of the county to the other in less than two hours. In addition, particularly since the 1960s, the area has drawn many international immigrants. The American Community Survey shows that the racial distribution of the metropolitan Washington area in 2019 was as follows: White (44.7 percent), Black or African American (24.9 percent), Hispanic or Latino (16.3 percent), Asian (10.3 percent), and other (3.8 percent). As far as faith, the Pew Research Center indicates that the religious composition of adults in Maryland is 69 percent Christians, 8 percent of non-Christian faiths, and 23 percent unaffiliated. The Christian community comprises 18 percent evangelical Protestants, 18 percent mainline Protestants, 16 percent Historically Black Protestants, 15 percent Catholic, and about 4 percent of people claiming affiliation to Mormon, Orthodox Christian, Jehovah's Witnesses, or other faiths.

Beliefs and Practices of Adults in Maryland

The findings of an extensive religious landscape survey⁵ carried out in 2015 with more than 35,000 American adults showed that in the United States in general and in Maryland in particular, the proportions of adults who profess their belief in God, pray daily, and attend church or other religious services have all declined in recent years. For instance, in Maryland, while a high percentage of adults (64 percent) said they believed in God, only 50 percent declared that

⁵ Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

religion was important in their lives. And only 31 percent claimed to attend religious services at least once a week. Furthermore, only 23 percent of adult Christians in Maryland reported participating weekly in church discipleship activities, such as prayer meetings, Scripture study, or religious education groups. These final two statistics, relate to how much time people devote to Scripture study, meditation, and interpretation, and speak volumes about the state of the disciple-making process across Maryland. Thirty-five percent of adults surveyed declared reading Scriptures at least once a week, while 27 percent said that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God and should be taken literally.

ECDM History and Demographics

EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries began as an informal nondenominational Pentecostal fellowship in 2010. A small group of six Central and West African (Cameroon and Ivory Coast) immigrants who had just arrived in the metropolitan Washington region and members of various local churches agreed to meet in homes each Saturday morning for prayer and to edify each other with the word of God. Maintaining close social ties in this new and culturally-unfamiliar environment and sharing integration experiences in American society were additional motivating factors. As David Livermore states, increasing the ability to effectively relate and work across cultures is essential for survival.⁶ While the level of spiritual maturity of the group members was varied, as in most Christian assemblies, no group member was considered a layperson or put on a spiritual pedestal. For several years, the group's members alternated the roles of preacher, small group discussion leader, and prayer session leader at each meeting. From 2010 to 2020, the numerical growth of the fellowship was up and down. New people joined the group while others left to relocate to other states or Canada.

⁶ David Livermore, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence* (New York: American Management Association, 2015), 20.

Spiritually, however, a few fellowship members kept growing in the favor of God and men. They succeeded in serving the Lord in various surrounding local churches while attending Christian school ministries and seminaries. What began as a group of six members in 2010 grew to thirty members in 2020. At this point, one leader felt the Lord's leading to transform the fellowship into a church. In March 2020, the state of Maryland granted the EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries request to become a church. As of January 2022, the church has sixty nine members, including fifty-three adult parishioners, four young adults, and twelve children of different ages. Most members are initially from West Africa, with four nationalities represented. The church's demographics are 93 percent Black, two percent Hispanic, and five percent from other ethnic groups.

Identity and Beliefs System

EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries (ECDM) is a nondenominational Bible-believing Christian Church rooted in the Word of God. Its confessed purpose is to reflect God's holiness (Eph 1:4), reveal His glory (Eph 1:5, 12), and be a witness to Christ, declaring His deeds and demonstrating His life and character (1 Pet 2:9; Eph 4:2–3). The church's vision and mission are to win the lost from all nations and help them grow and develop into their full potential for Christ and His mission during these end times. The governing doctrinal statement of the church affirms that the unifying force that enables ECDM to carry out its mission in the world is Christlike three-directional love. The upward dimension expresses the believer's genuine love for God (Matt 22:37), the inward dimension relates to love for one another in the body of Christ (John 13:35), and the outer dimension is God's command to all His children to love their neighbor (Matt 22:38).⁷ ECDM's core values system promotes the exaltation of God through the pursuit of

⁷ Ray C. Stedman, *Bodylife* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1972), 34.

holiness (1 Pet 1:15–16); mission (Mark 16:15); service (Matt 23:11; Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 15:58; John 12:26); discipleship (Eph 4:11–13); excellence (Matt 5:48; Phil 4:8); teamwork (Eph 4:16); leadership (Tit 2:7; 1 Tim 4:12); and integrity (Tit 2:7–8), among others. ECDM’s statement of faith recognizes the Holy Scriptures as the only authoritative Word of God, infallible and inerrant.

Furthermore, the church believes and teaches that Jesus Christ is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity who died on the cross for humankind and thus, atoned for their sins by shedding His blood. According to the Scriptures, he arose from the dead on the third day, ascended to the Father’s right hand, and will return in power and glory (John 1:1, 14, 20:28; 1 Tim 3:16; Isa 9:6; Phil 2:5–6; 1 Tim 2:5). Thus, He is the only way God the Father provided for the salvation of humankind.

ECDM Organizational Structure

Robert H. Welch defines the word “constitution” as it relates to a church as a statement of theology that describes how the church interprets Scripture for its vision and mission.⁸ ECDM’s 2020 constitution stipulates that the body overseeing the church’s activities is the board of directors, which comprises seven people. Its decisions are considered valid with a simple majority vote, which must include the approval of the senior pastor. The senior pastor is chairman of the board of directors and presides over all its meetings.

The church’s constitution also establishes an accountability board of no less than three persons and no more than five who serve without remuneration. The senior pastor must submit the name of each individual appointed to serve as a member of the accountability board to the board of directors for approval. The accountability board provides necessary aid, instruction,

⁸ Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 69.

guidance, protection, correction, counsel, wisdom, and fellowship to the senior pastor (2 Tim 3:16–17; Acts 15). In addition, the accountability board is tasked with investigating any accusations against the senior pastor to determine whether the latter is guilty or innocent and whether to discipline or dismiss him from office.

The Senior Pastor is entrusted with ecclesiastical authority and is responsible for the day-to-day decisions of the church. The church's constitution also allows the senior pastor to delegate certain responsibilities to four classes of other ministers. Commissioned ministers are not authorized to perform any priestly services but primarily assist others in the church. Individuals in this category may include teachers, worship leaders, instructors, hospital and jail visitation, and ministerial assistance. Minister apprentices are not permitted to perform ecclesiastic services but undergo extensive training and work closely with a licensed or ordained minister. Licensed ministers are individuals authorized to do certain religious functions at the senior pastor's request. They must be seasoned in the ministry but need further experience either because they have never entered full-time ministry or have only been in full-time ministry for less than three years. Finally, ordained pastors and ministers are individuals who have an established or proven ministry. The senior pastor can authorize this class of ministers to perform all Christian ministry and religious functions. These ministry leaders are required to be active and skilled disciples.⁹

ECDM Elders

At ECDM, the elders are appointed by the board of directors to oversee the spiritual care of the congregation. They are selected based on the biblical prescriptions in 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. The board of directors sets the boundaries of their authority, and they have no

⁹ Jody Dean and Hal Stewart, *Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2018), 153.

financial or governmental control within the church. They are only concerned with the spiritual needs of the fellowship. The church's constitution provides that the elders shall devote their time to prayer, the ministry of the word, and shepherding God's flock. They must examine and instruct prospective members, equip the congregation for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, assist the board of directors in admonishing and correcting errors, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions.

Furthermore, the elders should ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share ECDM's fundamental convictions. They must work closely with the board of directors to ensure a healthy spiritual atmosphere within the church. These ministry leaders are required to be active and skilled disciples.¹⁰

ECDM Deacons

The office of Deacon/Deaconess is described in 1 Tim 3:8–13 and Acts 6:1–7. ECDM's constitution provides that the church shall recognize men and women committed to serving one another and possessing particular gifts. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons/deaconesses. They have the responsibility to care for the temporal needs of ECDM members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration.

Problem Statement

The problem is that most spiritual adult congregants do not participate in the disciple-making process in EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries (ECDM) church in Rockville, Maryland. Thankfully, God has blessed the congregation with a senior pastor who is intentional

¹⁰ Dean and Stewart, *Together We Equip*, 153.

about fulfilling the Great Commission and understands that success in this mission rests upon equipping faithful adult men and women who can produce spiritual fruit. Unfortunately, parishioners have shown little interest in the church's discipleship opportunities. A significant proportion (84 percent) of ECDM adults seem to be prisoners of what Bill Hull describes as the expanded church culture of the Global North and beyond, where the pastor is the professional performer and the parishioners are the audience.¹¹ The consumer mindset is widespread. Opportunities to move parishioners from spectators to intentional actors, from the laity mindset to the body life mentality, are too often neglected. As a result, the church faces a crisis that menaces ECDM's existence.

Purpose Statement

This thesis aims to help the ECDM church analyze the root causes of adult congregants' low participation in the disciple-making process and identify a set of measurable actions the church can implement to breathe new life into the community. These objectives align with the vision and mission of ECDM, which is to win the lost and help them grow and develop to their full potential for Christ and His mission. Jesus told His disciples, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matt 9:37). Moreover, before he ascended back into heaven, He commanded them to go and make disciples worldwide regardless of people's ethnicity (Matt 28:18–20). Paul's epistle to the Ephesian church shows how Jesus positioned His church to fulfill that purpose, endowing it with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith (Eph 4:11–13).

¹¹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 24.

Winning the lost, equipping them, and then releasing them into the harvest field to repeat the process comes as the result of a team effort. As Jim Putman et al. rightly assert, “Christianity is a team sport.”¹² The collective action of all the members is required to achieve the Great Commission. It is, therefore, very concerning that most of ECDM’s adult congregants are not using their God-given talents to contribute to the church’s mission. However, this threat is also part of God’s urgent call for action to prevent the gates of hell from prevailing against His church. The proposed research is thus a rescue mission aimed at awakening the whole ECDM congregation from deadly spiritual lethargy, a God-given opportunity for each parishioner to see his or her responsibility of keeping the torch lit and passed along to others until the Master comes back.

Basic Assumptions

The researcher made three critical assumptions regarding the study. The first assumption was that about twenty of ECDM’s fifty-three adult parishioners would agree to participate in the research. This assumption was based on the expectation that the core group of congregants who regularly attend most of the weekly meetings of the church would consent to take part in the study.

The second assumption was that most participants would be honest when discussing why they do not participate in the church’s disciple-making process. For the few that were not honest, it was assumed that the investigator would either need to work to find ways to draw out the truth, reduce their number, or convince others to participate in safeguarding the credibility of the findings and recommendations.

¹² Putman et al. *Equipping Disciples*, 18.

The third and last fundamental assumption was that Lord Jesus, who commissioned all His followers throughout the ages to go and make disciples, would use this study as a catalyst to stimulate the willingness and energy of His children at ECDM to become shepherds of His sheep (John 21:15–17).

Definitions

Some of the terms used in the investigation include adults, cell ministry, disciple, discipleship, disciple-making, Great Commission, leaders, low involvement, multiplication, reproduction, sanctification, and strategy. The term “adults” designates twenty years old and older individuals, whether male or female. Cell ministry or cell-driven church refers to a ministry fundamentally based on groups of three to twelve people who meet weekly outside the church building to practice evangelism, build community, and grow spiritually to multiply the reproducing group.¹³ A disciple refers to a person willing to deny self, take up a cross daily, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). That speaks of someone who puts Christ before self, family, and possessions (Luke 14:25–35). It indicates an individual who is committed to Christ’s teachings (John 8:31), world evangelism (Matt 9:36–38), loving others as Christ loves (John 13:34–35), abiding in Christ—bearing fruit, glorifying God, having joy, and loving fellow believers (John 15:7–17). Discipleship describes the overall life actions of following Jesus.¹⁴ Disciple-making refers to leading unbelievers to faith in Christ and to become disciples.¹⁵ Making disciples is Jesus’s command to all His followers to intentionally engage in this process, which also refers to the Great Commission.

¹³ Joel Comiskey, *Planting Churches that Reproduce* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2011), 108.

¹⁴ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 11.

¹⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 34.

In this study, leaders are the pastor and other ministers vested with the authority to design and implement strategies to enable the church to accomplish the Great Commission. The term strategy is a vehicle that moves the congregation from where they are spiritually (lost or saved) to where God wants them to be (mature).¹⁶ Low involvement in the discipleship process speaks of the lack of interest in the church's disciple-making spiritual disciplines. It expresses the observed meager percentage (less than 10 percent) of ECDM's adults who are intentionally and actively involved in winning the lost and helping them grow to their full potential for Christ and His mission. Reproduction and multiplication denote the process of winning unbelievers and helping them grow into Christlikeness, notably through apprenticeship and releasing them into the harvest field to replicate this process. Sanctification refers to a progressive process whereby believers grow and become like Christ.¹⁷ Small groups and cell groups interchangeably describe transformational and healthy small environments where three to twelve members grow spiritually to become more like the Savior and reproduce.

Limitations

A limitation is a condition imposed on a study outside the researcher's control.¹⁸ The researcher identified several limitations for this project. The first was the study's timeline constraint. The researcher was required to complete his investigation within a given time frame, which may have negatively impacted the involvement of some participants and the quality of

¹⁶ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 169.

¹⁷ Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2016), 15.

¹⁸ Steve Lowe, "Definitions, Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions" (video presentation of class lecture, Liberty University), accessed April 11, 2021, https://libertyuniversity.instructure.com/courses/68774/pages/watch-definitions-limitations-delimitations-assumptions?module_item_id=7068661.

answers on the study's questionnaires. For the latter, responses may have been more thoughtful if participants were given more time. Additionally, available answer choices on the questionnaires may not have explained some participants' low participation in the discipleship process. To mitigate these risks and preserve the quality and credibility of feedback, the investigator prioritized participants who had a time constraints and followed up on the questionnaires with interviews to allow participants to speak freely and ask clarifying questions.

The second main limitation, which is somehow related to the one mentioned above, was the possible unreliability of the sample since all the participants came from the investigator's ministry setting. In addition, the investigator is the church pastor who has built relationships with most of the participants for many years. As a result, some participants may have sought to give "politically correct" answers instead of honest ones. Thus, while the investigator created a survey environment that allowed for free and honest responses, a residual risk existed in this area. Accordingly, although the study's findings and recommendations are of great value in the ministry context, they may need more contextualization to benefit other ministries facing a similar issue in their disciples-making process.

The third major limitation was related to the church demographics. Ninety-three percent of ECDM parishioners are Blacks, most of whom are immigrants. There was no opportunity to gather a racially diverse sample size. While the investigation examined various perspectives concerning the church's vision, it did not always get reliable information from the majority of the target group, for instance, about the effects of culture on the church's vision and discipleship process.

Delimitations

Delimitations are constraints that the investigator places on a study that clarify the study's boundaries.¹⁹ The investigator accordingly set boundaries for this project, considering the nature of the problem and its milieu. First, the sample size only comprised parishioners of EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries in Rockville, Maryland, because the concentration of the thesis project was on the disciple-making process in this community of believers. Accordingly, the study sample did not include visitors who have yet to fully understand the ministry's vision or commit to being church members.

Second, the sample size only included adult members of the ECDM church because the study aimed to explore their lack of engagement in the church discipleship process. Only individuals twenty years of age and older were included.

The third boundary was related to the timeframe. The researcher believed that to mitigate the risks identified under the limitations section above and associated with the participation of the target group and its quality of feedback, the initial phase of the thesis project would take sixty days to complete. Given the seriousness of the study's subject and the expected impact of its findings and recommendations on the church's ability to tackle the Great Commission effectively, it was believed that this timeline was adequate to educate participants about the ministry's disciple-making vision and their biblically-based foundation. In addition, it was thought that this amount of time allowed the investigator to take stock of participants' feedback and measure whether they were becoming excited about the church's disciple-making vision and more willing to commit to its implementation.

¹⁹ Lowe, "Definitions, Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions."

Thesis Statement

Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley rightly assert, “the Great Commission is the call to make disciples,”²⁰ and according to Bill Hull, “The small group is the most strategic training environment used by Christ to make the kind of disciples that glorify God.”²¹ The research revealed that the key to unlocking ECDM’s spiritual adult congregants’ active participation in the disciple-making process mainly rests upon the church’s transformation into a vibrant, healthy, growing, and multiplying cell ministry that models the ministry of Jesus and the early church. This expected outcome aligns with Ryan T. Hartwig et al., who suggest that small groups do far more than just fulfilling a function. They provide a place where people can exemplify God’s vision for the church and ultimately live the Christ-following life believers are called to live.²²

Hartwig et al. explain that when small groups are built purposefully and promote devotion and shared ownership, they provide a place to engage the challenges and messes of life together. Such small groups provide a context where people can grow spiritually, providing an example of attractive and irresistible communities to a lost world and making way for the church to live counterculturally.²³ Hull concurs and affirms in *The Disciple-Making Church* that the best way to reach the most people in the most meaningful way is through the small group. It provides all the essential elements for spiritual growth. When done correctly, small group involvement

²⁰ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 27.

²¹ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 235.

²² Hartwig et al. *Leading Small Groups that Thrive* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 7.

²³ Hartwig et al. *Leading Small Groups that Thrive* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 7.

makes disciples, identifies leaders, and provides people necessary relationships and accountability.²⁴

²⁴ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 19.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

The issue of vanishing discipleship in the universal church undermines the local church's ability to achieve the Great Commission. This literature review chapter explores adult discipleship in the local church, focusing on the root causes for why discipleship is dwindling, as well as how to develop a cell ministry, which is presented by many Bible scholars as one of the best remedies for this problem.

In *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, Greg Ogden addresses the need for discipleship in the local church. He seeks to rediscover Jesus's method of accomplishing life change by investing in just a few people at a time. The book's first section discusses the discipleship malaise in today's local church and some of the reasons for it. Ogden asserts that unless the church can see the gap between current reality and its desired destination, it will not effectively assess what it will take to get there.²⁵ The second section of the book primarily focuses on Jesus's method of growing people into mature disciples. Ogden explains that Jesus invested most of his time in a few disciples for two main reasons: internalization and multiplication. First, Ogden argues that Jesus wanted to internalize his life and mission in his disciples' lives, and the way to achieve this was through purposeful proximity.²⁶ Second, Jesus intended to transfer his life to others who would later carry the torch to the multitude after his earthly ministry. The third and last section of the book discusses a church-based strategy for disciple-making.

²⁵ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

Ogden explains that church discipleship arises from relationships. He asserts that the local church does not make disciples through a six-week, ten-week, or even a thirty-week program, but instead through relation life investment.²⁷ The book was essential to this research because it sheds light on some causes of the discipleship deficit in the local church and discusses ways to effectively tackle this issue, learning from the approaches of Jesus and Paul. It clarifies a misunderstanding in many churches that a person can be a Christian without being a disciple.²⁸ This misconception has come about partly because many church leaders have lowered their expectations and think that only a relatively small percentage of people will become disciples.²⁹ It also shows that another cause of the discipleship deficit is that many church leaders are trying to make disciples through programs. In contrast, the scriptural model for growing disciples is through relationships.³⁰

Disciple-Making Is ... How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey brings another perspective to understanding the biblical concept of discipleship. Its thirty chapters, divided into four parts, seeks to inspire readers to obey the Great Commission. It establishes a firm biblical and theological foundation for disciple-making, explains what a disciple is, and outlines essential disciple-making methods. In its last part, Earley and Dempsey survey and critique several disciple-making models, noting the importance of pastoral leadership and the local church in the disciple-making endeavor.

²⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 115.

²⁸ Ibid., 49.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 44.

The book was relevant to the research topic because it shows how the discipleship crisis may originate from misunderstanding Jesus's final instructions to His followers before His ascension. These final instructions, which eloquently express Jesus's greatest passion and top priorities for His church, were repeated on three separate occasions and are the only commands of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels and the book of Acts (Matt 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–47; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8).³¹ The most comprehensive of these five proclamations, known today as the Great Commission, is found in Matt 28:18–20 and expresses God's will for all believers: to make disciples.³² The Great Commission is about disciple-making, and it represents the mission that must dominate the life of every local church and Christ follower.³³ The primary term in the Great Commission is the imperative verb "make disciples."³⁴ The other words, "go," "baptize," and "teach" all modify and explain how Christians are to fulfill Jesus' command.³⁵ Since this order to evangelize the world by making disciples who make other disciples were clearly and repeatedly given, it is evident that all Christ-followers must obey it.³⁶ Other authors concur with the imperative nature of Jesus's commission.

In *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, Robert E. Coleman, for instance, notes that "The Great Commission is not a special calling or a gift of the Spirit; it is a command, an obligation incumbent upon the whole community of faith."³⁷ His book discusses how the apostolic church

³¹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 2.

³² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making*, 3.

³⁷ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2020), 12.

carried out its mandate. Beginning with the book of Acts, Coleman develops an unfolding pattern, noting principles of Christ's discipleship method in the witness of early Christians. Next, the book explains Jesus's vision of the kingdom and the coming of His universal reign through the reproduction of disciples. It also attempts to deal with the problem of aimless and self-serving multitudes.³⁸ Finally, it turns to the need to concentrate on persons wanting to learn of Christ and those who will labor in his harvest, underscoring the principle of selection critical to the research.

Another source that emphasizes that following Christ is a non-negotiable part of the Great Commission is *Disciple Shift: Five Steps that Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* by Jim Putman et al.³⁹ This book stresses that disciples must take the Great Commission at face value in their daily lives. If anyone serves Jesus, he must follow Jesus. There is no wiggle room in a genuine Christian's life for a faith characterized by compromise.⁴⁰ In its first chapter, the authors explain that the engine that should drive ministry is a clear understanding of the God-given purpose of the local church. The authors then explain that the problem of discipleship observed in many churches today stems from the objectives they commit their time and resources to achieve and their methods to accomplish those objectives. The rest of the book argues that making disciples requires shifting from reaching to making, informing to equipping, from program to purpose, activities to building relationships through the development of small relational groups, and from accumulating to deploying.

³⁸ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 16.

³⁹ Putman et al. *Disciple Shift: Five Steps that Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 32–33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

In *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, Bill Hull contends that teaching the church to obey the Great Commission is a vital but neglected work.⁴¹ He asks if a church that does not follow the Great Commission is obeying God. He answers that no, it is not.⁴² The book's introduction section explains that the church's present discipleship crisis is not one of the extremities, a problem of function or task. Instead, he argues it is a crisis that hampers the church's ability to carry out processes and tasks.⁴³ Hull asserts that the evangelical church has become weak, flabby, and too dependent on artificial means to stimulate real spiritual power. The other chapters expand on the church's condition, show pastors the challenges they will face, and provide inspiration and practical know-how to tackle these problems effectively. The book also helps the reader understand what disciples look like, the pastor's role in making them, and the practices that lead to positive change.

The reader also learns that the bare bones of obedience are the intentional effort to define a disciple and then produce disciples through various church vehicles.⁴⁴ Putman et al. concur and affirm that a church must correctly define the word *disciple* before moving toward making disciples.⁴⁵ Hull stresses, however, that "the most important factor in defining a disciple is the teachings of Jesus. He was a disciple-maker; he spoke to the disciples when the Great Commission was issued."⁴⁶ Hull then explains that a disciple is a Christ-follower willing to deny

⁴¹ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 70.

⁴² Ibid., 70–71.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ Hull, 70.

⁴⁵ Putman et al., 44.

⁴⁶ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 75.

self, take up his cross daily, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). Disciples put Christ before self, family, and possessions (Luke 14:25–35). They are committed to Christ’s teachings (John 13:34–35), abide in Christ, obey, bear fruit, glorify God, demonstrate joy, and love fellow believers (John 15:7–17).⁴⁷

The Great Omission: Claiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship by Dallas Willard also stresses the importance of a clear understanding of what a disciple is. It aptly summarizes Jesus’s definition of “a disciple” as follows: “In the heart of a disciple there is a desire, a decision or settled intent. The person, after coming to some understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, and thus having counted up the costs, desires to be like the teacher” (Matt 10:25).⁴⁸ The book explains that before ascending to heaven, Jesus commanded the church to “make disciples of all the nations.” It then notes that the church has responded by making converts, not disciples, which Willard claims is the church’s Great Omission.⁴⁹ This book was crucial to the research because it highlights how the church has strayed from its mandate and calls believers to return to Christ’s plan of being and making disciples.

In Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation, Jody Dean and Hal Stewart provide another perspective on what it means to be a disciple of Christ Jesus. The first chapter centers on Christian formation and stresses that the aim of spiritual growth is God’s glory. The next chapter discusses the impact of culture on Christian discipleship and ministry leadership. It emphasizes that to be most effective with discipleship, a ministry leader must understand the cultural tribes he engages. Other chapters focus on

⁴⁷ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 75.

⁴⁸ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

evangelism, mentoring, and small groups and explain the necessity of integrating discipleship and ministry leadership in the church's preaching. The book was relevant to the research because it explains what following Jesus entails. After Jesus's invitation to follow him (Matt 4:19), the authors stress that Jesus declares, "I will make you" in the second part of this verse.⁵⁰ Herein, the implications for discipleship are many. This phrase includes the necessity of investing time and intentionality to grow in Christ. This growth occurs as a person spends time with Jesus and other Christ-followers.⁵¹ Hull points out, however, that it is more important to be a disciple than to have a plan to make disciples.⁵² He describes two positive results of a church making a disciple: there is now a healthy and godly disciple, and that disciple can produce another disciple. This results in multiplication, which is the key to reaching the world and fulfilling the Great Commission. Therefore, disciples solve the crisis at the heart of the church.⁵³

In *Following The Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*, Michael J. Wilkins lays the groundwork for developing biblical discipleship ministries in the church, on the mission field, and in parachurch ministries. The book's first two chapters explore the meaning of following the master and discuss discipleship models in depth. The following chapters discuss discipleship in the Old Testament, in the Greco-Roman Ages, Judaism, and the Early Church. Jesus's form of discipleship is also discussed, along with gospel portraits of discipleship. The book was particularly essential to the research because it shows how biblical discipleship has evolved throughout the ages and exposes the harmful dichotomy between the words *disciple* and

⁵⁰ Dean and Stewart, *Together We Equip*, 59.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 13.

⁵³ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 70.

Christian.⁵⁴ The author illustrates the dilemma as follows: when people are asked if they can confidently say they are true disciples of Jesus Christ, many struggles to answer the question. However, when those same people are asked whether they are convinced they are true Christians, most say yes without hesitation.⁵⁵

The book helped the present research as it points out the complexity surrounding the concepts of disciple and discipleship. As Wilkins writes, “Being a disciple of Jesus is a phenomenon that is simple to appreciate yet incredibly complex to comprehend.”⁵⁶ He explains that while disciples can appear simple to understand at first glance, the more one examines what Jesus was doing with His disciples, the more complex the issues become. Wilkins asks whether modern discipleship means that everyone must leave everything to follow Jesus—including family and occupation. He questions what it means to count the cost before becoming a believer. He wonders whether a person must perform acts of commitment before conversion and, if so, how that allows for grace. Or, if not, what does it mean to count the cost?⁵⁷ Clearly, these are complex questions.

Building a Discipling Culture by Mike Breen discusses the kind of missional disciples that Jesus developed and commissioned His followers to produce in all nations. The first part addresses the multicultural setting that today’s churches face. The author stresses that while many local churches operate in a rapidly and culturally shifting environment in a global marketplace, most church leaders have been trained and educated for a world that no longer

⁵⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following The Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁷ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 33.

exists. However, the call to make disciples remains.⁵⁸ The other chapters of this first part of the book center on Jesus's discipleship model, explaining that learning occurs best through apprenticeship, immersion, and focus on building a discipleship culture. The last two parts focus on discipling language and using huddles to disciple people. The book was helpful because it gives a different perspective of the root cause of the discipleship problem in some churches: the development of a religious language that has substituted the spiritual or discipling language. Breen suggests that when considering the church, one must examine how the agreed-on language is used and how it creates a church's culture and impacts its disciple-making process.

In *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*, David Livermore discusses how to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures. Chapter One explains the relevance of cultural intelligence to global leadership and stresses that effective leadership in a cosmopolitan environment requires leaders to be culturally savvy.⁵⁹ Chapter Two gives a brief introduction to the research on cultural intelligence. The remaining chapters discuss the four capabilities of cultural intelligence and how to develop and apply them as a leader. The book was relevant to the research because it describes how to build the capacity to function cross-culturally and effectively fulfill the Great Commission in today's multiethnic world. Because of the deficit in cultural intelligence, many church leaders struggle with ineffective discipleship programs because they are not adapted to their cultural settings and audiences.

In *Making Disciples in the Twenty-First Century Church*, Joel Comiskey shares his conviction that the primary goal of the local church is to make disciples who produce other disciples. He then discusses ways to achieve that objective. Comiskey argues against what he

⁵⁸ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2016), 4.

⁵⁹ Livermore, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*, 4.

sees as a misplaced reliance on discipleship models that are not tailored to a cultural setting and audience. He explains that a packaged discipleship model does not work in any other context than the one for which it was created.⁶⁰ Comiskey emphasizes that it might seem easier initially to plug and play, but the model malfunctions because of cultural barriers. He also stresses the impact of the denominational context on disciple-making. The author emphasizes that one model might work great among the Assembly of God in Brazil but will not be effective among Baptists in Spain. He explains that what worked great in a Latin American Pentecostal environment, where leaders are authoritative, will need to be adapted among Baptists, who follow a more congregational, participatory form of governance.⁶¹

This book demonstrates why cells are the best vehicle for effective disciple-making. The author explains that the first-century church and Paul mainly emulated Jesus's strategy. Comiskey notes that the early church met in houses after Christ's resurrection. He argues that they turned the world upside down from the inside out through house-to-house ministry.⁶² Comiskey points out that the emphasis was and should always be on making disciples who reproduce, and the result is multiplication, not the other way around.⁶³ Still, the author warns that when a church enters into the cell church vision because of the possibility of growth, it is easy to look to techniques, rather than God, to bring the change.⁶⁴ He further explains that if a leader spotlights the number of people attending the cells or larger gatherings, they will often miss the

⁶⁰ Joel Comiskey, *Making Disciples in the Twenty-First Century Church* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2013), 26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶³ Comiskey, *Making Disciples*, 103.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

more qualitative reasons for cell ministry.⁶⁵ Finally, Comiskey concludes his exposé by warning that if the foundation is superficial, there is a good chance that cell ministry will not withstand the storms of doubt, resistance, and weariness.⁶⁶

The book also discusses discipleship through community, the priesthood of all believers, group evangelism, multiplication, group discipleship and culture, and coaching. As far as this thesis, this book shows that disciple-making occurs best in a cell environment where authentic relationships happen and mutual accountability is fostered. In addition, it explains how the culture of individualism fights against biblical commands to serve one another, submit to others, give up rights for the greater good of the group, and humble oneself before others. Dean and Stewart concur, underlining that as ministry leaders engage the contemporary culture in discipleship and ministry leadership, they must have a high cultural intelligence to understand how individuals view themselves, the Christian faith, and the church.⁶⁷

In *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* by David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, the authors bring different insights to biblical discipleship, drawing from their dissimilar backgrounds. One grew up in the Midwest of the United States. In contrast, the other grew up in Tanzania in a missionary family (and later served in East Africa himself as a missionary). Each brings insights and illustrations that help interpret and contextualize the message of reconciliation. The book was pertinent to this research because it reminds us that church leaders must seek God's guidance in developing congregations of disciples. They must heavily rely on the Holy Spirit for interpretations, contextualization, and innovation in various cultural contexts.

⁶⁵ Comiskey, *Making Disciples*, 24

⁶⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁷ Dean and Stewart, *Together We Equip*, 19.

First, church leaders operating in a multicultural setting must understand that cultural practices dealing with diet, ritual, or amenities are significant only within the local cultural context and not should be taken as universal values. However, they must also recognize and embrace universal transcultural commitments and preserve the church's unity.⁶⁸

In *Pastoring Men* by Patrick Morley, the author expresses the above cultural problem and its devastating result on the disciple-making process for Christian men. He writes,

Despite their good intentions, after they walk the aisle and pray the sinner's prayer, most men return to their seats and resume their former lives. They do not take the subsequent steps. Almost imperceptibly, one disappointment at a time, the world sucks out their newfound joy and passion for life in Christ. They lose heart, go silent, and anesthetize their pain. Then they give up, burnt out, drop out, or just slowly drift away.⁶⁹

Morley explains that the root cause for this problem is cultural. He calls it success sickness and defines it as men always wanting more but never being happy when they get it. Thus, they become trapped in the cultural rat race and constantly try to be something different than what God's intended. As a result, they become cultural Christians, preoccupied with material success, mainly seeking the God they want instead of the God who is.⁷⁰ The book was critical to the research because it provides fascinating insights into the issue of men's low involvement in the disciple-making process in many local churches and discusses success factors in discipling men.

In *Where are the Men?* by Philip Monnin, the author expresses a similar perspective. The book examines the basics of the Christian life and what following Jesus means. It also discusses the role of culture in men's emasculation and suggests a way for them to get their masculinity back. The book was essential to the research because it draws attention to the state of men's

⁶⁸ David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 113.

⁶⁹ Patrick Morley, *Pastoring Men* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 20.

⁷⁰ Morley, *Pastoring Men*, 72.

discipleship (or lack thereof) in many modern-day churches. The author writes, “walk into any church today, and what will we see? We will likely see more women than men, and we will see varying levels of deadness.”⁷¹ This book helps understand that this sad situation finds its source in culture, as men focus on conforming to the popular culture of independence, self-seeking, and self-promotion.⁷²

Bill Hull is the author of *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Here, the author provides an in-depth analysis of discipleship, its biblical foundations and origins, and its story from the Greco-Roman World to the Reformation. This history of discipleship was vital to the research because it demonstrates that discipleship has been and remains God’s very best for His people from the beginning until now. It is God’s primary work. In addition, it provides excellent insights into the distinguishing marks of a disciple, the disciple-making environment and what makes things grow, the stages of discipleship, personal approaches to disciple-making, and the role of small groups, congregations, and pastors in this process. The author also discusses the negative impact of focusing on programs and stresses that the most common mistake well-intentioned leaders make, particularly in the Global North, is turning discipleship into a curriculum that an earnest disciple completes and then graduates.⁷³ Finally, Hull affirms that churches worldwide are filled with people who have learned basic information about being a follower of Jesus but no longer study the Bible, memorize Scripture, or pray.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Philip Monnin, *Where Are the Men? The Journey to Discipleship in Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 61.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 36.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 38.

In *Exponential* by Dave and Jon Ferguson, the authors discuss developing a missional and exponential church movement. They share five reproducing principles they have learned in their journey of serving the Lord. The principles are as follows. First, reproducing requires everyone to have an apprentice. Second, growth entails being proactive, not reactive. Third, multiplication is a function of leaders' readiness and not the size of the church. Fourth, duplicating is about God's kingdom, not ours. The fifth and final principle is that reproduction happens on the edge and at the center.

On the other hand, the book discusses the harmful focus of attractive programs. It explains that "discipleship in nowadays church has more to do with consuming, and absorbing cognitive content than with missional action."⁷⁵ The authors lament that being a disciple is increasingly about an individual and their ability to get a passing grade on some subject matter and less about being a follower of Jesus, someone who lives in a community with others for the sake of Christ's mission.⁷⁶ The book's discussion regarding reproducing leaders, groups, missional teams, coaches, communities, churches, and networks was particularly helpful. The authors stress the importance of cell ministry in the leadership development process. They argue that small groups provide a safe place to take leadership risks and receive honest feedback. As a result, they are ideal for reproducing leaders.⁷⁷

In *The Disciple-Making Church*, Bill Hull explains why disciple-making must be the church's focus and how the church can best accomplish its divine mandate. The book's first part looks at the biblical foundation of discipling and the priorities of a disciple-making church. The

⁷⁵ Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 45.

⁷⁶ Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 45.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 98–100.

second part reviews the early church in Jerusalem, its creation, practices, priorities, the challenges for a growing church, and how to deal with these so disciple-making can occur effectively. Hull argues that the best way to reach the most people in the most meaningful way is through a small group. He explains that when a small group is done well, it helps identify leaders, gives people the relationships and accountability they need, and leads to disciple-making.⁷⁸ Hull shows how leaders can be identified and apprenticed through a small group.⁷⁹ The book was critical for the research because it discusses the practices of a disciple-making church, pastoral priorities, and cell ministry as the best setting for building relationships, developing leaders who reproduce, and cultivating mutual accountability.

Leading Small Groups that Thrive by Ryan T. Hartwig et al. discusses the latest insights on small groups from a large-scale research study of small group pastors, leaders, and members. It shows that it is possible to have thriving and growing small groups. The authors show small group leaders how to plan for a small group launch and how to build, sustain, and multiply highly effective, transformational healthy small groups where people grow spiritually together. They explain that small groups provide a place where people can exemplify God's vision for the church and ultimately live the Christ-following life believers are called to live.⁸⁰ They emphasize that thriving small groups are healthy communities that contribute to individuals' spiritual growth. They stress that when small groups are built purposefully and cultivated by devotion and shared ownership, they can provide: 1) a place to engage the challenges and messes of life together; 2) a context in which people can grow together spiritually; 3) an example of an

⁷⁸ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 19.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hartwig, et al. *Leading Small Groups*, 7.

attractive, irresistible community to an unbelieving world; and 4) a way for the church to live counterculturally.⁸¹

Leading Healthy Growing, Multiplying Small Groups by Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley centers on creating and leading healthy, growing small groups that take their lead from Jesus's earthly ministry. The authors discuss the biblical foundations for leading groups and describe a healthy group's characteristics and practices. They emphasize that Jesus was a small group leader who gave the church a discipleship model to follow.⁸² Dempsey and Earley stress that if Jesus's followers want to live as Jesus lived, they must do as Jesus did. They note that Jesus invited a handful of men to gather with Him in an intensive, ministry-focused small group.⁸³ Dempsey and Earley underscore that the most straightforward argument for leading small groups is that Jesus gave an example for the church to emulate. Involvement in small group life and leadership was a primary spiritual discipline in the life of Jesus. Following Jesus today means following Him into deep relationships with other believers.⁸⁴ This book was essential to the research because it gives practical advice on developing leaders for groups, finding and training an apprentice, and filling a church's empty chairs.

Planting Churches that Reproduce by Joel Comiskey focuses on planting churches that are simple to reproduce and can grow into a movement of churches. The author uses the latest North American church planting statistics and then broadens the illustrations to include worldwide church planting. Comiskey discusses the necessity of multiplying to avoid slow death,

⁸¹ Hartwig, et al. *Leading Small Groups*, 15.

⁸² Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy Growing Multiplying Small Groups*, 26.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

growing to survive, getting life through sharing, concentrating on core values, establishing leadership, and raising funds. In addition, the book teaches about learning the customs and culture of people, among other survival practices. Comiskey also stresses the importance of simplicity in the reproduction strategy and underlines the early church's prescription for church planting: meet in homes and gather together whenever possible for fellowship and to hear the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42–46).⁸⁵ He explains that Paul's disciple-making method was the most successful of the first century. He planted simple, reproducible churches and moved on to spread the flame.⁸⁶ Paul believed in releasing leaders and moving on. He practiced simple church planting.⁸⁷ The book was critical to the investigation because it discusses helpful, successful church planting experiences and provides practical solutions for those planting churches today.

Roger S. Greenway is the author of *Go and Make Disciples*. The book centers on missions. Its first part discusses the world in which today's church is operating, including population growth and movement, cultural barriers, the strength of non-Christian religions, and the state of missions in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and western countries. The two remaining parts of the book address the biblical foundations and the most frequent issues faced in missions.

Chapter eight, which discusses Paul's missionary methods, was beneficial. Greenway argues that Paul focused on families and households in evangelism and outreach into society. He notes that Paul planted and nurtured faith, worship, fellowship, and service communities. He concentrated on developing local leaders in the churches and placing them in charge as soon as possible. Greenway explains that Paul used the natural bridges of families, relatives, friends, and

⁸⁵ Comiskey, *Planting Churches that Reproduce*, 51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

other contacts in spreading the gospel. He started house churches everywhere he went. These house churches became living cells of the Body of Christ. He used many fellow workers called lay people to spread the gospel and minister in the house churches.⁸⁸

Summary

These books provide helpful information about the challenges of discipleship in many local churches and discuss various solutions. However, most of the problems identified and the remedies proposed concern churches whose culture is predominantly North American. Result findings and ministry experiences used for illustration seldom align with local churches established in the United States but whose members are primarily from a different culture. Application or customization of proposed solutions seems complex in this regard. This research aimed to examine waning adult discipleship at EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries. However, solutions must consider that most of its members come from an African background. Unfortunately, there do not appear to be any books or articles that contain this combination of research.

Theological Foundations

From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures are filled with examples of God using people to form others for a given mission.

Old Testament Examples of Discipleship

Michael J. Wilkins asserts that several relationships between individuals in the Old Testament could be described as “discipleship” relationships. Most prominent among them are the relationships between Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jeremiah and Baruch. In

⁸⁸ Roger S. Greenway, *Go and Make Disciples: An Introduction to Christian Missions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 1999), 64–67.

each example, one person is seen as called to serve God and the nation, while another plays a subordinate role.⁸⁹ Also, in each of these discipleship relationships, God is the focal point that the country and the individuals must follow.⁹⁰ Wilkins further explains that these discipleship relationships had additional unique characteristics.

First, they were oriented toward service. The apprentice was to serve the mentor or master. For instance, Joshua was called “the servant of Moses” (Ex. 24:13), while his mentor, Moses, was called the servant of God (Num 12:8). Second, God called both the Master and disciple to carry out His work, with the Master in the leading role and the disciple in the apprenticeship role. This prepared the apprentice to take over the master’s leadership responsibility at God’s appointed time. Third, the discipleship relationships between these individual masters and their selected followers were practically related to Israel’s historical crisis periods. God brought them into existence to fill a leadership gap in the nation. For example, God called the prophet Jeremiah to be His prophetic voice during Judah’s crisis. Jeremiah’s disciple, Baruch, assisted him in that role, writing down what Jeremiah dictated (Jer 36:27, 32–33). Fourth, the human master never assumed the primary place of importance. The master always pointed beyond himself to God, so the disciple ultimately followed, served, and walked with God (Deut 31:7–8).⁹¹

Moses and Joshua

The first example of a discipleship relationship in the history of Israel was that of Moses and Joshua.⁹² According to Hull, this relationship, which appears to have lasted the longest,

⁸⁹ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 61.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 60.

⁹¹ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 63.

⁹² Hull, *The Complete Book*, 56.

provides context for five critical areas of applications regarding what humans need to grow and develop.⁹³ The first area is concerned with relationships to nurture. God entrusted Moses with the mission to go to Egypt, deliver His people, the children of Israel, and bring them to the promised land. To fulfill that dangerous and challenging mission, Moses, apart from the help of God, needed the assistance and encouragement of other people. As a result, his brother Aaron helped defeat Pharaoh, his father-in-law Jethro taught him an effective leadership style, and Joshua formed and led an invincible army (Exod 17:8–16).

The second area is competence. After defeating the Amalekites, Moses noticed Joshua's great potential and gave him the opportunity for further service and training. Moses brought Joshua up to the mountain to meet with God (Exod 24:13). Joshua followed Moses everywhere he went from that time forward, observing and learning how to lead difficult people in challenging circumstances. Joshua saw Moses break the tablet of the Law and learned about anger management. He also learned from Moses that not following God's instructions has consequences.

The third area of growth and development is accountability for tasks. Joshua learned from Moses the intricate art of managing two million people in a hostile environment. He was frequently with Moses, learning to listen to God, watching his mentor interact with God, growing in favor with God and with men, and increasing in his knowledge of and love for God, which were crucial aspects of his growth and preparation for his approaching mission (Exod 33:9–12).

The fourth area of required growth is submission. Joshua learned how to submit to God from Moses, and he remained faithful to God and Moses, even when he faced pressure from others. He and Caleb remained faithful to God and gave a report that glorified Him when all the

⁹³ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 56.

other spies chose not to. Hull rightly asserts that Joshua's submission to the Father and his servant Moses shaped him into a man of strong faith and character.⁹⁴

The fifth area of application of discipleship that Hull identifies in the relationship between Moses and Joshua is wisdom. God selected Joshua to take over and continue Moses's mission because Joshua had learned from Moses and was equipped and ready. God appointed him, Moses trained him, and God honored and anointed him before the entire congregation (Num 27:12–23; Deut 1:38; 31:1–30).⁹⁵ After Moses prepared him well, Joshua took over and led Israel into Canaan, the promised land.

Elijah and Elisha

When Elijah was called to serve as God's prophet to Israel, the entire nation was deeply plunged into spiritual and moral decadence. Elijah, which in Hebrew is Eliyahu, means "My God is Yahweh." He was raised to bring the nation back to God, to turn the children of Israel from their idolatry to a vibrant faith in the true God, the God of Israel. The culmination of this restoration is recorded in 1 Kings 18, where Prophet Elijah openly opposes the prophets of Baal before the people on Mount Carmel. Elijah addressed the children of Israel, saying, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him: but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kgs 18:21). Following Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal, God appeared to him and asked him to anoint three people to continue the restoration mission in Israel: Hazael as king over Syria; Jehu, the son of Nimshi, as king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat as a prophet in his place. God said, "It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill" (1 Kgs 19:15–17). The next scene

⁹⁴ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 57.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

shows Elijah approaching Elisha and throwing his mantle over Elisha, a symbolic act denoting Elijah's call to the office of a prophet. It was also a clear indication of God's gift to enable him to fulfill the prophetic ministry. Elijah's throwing off the mantle was a prophetic announcement that the gift of prophecy had been given (or would be given) to Elisha. Elisha, who understood God's calling and mission, said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you" (1 Kgs 19:20). "I will follow you" signified Elisha's acceptance of the apprenticeship and mentoring relationship offer, which lasted a few years and prepared him to fulfill God's given mission effectively. The five areas of growth and development identified in the Moses-Joshua relationship were also present in Elijah-Elisha's case.⁹⁶

Eli and Samuel

Eli and Samuel also had a discipleship relationship that prepared Samuel to carry out God's mission as prophet and judge in Israel. Eli, the high priest, was given custody of Samuel when he was a child (1 Sam 2:18–19). Thus, Samuel grew up in the temple and was exposed to Eli's teachings. Samuel learned from Eli to recognize the voice of the Lord, and Samuel adhered to the religious values passed down to him. As a result, he grew in stature and favor with the Lord and men. Samuel also learned to patiently wait until Eli's death to become Israel's spiritual leader.⁹⁷

In contrast, Eli did not train his sons to fear the Lord, and he did not restrain them from their ungodly behavior. They were corrupt and did not know the Lord (1 Sam. 2:12–17). Their lack of a discipleship relationship with their father was fatal. They both died on the same day,

⁹⁶ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 58.

⁹⁷ Hindson and Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey*, 124.

and their father Eli died as well (1 Sam 4:10, 18). God eradicated a whole generation of priests because Eli failed to educate his children in the ways of the Lord (1 Sam 2:22). The cost of the lack of discipleship was very high for Eli, his sons, the family, and the entire nation.

Naomi and Ruth

Naomi and Ruth's relationship is another example of a discipleship relationship. Ruth, a gentlewoman, made the unprecedented decision to turn from her idols to follow her mother-in-law Naomi and serve the living and true God.⁹⁸ Just as Elijah told Elisha to stay and not follow him to test Elisha's faithfulness, Naomi also tested the loyalty of her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth. Naomi asked them to return to their respective mother's houses. Orpah kissed Naomi and went back to her idols, but Ruth refused, saying, "wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people should be my people and your God, my God" (Ruth 1: 16). Ruth then followed Naomi and learned godly principles, which brought her great blessing from God and men. For example, she volunteered to care for Naomi's needs by going into a field and gleaning, a humble task that exemplified her godliness and won the heart of Boaz, who became her kinsman-redeemer, a foreshadow of Jesus Christ, the great redeemer of humankind (1 Pet 1:18–19).⁹⁹

Discipleship under the Scribes and Wise Men

Israel had three primary sources of spiritual wisdom and authority. First, the high priest and his clan known as Levites represented the people to God. Second, prophets represented God to the people. Third, wise men were given the role of protecting the accumulation of wisdom.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Hindson and Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey*, 124.

ago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1993), 99.

⁹⁹ Benware, *Survey*, 101.

¹⁰⁰ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 58.

These men passed on wisdom literature orally from father to son, and eventually, these sayings were written down. For instance, after returning to the land under Nehemiah's leadership, Ezra, one of the most renowned of the wise men, became the principal teacher of God's Law (Neh 8:1) as dealing with the wisdom literature work required formal training, including a master-disciple relationship. Part of that training consisted of apprenticeship in reading, writing, transcribing, and expounding on wisdom and Scripture. For example, there was Baruch, a trained scribe who helped Jeremiah put together his work. There were also trained wise men who assisted Solomon in composing the book of Proverbs.¹⁰¹ While the initial instruction occurred within the family and clan, advanced specialization took place within a scribal guild.¹⁰² Sociologically, wise men were initially trained within scribal families. Later, instruction happened in the context of a fellowship of scribes in Israel, the sophistication of the court, the Torah-centered activities of Ezra, and later on, in rabbinic relationships.¹⁰³

New Testament Examples of Discipleship

John the Baptist

The word "disciple," *mathètès* in Greek, appears 261 times in the Gospels and the book of Acts. The initial disciples in the gospels devoted themselves to the way of life that John the Baptist taught.¹⁰⁴ John's fixation was a purist form of Judaism centered on repentance, seeking and serving God, and proclamation. In fact, it was very close to the kind of discipleship Jesus

¹⁰¹ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 58.

¹⁰² Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 64.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 64–65.

¹⁰⁴ Robert L. Foster, "Discipleship in the New Testament," accessed April 6, 2021, https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TBv2i7_FosterDiscipleship.pdf.

espoused. The gospel of John depicts this period of discipleship as relatively brief since John the Baptist understood his role as essentially preparing Israel for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.¹⁰⁵ The Gospels portray John the Baptist as seeing Jesus as someone so much greater than himself that he felt unworthy even to untie the sandals on Jesus' feet (John 1:27; Matt 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16). When Jesus entered the ministry, John the Baptist immediately pointed his own disciples to Jesus, whom the disciples began to address as "Rabbi," which means "teacher" (John 1:35–39). Two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus at this early stage (John 1:35–37), while the book of Acts records twelve more believing in Jesus later.

Jesus and the Twelve

Jesus's form of discipleship was unique, not patterned after other forms found in Palestine at that time. People from various backgrounds left everything to follow Him, not for study but for service.¹⁰⁶ Jesus addressed His disciples, saying, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow me, and where I am, there My servant will also be. If anyone serves me, him my Father will honor" (John 12:26). The Gospels show that some people took a personal initiative to follow Jesus, based on various understandings of the messages of John the Baptist and Jesus.¹⁰⁷ This category included people who came to Jesus because they recognized His messianic identity (John 1:35-51).¹⁰⁸ The second category was composed of people who responded to Jesus's call "follow me" (Matt 4:19; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27; John 1:43).

¹⁰⁵ Foster, "Discipleship in the New Testament."

¹⁰⁶ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 101.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 102.

However, regardless of how these individuals came to Jesus, they were all introduced to a very different type of life in a new spiritual family where spiritual transformation occurred due to interactions between the family members.¹⁰⁹ Jesus's discipleship strategy is summarized in one verse of Matthew's gospel: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19). His invitation to follow Him made it clear that He would be the leader and the disciples were to follow. "Follow me" did not mean "follow a set of rules or a series of rituals or activities."¹¹⁰ It meant and does mean a call to pursue Jesus passionately.¹¹¹ It is the heartbeat—a formal challenge to live with, learn from, and study under the rabbi of rabbis, Jesus.¹¹² The call "follow Me" is a call to engage intentionally in a discipleship adventure with the master. This call involves being close to Jesus, obeying His teachings, taking the same path as Him, and walking the same road He is walking. It involves daily growth and development at the expense of personal comfort. It demands absolute abandonment of all else to pursue Jesus fully.¹¹³ The "I will make you" in Matt 4:19 is a clear indication from Jesus to His followers that He can and wants to change them into fishers of men. Apart from Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus, this small group of Jesus's disciples called apostles were all transformed. They carried out the Great Commission just as Jesus commanded them.

¹⁰⁹ Comiskey, *Making Disciples*, 37.

¹¹⁰ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making*, 95.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 95–96.

The New Testament's Discipleship Community

Disciple-making in the first century early church occurred in a community of faith. In the book of Acts, after Dr. Luke's observation that the disciples were increasing in number, he next describes them as being banded together as a "congregation of disciples" (Acts 6:2, NASB; *plêthos tôn mathêtôn*).¹¹⁴ The Greek word *plêthos*, which in English means "the congregation," has two meanings in Acts: it can mean "a crowd, a large number of persons" (e.g., 2:6), which aligns with the early church situation from the Day of Pentecost, or it can mean "the full assembly" (Acts 6:2).¹¹⁵ Luke's use of the term "disciple" in the book of Acts (i.e., Acts 6:1–7; 9:1) is a clear indication that the form of discipleship that Jesus had initiated continued into the early church, but with the difference that it occurred in the context of the community which from that time onward was the church.¹¹⁶

One of the great features of the first-century community was the transition from following and learning to live the kingdom type of life directly from Jesus to learning it now from the apostles, who were endeavoring to teach all that Jesus had commanded (Matt 28:20). The term "disciple" in this context refers to a believer who has committed their faith for salvation to Jesus.¹¹⁷ Another key distinctive feature of the discipleship process in the early church was the emphasis on the mutuality of the community. Since all believers were disciples of one master, they were committed to the growth of one another as equals. This concept is emphasized in the epistles and the church tradition known as "the priesthood of all believers."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 256.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 258.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 271.

¹¹⁸ Wilkins, *Following The Master*, 272.

The other vital elements of the early church discipleship process were devotion to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42–47). Companionship meant sharing in, partaking in something or someone, and in this case, the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas

Paul was not part of the twelve whom Jesus called during His ministry on earth who followed Him for three years. Nevertheless, when Jesus finally called him on the road of Damascus, Paul learned quickly from Barnabas as they ministered together in Seleucia, Cyprus, and Antioch. When they went out to minister, Barnabas was the leader. He did the ministry, and Paul observed (Acts 13:1–5).¹¹⁹ However, not long into their journey, Barnabas moved over to allow Paul to lead (Acts 13:6–11).¹²⁰ After that, Paul was ready to go out on his own (Acts 15:36–41). This discipleship relationship exhibited modeling, mentoring, and motivating people.¹²¹

Paul and His Discipleship Small Group

Paul modeled Jesus's way of identifying and equipping leaders who could produce other leaders. After his separation from Barnabas, Paul took Silas and Timothy to minister in Macedonia (Acts 15:39–41; 16:1–3). Paul continued to help Silas and Timothy grow spiritually during these evangelistic journeys. They learned from him and how to use their spiritual gifts. In fact, they grew so much that Paul confidently left Timothy and Silas to minister in Berea on their own.¹²² The epistles record Paul encouraging Timothy to be courageous, “for God did not give

¹¹⁹ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 165.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 165.

us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7).¹²³ Paul encouraged Timothy to take heed to his ministry, letting no one despise his youth, to endeavor to give attention to reading, exhortation, and doctrine, and to be an example to the believers in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity (1 Tim 4:12–16). Imprisoned and anticipating his martyrdom, Paul wrote a letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, encouraging him to be strong in the Lord’s grace and fan into flame the remaining members of his recognized call to leadership.¹²⁴ He urged Timothy to take action to ensure the continuation and health of the gospel in his own life, in the life of the church at Ephesus, and in the larger kingdom.¹²⁵ He reminded Timothy about the necessity to reproduce, telling him, “the things that you heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Paul told Timothy that the task is not easy and requires the discipline of a soldier, the vision of an athlete, and the patience of a farmer (2 Tim 2:3–7).¹²⁶

A similar discipleship relationship is observed between Paul and Titus. After Titus converted, Paul took him along (Gal 2:1–3) for his third missionary journey. Later, Paul sent Titus to Corinth to help that church with its work (2 Cor 2:12–13; 7:5–6; 8:6). After Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28), he and Titus ministered in Crete (Tit 1:5), after which he commissioned Titus to remain there as his representative to complete some needed work (Tit 1:5; 2:15; 3:12–13). Paul’s epistle to Titus sounds like a discipleship program. First, he asked Titus to identify and appoint qualified elders and define their qualities and jobs.

¹²³ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 282.

¹²⁴ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 283.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Next, he talked about the characteristics of a sound church: the preaching of sound doctrine to the older men and women, young women and their husbands, and young men and bondservants. Finally, he encouraged Titus to perform good works with integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, and sound speech (Tit 2:1–10).

Theoretical Foundations

The previous section stressed that disciple-making is God’s mandate to the church. However, from Jesus’s ministry to the first-century church to churches throughout the ages, local groups of believers have tested different approaches to achieving the Great Commission. The literature clearly shows that disciple-making philosophies and practices have varied from one local church to another because contexts were and are different. This section discusses disciple-making models before focusing on small groups or cell ministry as primary discipleship vehicles.¹²⁷

Discipleship Models

Earley and Dempsey define “model” as a schematic description of a system, theory, or phenomenon that accounts for its known or inferred properties that may be used to study its characteristics further.¹²⁸

Disciple-Making Practices in the Early Church

The first church was an unstoppable force.¹²⁹ From the five hundred disciples who witnessed the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15) to the hundred and twenty waiting for the promise in the upper room, the early church increased exponentially. It reached more than one

¹²⁷ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 218.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 229.

¹²⁹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 117.

million followers in seventy years.¹³⁰ The secret of this expansion strategy was a focus on making disciples who make other disciples. Jesus preached to the crowd, but for discipleship, He focused on equipping a small group of followers and forging a reproduction mindset in each of them.

Earley and Dempsey explain that “if you win someone to Jesus, you have added someone to the kingdom. You have not multiplied until that person is winning people to Jesus who are winning people to Jesus.”¹³¹ Neil Cole agrees and emphasizes that addition is good, but multiplication is better. Addition produces incremental growth, but reproduction stimulates exponential growth.¹³² Cole asserts that the focus on disciples’ exponential reproduction is well illustrated in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. He tells Timothy, “the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). This verse is critical in all the Scriptures, showing what it means to reproduce disciples. Four generations are mentioned: Paul, Timothy, “faithful men,” and “others.”¹³³

Earley and Dempsey stress the power of multiplication, emphasizing that the process of raising leaders who multiply is the fastest way to fulfill the Great Commission.¹³⁴ Leroy Eims validates this strategy by explaining that Jesus, on his way to the cross, focused His attention and energy on growing a small group of followers whom He taught and sent to do the same in all the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 117.

¹³¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making*, 118.

¹³² Neil Cole, *Church 3.0* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 74.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Earley and Dempsey, 118.

nations until His return.¹³⁵ His disciple-making strategy focused on three progressive commitment levels: trust, obedience, and learning. At each stage, Jesus demanded more significant commitment. He led his protégés through three distinct stages. The first stage, declaration, consisted in preaching the good news to induce repentance, build trust, and lead to a commitment to follow Jesus (Mark 1:15; John 1:35; 3:3–8). The second stage, development, led the people who had repented into immersion, abandonment, and apprenticeship into ministry (Matt 4:19). The last stage, deployment, was the intentional global commissioning of spiritually-grown disciples to become disciple-makers (Matt 28:19–20).¹³⁶ On the other hand, Paul’s discipleship approach focused on the following critical practices: 1) selecting a few faithful men with great potential and passing unto them the things Jesus modeled; 2) doing ministry together, and 3) letting the followers do ministry without Paul while keeping them focused on the big picture.¹³⁷

The Medieval Disciple-Making Model

The main factor that impacted believers’ spiritual development during the Medieval era was illiteracy.¹³⁸ There were few books, and only the elite could afford or read them. As a result, the discipleship process was organized around three key pillars: the Eucharist, community life, and art. The Eucharist was simple and directed toward the celebration of Jesus’s sacrifice.¹³⁹ Community worship was rooted in an interdependent way of life. People lived in a community,

¹³⁵ Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 9.

¹³⁶ Eims, *The Lost Art*, 126.

¹³⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making*, 161–162.

¹³⁸ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book*, 88.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

shared homes, bedrooms, food, water, and tools. They naturally took worship as a joint exercise. The disciple-making model in the Middle Ages church had a communal approach, and lay people knew the liturgy, memorization, and meditation on its richness.¹⁴⁰ Lastly, the Medieval church used stories to teach the gospel to the illiterate.

On the other hand, the Celtic Christians of the Medieval Ages had a very effective discipleship model involving ministry people who inspired one another, prayed together, and evangelized as a team.¹⁴¹ They worked on creating discipleship relationships in the communities where they lived, identifying with the people, engaging in friendship, conversation, ministry, and witnessing to build a church within a specified time.¹⁴² Additional discipleship practices that were very successful included isolation in remote areas, time in small groups or with a friend, and partaking in community life, meals, and work. In addition, Celtic Christians of the Middle Ages used group learning, biblical recitation, prayers, worship in community, and biblical hospitality, which consisted in inviting seekers, pilgrims, refugees, and others to be guests of the monastic community.¹⁴³

Post-Medieval Discipleship Models and Practices

Many Christian leaders of the Post-Medieval era were very effective in making disciples who made other disciples. Madame Guyon was one of these giant Christian leaders.¹⁴⁴ She is to

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴¹ Winfield Bevens, "Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way," Accessed April 10, 2020. <https://learn.liberty.edu/bbcswebdav/pid-39192546>.

¹⁴² Bevens, "Lessons from St. Patrick."

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ James Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (San Bernardino, CA: Jawbone, 2016), 49.

France what Savonarola is to Italy. Her spiritual development resulted from her encounter with other eminent servants of God such as A Kempis, De Sales, a Franciscan monk, Madame Chantal, and Father La Combe. She learned that pure religion is a matter of heart and soul rather than a mere routine of ceremonial duties and observances through their instruction. The practices of oneness with God, Scripture meditation, prayer, praise, and writing were the main spiritual disciplines that profoundly affected Guyon's spiritual formation and that of many people in France and Europe. Guyon's spiritual growth experience illustrates that God uses people to shape people more than anything else.¹⁴⁵

Fenelon was an individual whose acquaintance with Guyon's writings, prayers, and conversations profoundly shaped his spirituality. Fenelon learned from Guyon that a man's soul could be transformed through pure faith, through a six steps process: bringing natural appetites and propensities under subjection, ceasing to rest on pleasures of inward sensibility, forsaking any reliance upon own virtues, crucifying ordinary feelings involved in the process of inward crucifixion, the resurrection of the life and love called the new life, and union with God.¹⁴⁶ Fenelon's writings, namely *Letters to Men* and *Letters to Women*, continue to wield significant influence in deepening Christian character and experience.¹⁴⁷

Georges Fox founded the Quakers movement and began preaching without any special training, a follower, or even a place to preach. Yet he promoted a model of discipleship based on meeting-houses where the power of God transformed many lives. The focus of his model was on

¹⁴⁵ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 182.

¹⁴⁶ Lawson, *Deeper Experiences*, 49.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

teaching people to turn their eyes away from outward forms and ceremonies and direct them to the need for absolute holiness of heart and life.¹⁴⁸

John Bunyan, the celebrated author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, which has a more excellent circulation than any other book except the Bible, spent many years in prison for preaching beyond the legal time set forth. There, he helped prisoners grow spiritually. His discipleship practices included prayer with fellow prisoners, meditating on the Scriptures, and writing books. In his life and writings, obedience to God was central and is an example that shaped Christians for centuries.

Discipleship during the Reformation

Spirituality formation during the Reformation shaped just about everything known about Christianity today. For example, giant Reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Thomas Crammer changed the message of fear of eternal damnation that was predominant at that time. Instead, they stressed that if individuals went directly to God through Jesus Christ and, by faith, received God's gracious gift of salvation, this would transform their lives.¹⁴⁹ Hull emphasizes, for instance, that one of the primary goals of Luther and Calvin was to help people imitate Christ in practical ways.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Crammer made it possible for laypeople to advance their personal spirituality thanks to *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Disciplines of the Inner Life and Small Groups of Spener and Wesley

Philipp Spener, the father of Pietism, which fundamentally focused on the heart and passion toward God, stressed the practice of spiritual disciplines in spiritual formation. He also

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴⁹ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 97.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 98.

promoted developing pious desires, including a thirst for spirituality, love of one's neighbor, and a healthy attention to self.¹⁵¹ Spener's discipleship model also emphasized Bible study in small groups. These private meetings, known as *collegia pietatis*, gathered highly motivated Christians.¹⁵² Spener encouraged believers to read the Bible from start to finish to understand how it was written. His discipleship method included instruction, access to God's Word, and accountability in living it out.

The concept of discipleship through small groups and spiritual disciplines that Spener initiated reached new heights with John Wesley. His emphasis was on the role of laypeople both in ministry and in social reforms. In addition, his small accountability groups provided a foundational place to focus on study, encourage one other, and reach out to people beyond the assembly. Wesley's discipleship model became the most prominent of his day.¹⁵³ It included: 1) society meetings, which promoted social interaction as the way to holiness and placed the entire thrust of personal growth on group participation; 2) class meetings, which encouraged behavior change; and 3) band meetings, which stressed growing in love, holiness, and purity of intention. In addition, Wesley's band meetings were an environment of ruthless honesty and frank openness, in which members sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁵² Hull, *The Complete Book*, 100.

¹⁵³ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, 2nd ed. (Compton, CA: Rafiki Books, 2016), 92.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 220.

Bonhoeffer's Gospel that Embraces Discipleship

Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued that Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship and that Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.¹⁵⁵ He maintained that believing in Christ starts with denying self and that the journey of following Jesus as his disciple is lifelong. Consequently, he admonished Christians to live a life that reflected Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Bonhoeffer taught that this kind of life would be discipleship because it is Christianity with Christ.¹⁵⁶ He described the Christian life as based on costly grace rather than cheap grace. He taught that cheap grace serves as discipleship's bitterest foe because it makes a life of transformation optional.¹⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer advised all believers never to consider cheap what was costly to God. Instead, he asked all the followers of Jesus to willingly leave all things behind and follow Jesus wherever He leads.

Bonhoeffer understood the body of Christ as the ground and assurance of the Christian faith. He pointed out that there can be no fellowship or communion with Jesus except through his body, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. He explained that only through that body can humankind find acceptance and salvation.¹⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer stressed that baptism incorporates the believer into the body of Christ and that the Lord's Supper fosters and sustains a believer's fellowship and communion in that body. He taught that the unity of the body of Christ is the sign and pledge that believers are with Christ, in Christ, and that Christ is in the believers.¹⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer explains that

¹⁵⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1949), 59.

¹⁵⁶ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 107.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 239.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

to be in Christ is, therefore, to be in church, which is the real presence of Christ and composed of all believers who cannot become renewed persons as solitary individuals.¹⁶⁰ He defines the church as a fellowship of members (Rom 12:5 1 Cor 12:12) where each individual preserves their own identity and function. That said, the church is a place where all the individuals are united in service.¹⁶¹ This community life is where discipleship takes place. Believers use their gifts to contribute to the equipping of the saints, advance the work of ministry, and edify the body of Christ (Eph 4:11–13).

Small Groups as the Primary Discipling Vehicle

Jesus's House Church Strategy

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, was also a small group leader.¹⁶² While He ministered to the crowd (Matt 4:25; Mark 5:24; Luke 5:1; John 6:2), Jesus devoted His time and energy to discipling a small group of twelve. The gospels show that Jesus primarily ministered in a household setting.¹⁶³ Jesus ministered in the house of Peter (Matt 8:14), Matthew (Matt 9:10), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10); Lazarus and his sisters (Luke 10:38–42), Jairus (Mark 5:35–38), Simon the leper (Matt 26:6), and in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1).¹⁶⁴ Jesus sent first twelve and then seventy disciples to heal and teach from village to village and house to house (Luke

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 242.

¹⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 239, 243.

¹⁶² Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 27.

¹⁶³ Comiskey, *2000 Years*, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

9:1–9; 10:1–11). One key reason Jesus chose a house-to-house discipleship vehicle was to create a new spiritual family.

To make this happen, Jesus first had to transform people where they lived and display essential character values.¹⁶⁵ He wanted to instill the typical family networks with a new vision of love and sacrifice. To do this, He lived among His disciples in houses, showing them practically how to love and serve one another (John 13:1–17).¹⁶⁶ Jesus lived with His disciples, shared financial resources, and taught them about kingdom values. Using children as an example, his teaching on true greatness took place in a house setting context. He wanted his disciples to see servanthood as the central leadership style and childlike dependence as the guiding light.¹⁶⁷ He brought His disciples along in all His outreach and prayer meetings, so they could learn by watching and then emulate what they saw at the right time.¹⁶⁸ Luke 9 and 10 show how Jesus commissioned the twelve and the seventy-two to go from village to village, enter homes, and offer peace to those living there. He sent them in pairs so each person could have a partner for fellowship, support, and ministry effectiveness.¹⁶⁹

New Testament House Church Strategy

Christ's home-based disciple-making strategy and His instructions, as recorded in Luke 9 and 10, led the early church into house-to-house ministry. From Jesus, the first-century disciples

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Comiskey, *2000 Years*, 18.

¹⁶⁷ Osiek et al. *A Women's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), Kindle edition, 83.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

learned and practiced the house-to-house concept.¹⁷⁰ With over five thousand Christians, the Jerusalem church would have had to break members down into manageable units.¹⁷¹

Accordingly, the Apostles selected and placed seven faithful men in leadership positions (Acts 6:1–7).¹⁷² Most scholars concur that the early house church’s discipleship strategy emphasized worship, the practice of spiritual gifts, teaching, prayer, fellowship, evangelism, the Lord’s Supper, and baptism.¹⁷³ For example, Luke describes prayer meetings in homes (Acts 12:12). They also used homes for Christian fellowship (Acts 21:7); for holy communion services (Acts 2:46); for a whole night in prayer, worship, and instruction (Acts 20:7); for impromptu evangelistic gatherings (Acts 16:32); for planned meetings to hear the gospel (Acts 10:22); for fellowship (Ac. 18:26); and organized instruction (Acts 5:52).¹⁷⁴

House churches in the New Testament era were not independent of each other. Instead, they were part of a larger unit.¹⁷⁵ Paul says that he taught publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20). In 1 Cor 16:19, Paul writes, “The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.” Nevertheless, the whole church sometimes gathered for public meetings. For instance, in Acts 15:4, Luke writes, “When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the Apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.”

¹⁷⁰ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 19.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 27.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), Kindle locations 3776–3778.

¹⁷⁵ Comiskey, *2000 Years*, 26.

Leadership Development Strategies in Small Groups

Helping a Potential Leader Move around the Bases

America's favorite pastime is undeniably baseball, and part of the reason for its popularity is the simplicity of the game.¹⁷⁶ The basic concept of getting a player to make it to home base and score a run is exciting. Every time a player crosses home plate, there is a celebration because the team has made progress and may win if enough runs are scored.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, there are many joys in small group ministry: making new friends, teaching the word, praying for one another, and sharing life.¹⁷⁸ However, one of the greatest moments is when group members grow to the point where they can begin a new group.¹⁷⁹

Baseball teams develop new players through an extensive training regimen and a farm club system. There are similarities with how small groups create new leaders.¹⁸⁰ The training plan combines instruction and mentoring. Dempsey and Earley explain that the first step is to identify four points or goals that every leader should accomplish, with the fourth objective being starting a new group.¹⁸¹ They explain that the first base is selecting an able apprentice who has integrity, is teachable, and has a heart for God. The second base consists of establishing a regular meeting time with the apprentice. The third base sets specific, measurable, awe-inspiring,

¹⁷⁶ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 75.

¹⁷⁷ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 75.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 76.

relevant, and timed goals for the new group. Finally, home plate occurs when a new group is established and functioning.¹⁸²

Apprenticeship in Developing Leaders

Paul understood that there is no lasting success in ministry without a successor.¹⁸³ The small group context is the best setting to prepare a successor through apprenticeship and mentoring. Earley asserts that one of the non-negotiable habits of a high-performing small group leader is mentoring apprentices, raising leaders who can lead future groups.¹⁸⁴ Apprenticeship occurred only in its most embryonic stages in the early church.¹⁸⁵ The apostles' selection of seven faithful men to help with food distribution indicates their willingness to delegate and confidence that others had gifts to minister.¹⁸⁶ The principle of selectivity is seen in Jesus's ministry and that of the first-century church leaders. Mentoring was Jesus's discipleship method. Before He told His disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations, Jesus did so Himself. He taught them about mentoring for three years by showing them His example. Similarly, mentoring was Paul's method of discipleship.

Recasting the Vision

Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery assert that disciple-making is slow work and that progress can be so gradual that people begin to feel bogged down.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, re-casting the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Dave Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2001), 62.

¹⁸⁴ Earley, *8 Habits*, 62.

¹⁸⁵ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 219.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others Into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 2006), 257.

vision in meetings is paramount to moving people in the right direction. Other valuable practices include developing a sense of team, practicing a high level of availability and coaching others, and recognizing the sacrifices of those involved in ministry.

A Strategy for Developing A Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church

The Biblical Mandate for a Diverse Congregation

Jesus envisioned His church to be multiethnic when, in the Gospel of John, He prayed that future generations of believers would be united so that the world would know God's love and believe in Christ (John 17:20–23). Mark Delmas and Harry Li assert that Jesus intends for the local church to be one for the gospel's sake. They note that it may not be easy, but it is biblical and correct.¹⁸⁸ Dr. Luke confirmed this understanding in the book of Acts. He writes that believers driven from Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen went to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch and preached the gospel to the Greeks.¹⁸⁹ The Ephesus cosmopolitan church provides further biblical evidence of God's desire for a multiethnic church (Acts 19:8–17; 20:21). Similarly, the Apostle Paul emphasized this divine vision for the church in his epistle to the Ephesians. He told them: “Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:6).

State of the American Church's Multiethnicity

In *Divided by Faith*,¹⁹⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith share data detailing the systematic segregation of local churches in the United States. One of the main findings of their

¹⁸⁸ Mark Deymaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 40.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

research on Catholic and Protestant churches throughout the country was that 92.5 percent of churches might be classified as monoracial, composed of about 80 percent of individuals from a single ethnicity.¹⁹¹ They described the remaining 7.5 percent of churches as multiracial or multiethnic. In addition, Emerson and Smith determined that about 12 percent of Catholic, less than 5 percent of evangelical churches, and approximately 2.5 percent of mainline Protestant churches could be labeled as multiracial. Furthermore, the authors found that evangelicals spend more than 70 percent of their social time with people from their congregation. In other words, when people from evangelical churches invite others into their homes, go out for dinner, or enjoy a weekend away, they most often invite people who attend their local church and look like them.¹⁹²

These findings imply a sad reality. Since most evangelicals attend churches composed of individuals of similar ethnicity, they are unlikely to have developed relationships of transparency and trust with people from a different culture. Consequently, they do not understand the challenges unique to individuals from other cultures with whom they work, go to school, or share their neighborhood.¹⁹³ Emerson and Smith conclude that the church is a sleeping giant in the struggle to dismantle institutional racism in the United States. As a remedy, they propose the establishment of multiethnic churches where people are welcomed, loved and engaged cross-culturally. These are churches in which relationships are based upon a genuine passion for Christ and in whom members find ways to overcome earthly divides of ethnic and social status.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Deymaz and Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 24.

¹⁹² Deymaz and Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 24.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 25.

While building multiethnic churches appears unrealistic and a dream for many in the American individualistic society, others contend that nothing is impossible for those who believe and trust in the Lord's capacity to bring about reformation.

Core Practices of a Multiethnic Congregation

Deymaz and Li identify seven commitments of a multiethnic church. First, these fellowships should embrace dependence, which means that church leaders rely on the Holy Spirit to break cultural barriers. Such reliance requires leaders to persevere in prayer and cultivate patience and persistence in seeking to walk together with diverse others in a manner worthy of the calling they have received (Eph 4:1). Second, churches ought to take intentional steps. Deymaz and Li explain that, while it is true that a multiethnic church is a work of God, it cannot just happen. In general, leaders and congregants must do their part. While it is true that the vine (Christ) alone produces the fruit, it is the task of the branches (believers) to abide in the vine and bear it (John 15:4–8). Third, fellowships should empower diverse leaders, from the pulpit to the nursery and every stop in between (Acts 4:36; 9:11; 13:1). Fourth, churches should develop cross-cultural relationships, realizing that they take time to form and cannot be agenda-driven.¹⁹⁵

Fifth, fellowships should pursue cross-cultural competence, which can be gained through experience and interactions with diverse people, especially from different ethnic backgrounds. Sixth, churches ought to promote a spirit of inclusion. Paul recommended that Philemon pay attention to this as follows: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his interests but also for the interests of others” (Phlm 2:3–4). Seventh, fellowships should mobilize for impact. Deymaz and Li explain that the projected result of a multiethnic church is to

¹⁹⁵ Deymaz and Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 44–48.

turn outward God's power to bless a city, lead people to Christ, encourage the body, and fulfill the Great Commission.¹⁹⁶

The literature review showed that many Bible scholars had researched the issue of low discipleship levels among adults in the local American church. They have also proposed many solutions, which unfortunately do not address cultural issues some churches face. This includes ECDM, whose members are mainly from Africa. The theological foundation discussed the scriptural basis for disciple-making, reviewing examples from the Old and New Testaments. This section showed that building up and equipping people to accomplish God's mission remains at the center of the Lord's redemptive plan. The theoretical foundation then discussed discipleship models and strategies and showed how several past and current practices inform the topic. This research used the literature review findings, including the theological and theoretical foundations, to help address the issue of adult discipleship at ECDM.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 49–50.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A 2015 survey from the Pew Research Center, which included more than 35,000 U.S. adults, showed that the percentage of adults professing to believe in God, pray daily, and regularly attend church or other weekly religious services has been in continual decline in recent years.¹⁹⁷ It is very alarming that only 23 percent of adult Christians in Maryland claimed to participate every week in their church's discipleship activities, such as prayer meetings, Scripture study, or religious education groups. ECDM is one of the churches in Maryland that is experiencing waning levels of adult involvement in the disciple-making process. Only 4 percent of its fifty-three adult parishioners participate in discipleship. If nothing is done to change this alarming metric, it will not only tremendously hamper the church's ability to achieve the Great Commission, the church's very survival will be at stake. It was thus incumbent on ECDM leaders to investigate the origins of the problem from the perspective of ECDM adults parishioners and address their concerns. Ernest T. Stringer rightly asserts that it is crucial to understand participant experiences to work toward a viable solution where people will invest their time and energies.¹⁹⁸ This project thus sought to understand the root causes of adult disengagement from the discipleship process at ECDM. The aim was to help parishioners gain more insight into the realities of this situation and its various implications. Additionally, the project endeavored to mobilize ECDM congregants around collaborative solutions that could address the problem in a meaningful and sustainable way.

¹⁹⁷ Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape."

¹⁹⁸ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, 2014), 101.

Intervention Design

The primary purpose of this methodology chapter is to describe how the research was accomplished.¹⁹⁹ The intervention design explains the methods used, the steps that were followed, and the specific actions that were carried out to increase participants' appreciation of the ECDM adult discipleship problem and engage them in a collective formulation of a plan of actions to effect change.

Approvals

Even though the investigator is the senior pastor of ECDM, he sought the approval of the church's board of directors for this project. The board's blessing was secured, which increased the study's legitimacy, endorsement, and ownership.

Participant Selection and Enrollment

Purposeful sampling helped select participants who were aware of the situation and met the criteria and attributes essential to the research.²⁰⁰ Accordingly, participants targeted to be part of the study were adult parishioners of ECDM. They were men and women who were at least twenty years old at the start of the project. The project aimed to have a minimum of twenty adults participate in the intervention. Enrollment in the study included the following additional criteria: 1) the participant expressed interest in being an intentional contributor to the entire research process; 2) the participant was willing to sign a consent and confidentiality agreement. Three weeks before the start of the research, the investigator began announcing the upcoming research and explaining its objectives, importance, expected benefits for participants and the church, and participation criteria. The aim was to create a climate that gave congregants a sense

¹⁹⁹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 62.

²⁰⁰ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 83.

that they were in control of their own lives and supported them as they took systematic action to improve their circumstances.²⁰¹

The primary enrollment method for the study was verbal through in-person church messages and talking to potential participants individually. During Sunday services, Tuesday discipleship classes, and Thursday intercession prayer sessions, these invitations occurred. In addition, announcements included requests to those interested in the study to contact the investigator and church secretary. The secretary was tasked with registering potential participants based on the aforementioned enrollment criteria. Finally, the investigator closed each announcement by asking a potential participant to lead the congregation in prayer for the project's success.

The investigator next requested the church's secretary to provide him with a list of all ECDM targeted adult members to whom a formal letter of consent was sent. The consent letter provided that the process is not binding. Participants could withdraw from the study and refuse to answer any questions if they felt uncomfortable. The letter also assured participants of the confidentiality of their answers. The investigator next contacted all participants via email one week before the beginning of the project. Again, all participants were asked to acknowledge receipt of the questionnaire. Finally, the investigator made a follow-up phone call to allow each potential participant to ask any questions regarding the project.

The investigator organized a workshop to clarify any further questions participants had regarding the process and expectations from both sides, the investigator and the participants. Social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, were used as a backup means to contact and involve some participants. For participants who could not be reached one week before the start of

²⁰¹ Stringer, *Action Research*, 28.

the intervention through the channels described above, the investigator asked people who were acquainted with such individuals to approach and ask them to contact the investigator by telephone. After three days passed, if the investigator could not connect with the individual, he replaced that name with another participant (while continuing the attempt to reach the unresponsive participant).

The Project Core Task Force

In addition to the general participants, the intervention involved putting together a task team.²⁰² For this research, the Core Task Force included: 1) the investigator who led the project; 2) a project assistant, in this case, the secretary, who assisted the investigator in coordinating the study's logistics, including organizing participant recruitment, specific meetings, taking notes, and recording the discussions; 3) a participant-observer, who as tasked with taking notes and helping the investigator capture and analyze the participants' appearance, gestures, and verbal behaviors during interviews; 4) a participant facilitator, who led the focus group discussion; 5) an outside independent expert, whose job was to complement the researcher's data collection by conducting two to four group interviews with participants.

Intervention Plan

The intervention plan encompassed seven key stages: 1) problem identification and description; 2) data collection; 3) data analysis; 4) findings sharing; 5) collaborative construction of solutions to fix the ECDM adult discipleship problem; 6) implementation plan of actions identified; and 7) progressive evaluation of the impact of these actions.

²⁰² Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 83.

Phase One: Problem Identification and Description

The initial step of the research process was framing the problem. The aim was to collect information about participants' experiences and perspectives and collectively define the church's discipleship problem in terms that made sense to them.²⁰³ To this end, the researcher convened a launching workshop where participants were given time to share their understanding of Jesus's command in Matt 28:18–20 to go and make disciples of all the nations. They were then asked to share their perception regarding the church's current discipleship process. Who did they think should be involved? What was their understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the disciple-making process? Was the current rate of adult participation a problem? Which problems and issues did they see within or behind this issue? It was expected that this first stage of the research would help the congregation collectively frame the church discipleship problem and foster their engagement in the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the launching workshop was held on the Zoom platform on the first day of the study implementation period, which lasted eight weeks.

Phase Two: Data Gathering

The second phase of the intervention, which lasted two weeks, gathered information regarding the participants' perceptions of various root causes of the church's disciple-making problem. The researcher used a triangulation data collection procedure, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Data triangulation aimed to cross-check information to provide breadth and depth to the investigator's analysis and increase the trustworthiness of his research.²⁰⁴ Triangulation meant comparing observational data with interview data, comparing

²⁰³ Stringer, *Action Research*, 101.

²⁰⁴ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 72.

what participants said in public with what they said in private. It also meant checking the consistency of what participants said over time and comparing their perspectives with different points of view.²⁰⁵

Questionnaires

Zoltán Dörnyei and Tatsuya Taguchi explain that questionnaires are written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers.²⁰⁶ The proposed project used a preintervention questionnaire that included statements that checked the participants' level of knowledge regarding the church vision. The questionnaire also gauged their understanding of Jesus's command to make disciples and captured their experiences and perspectives regarding the disciple-making process at ECDM. The investigator was aware that questions on a self-completed questionnaire restrict participants' opportunity to explore an issue in-depth. Questions on the self-completed questionnaires were thus kept simple. Participants were asked to circle the answer that best summarizes their discipleship experience. A space was left if there was no best fit among the questions given answers.

Preintervention questionnaires were made available to all participants one week before the research process, electronically. Participants were given two weeks to provide their answers.

Post-intervention questionnaires were used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. These questionnaires were distributed to all participants who completed the preintervention questionnaires and participated in the other various activities of the intervention. Data was

²⁰⁵ Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Quantitative Methods in Evaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 161.

²⁰⁶ Zoltán Dörnyei and Tatsuya Taguchi, *Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration, and Processing* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 3–4.

reviewed with all the information gathered through the other tools, including the preintervention questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations. The investigator reviewed these completed instruments to gauge participants' increased level of awareness and knowledge concerning the Great Commission and its process in ECDM. As with the preintervention questionnaires, participants were given space to provide their views on their own terms with a few lines following specific questions. For example, a question asked if the participant's perception of their role in the disciple-making process had changed. The post-intervention questionnaires were distributed one week before the end of the intervention for participants to complete and submit within that period. Both questionnaires included questions about character assessment for ministry, most of which were taken from Malphurs's *Strategic Disciple-Making*.²⁰⁷ The character assessment helped the researcher determine participants' character strengths and weaknesses to identify where they are strong and where they need to develop and grow to fit the characteristics mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Ruthellen Josselson (2013) defines an interview as the shared product of two people, the interviewer, and the interviewee, consisting of what they discuss and how they converse together.²⁰⁸ However, Josselson explains that qualitative research interviews are differentiated from simple conversations based on the planning and thinking before a research interview and the following analysis.²⁰⁹ Interview-based qualitative research is usually positioned amid relativistic and realist approaches to knowledge. Qualitative researchers are familiar with the

²⁰⁷ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 171–176.

²⁰⁸ Ruthellen Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach* (New York, NY: Guilford Publications, 2013), 1.

²⁰⁹ Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, 1.

social constructs of reality and their role in creating the actual phenomenon they are studying by framing the interview questions and the types of investigation they perform.²¹⁰

In this research, three types of interviews were used. Following the participant's submission of the first questionnaire, the researcher reviewed it immediately and set up a follow-up face-to-face or Zoom videoconferencing interview. Face-to-face interviews were prioritized to maximize associated advantages, especially when dealing with sensitive topics or special populations.²¹¹ Research shows that face-to-face interviews produce better response rates.²¹² The time allotted for each face-to-face or Zoom virtual interview was one hour. The investigator who led these interviews was aware of the participants' unexpected time constraints and the necessity of making required adjustments to accommodate participants. A participant-observer took notes and helped analyze the interviewee's appearance, gestures, and verbal behavior. The researcher included very general queries about how participants experience the church's discipleship context and process to mitigate any perceived risk of implied judgment or criticism in interview questions. Finally, the researcher asked follow-up questions to extend the participants' exploration of their own experiences and perspectives on issues that emerged during the research process.

Focus groups, which might be characterized as group interviews, constituted a second way of acquiring information.²¹³ The researcher set up four focus group interviews comprising four to five members each. Each focus group had a participant facilitator who led the group

²¹⁰ Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, 1–3.

²¹¹ Fontana Andrea and Anastasia H. Prokos, *The Interview: From Formal to Postmodern* (Walnut Creek, CA: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 23.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Stringer, *Action Research*, 111.

discussion and a group secretary who took notes and recorded the meeting. Participants in focus groups had equal opportunities to describe their discipleship experience and share their perspectives on related issues.²¹⁴ Focus group questions were similar to those used in face-to-face interviews or via videoconferencing. They followed identical rules and formats, including using neutral language and maximizing opportunities for participants to express themselves in their own words.²¹⁵ Group interviews allowed members to learn from each other's discipleship experiences, participate in a collective framing of the adult-related issue at ECDM, and construct a viable solution. Throughout the focus group sessions, the researcher also took notes and clarified any questions group members had, using his expertise as senior pastor, researcher, and active participant. Finally, the group developed a synthesis report of their interview and submitted it to the investigator.

Lastly, the investigator asked an independent expert to conduct two group interviews with participants. The investigator did not participate in this set of interviews to allow participants to express their views more freely. Instead, one participant-observer and a secretary participated in these interviews to take notes and record the exchanges.

Interview and Focus Group Protocols

All three types of interviews followed Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom's suggested six-part format.²¹⁶ First, the investigator, the focus group facilitator, and the independent expert set the stage for the interview with an introduction that included an overview of the inquiry process and its significance and provided details about confidentiality and how the

²¹⁴ Stringer, *Action Research*, 111.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler, 2003), 156–157.

data collected would be used during and after the intervention.²¹⁷ Next, they used stage-setting questions that built rapport, followed by topic questions that explored in-depth the adult discipleship problem at ECDM, and concluding questions that wrapped up the interview, such as “Is there anything you would like to add?” or “What should I have asked you that I did think to ask?” Next, they used summary sheets to track parts of the interview and store the best stories, quotes, and ideas. Next, they provided space for reflection to record the initial interpretation.²¹⁸ Finally, they used action sheets to collect items that required immediate action or attention.²¹⁹

Weekly Discipleship Classes and Case Studies

The intervention included weekly discipleship training classes for participants. The aim of these two-hour sessions, organized from 7 to 9 p.m. each Tuesday for eight weeks, was to expand participants’ understanding of Jesus’s command to make disciples. The researcher explained the disciple-making process and how the church could effectively use small groups to develop disciple-leaders who reproduce. In addition, the researcher introduced participants to proven disciple-making strategies to help boost their participation in the discipleship process at ECDM. It was expected that discipleship class activities and discussions would stimulate participants’ desire for spiritual growth, willingness, and capacity to contribute to Jesus’s redemptive work at ECDM and beyond.

The investigator used two primary materials: *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* by Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley; and *Groups that Thrive* by Joel Comiskey and Jim Egli. The investigator selected these two materials to serve in training for three reasons.

²¹⁷ Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, *The Power*, 156–157.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

First, these books show that small groups are the best place to develop Christ-followers. Jesus Himself used a small group to establish the first group of world changers.²²⁰ Second, they indicate that small groups can help change a life by studying the Bible, serving others, building community, and practicing accountability.²²¹ Third, they show that small groups are a great place to take leadership risks and receive honest feedback.²²² The training classes expanded the participants' comprehension of the biblical foundations for leading groups into developing others and exposed them to an inductive Bible study technique and how to host or lead a healthy, growing, and multiplying small group to achieve the Great Commission.

In Week One, the researcher focused the training on explaining Jesus's command to make disciples (Matt 28:18–20). Making disciples is not a Great Suggestion! It is a Great Commission and the church's mandate.²²³ The course of actions that each believer needs to take as they “go, baptize, and teach” was discussed. Each participant was allowed to share their understanding of these actions. Jesus's discipleship method was addressed using Matt 4:19, in which Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The course explored apprenticeship and coaching, roles and responsibilities, and accountability. As a case study, the biblical foundations for a cell ministry and leading small groups were discussed using Jesus, who was a small group leader. The class also discussed the discipleship lives of the Apostle Peter and Judah Iscariot. Prayers and worship opened and closed all training sessions.

²²⁰ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 10.

²²¹ Dean and Stewart, *Together We Equip*, 54.

²²² Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 98–99.

²²³ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 8.

Week Two class emphasized the characteristics of a healthy small group. These include the following. Leadership that understands that disciple-making is the church's mission and is thereby the product of investing in the process²²⁴ of regular weekly meeting time that provides the right environment for growth and development (Acts 2:42–47). Also, studying and applying the Word of God, which has the power to change believers from what they are to what God has intended them to be (Heb 4:12; Rom 12:2). Then, there is unity in service (Eph 4:7–8); praying for one another (Matt 18:19); loving one another (John 13:34); holding each other in high esteem, and actively honoring one another (Rom 12:16); accepting one another (Rom 14:13; 15:7); submitting to one another (Eph 5:21); bearing with and forgiving one another (Eph 4:32); resolving conflict (Rom 12:16); encouraging one another (1 Thess 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25); praising and worship God, and fellowshiping with brethren (Acts 2:42–47).²²⁵ The researcher emphasized that empowering and encouraging others to practice group evangelism is better than depending on a gifted evangelist.²²⁶

Week Three training class focused on how to lead a healthy small group. The researcher emphasized the importance of each small group having an intentional leader, a small group apprentice in training, and a small group host who is friendly and welcoming to members and visitors. The investigator described the roles and responsibilities related to these three small group positions to prepare some participants to assume them.

Week Four training built upon the previous classes and developed leaders for groups. The Apostles faced the challenge of raising leaders for young churches in the early days of

²²⁴ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 208.

²²⁵ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 31–40.

²²⁶ Joel Comiskey and Jim Egli, *Groups that Thrive: 8 Surprising Discoveries about Life-Giving Small Groups* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2018), 41.

Christianity.²²⁷ They did not plant churches that depended on seminaries to give them leaders.²²⁸ Instead, early missionaries trained local church leaders. A significant factor of the Apostles' success was their focus on training local leaders to carry on the ministry of the gospel, relying on the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and God's grace.²²⁹ This session aims to help participants understand the importance of leadership development through an apprenticeship in ECDM for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Week Five training concentrated on how to grow a healthy small group. The investigator explained the importance of praying daily for group members, having a clear mental picture of the ultimate result, maintaining a focus on the priority of winning people to Christ now, and dreaming of leading a healthy, growing, multiplying group. He also stressed the necessity of inviting new people weekly, regularly contacting group members, mentoring an apprentice leader, planning group fellowship, and committing to personal growth.²³⁰

Week Six training focused on how to multiply a small healthy group. The investigator explained that growth, development, and multiplication are God's vision from the beginning for His children (Gen 1:28; 17:2; 22:17; 26:4; 35:11; Matt 14:13-21; Mark 8:1-9; John 15:8). The researcher discussed the following topics: birthing a new group, balancing outreach and fellowship, catching the vision of multiplying leaders, discovering potential leaders, and steps for developing them. The actions, principles, and practices Jesus used for developing leaders were

²²⁷ Greenway, *Go and Make Disciples*, 106.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 113-114.

discussed, including modeling (Matt 9:32–38), mentoring (Matt 10:1; Acts 13:6), motivating (Matt 10:5; Acts 15:36–1), and multiplying (Matt 10:1; Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7).

Week Seven training centered on transitioning to healthy, growing, multiplying small groups. The investigator discussed the stages of maturity for small groups and explained how to evaluate their growth. He also explored steps to transition to small groups and keep from losing heart in ministry.

Week Eight reviewed and discussed Comiskey and Egli's research findings on small groups that thrive. Characteristics of such groups include: members create thriving groups; mobilized groups evangelize the best; God uses the least likely; groups that are closer grow more; group outreach strengthens transparent sharing; thriving groups prioritize worship and spirituality; spiritual preparation stimulates thriving small groups, and persistent practice and adjustments create successful groups.²³¹

Phase Three: Data Analysis

This stage was the “Think Phase” of the intervention. The researcher closely examined the information from responses to preintervention and postintervention questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and weekly discipleship classes. The first procedure that the researcher used for data analysis and interpretation was categorizing and coding. This procedure identified units of meaning, such as experience and perception, within the data and classified them to typify or summarize participants' experiences and perspectives.²³² The second data analysis process selected essential experiences or transformational moments and unpacked them to identify the

²³¹ Comiskey and Egli, *Groups that Thrive*, 19–164.

²³² Stringer, *Action Research*, 139.

elements that composed them, thus illuminating the nature of those experiences.²³³ Next, the investigator grouped recurring themes, claims, stories, topics, or expressions. Finally, he examined their relevance to the research topic.

Additionally, the researcher examined how the information gathered from the various means interacted, inquiring whether they complemented or challenged themes that emerged from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and training sessions.²³⁴ Finally, thematic identification was achieved through the word-based technique, comparisons and contrasts, metaphors, and analogies. Next, the researcher documented the meaning of the data and what it portrayed, along with the implied and inferred meanings he believed the data carried. Then, he read the information reflexively, locating his role as a researcher in data generation and interpretation.²³⁵

Phase Four: Findings Sharing

The researcher shared the results and conclusions from the data analysis with the participants. He further sought their viewpoints regarding these findings to reduce associated rejection risks.

Phase Five: Collaborative Construction of Solutions

Based on the research findings regarding the problem's roots jointly identified, this phase sought a collective construction of solutions whose implementation appealed to the contribution of all the congregants, beginning with adult parishioners. In this process, the researcher endeavored to educate the study's participants concerning approaches that Jesus and the New Testament church used to make disciples that reproduced. These examples show that small

²³³ Stringer, *Action Research*, 139.

²³⁴ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 196.

²³⁵ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 197.

groups provide intimacy, a variety of gifts without an overwhelming atmosphere, and an ideal training vehicle for reproduction.²³⁶ As a primary and effective discipleship vehicle, the cell ministry was illustrated by contrasting associated advantages and shortcomings with other approaches. The researcher discussed these advantages and benefits during the training classes. Participants were allowed to express their viewpoints to foster solutions ownership and increase their enthusiasm for the church disciple-making process, thus uniting zeal and knowledge according to Rom 10:2, 12:11, and Titus 2:14.

Phase Six: Definition of a Plan of Actions

This phase aimed to mobilize research participants and the entire congregation around the definition of a measurable discipleship plan that adult congregants would be willing to implement, thereby providing an excellent example that the rest of the church could then follow, fulfilling 2 Tim 2:2.

Phase Seven: Evaluation

This last stage of the intervention aimed to build consensus around an evaluation process for the effectiveness of measures agreed on to overhaul ECDM's disciple-making process. The total rate of adult disciples was one of the key metrics.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Thirty ECDM parishioners were selected based on the criteria set forth and participated in the research. They represented about 57 percent of the church's current total of adult congregants. The researcher sent four different questionnaires to all participants using SurveyMonkey. Participants had one week to submit their responses before receiving the

²³⁶ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 219.

subsequent questionnaire. Every two days, the SurveyMonkey tool automatically sent reminders to all non-respondents, and the researcher supplemented those electronic reminders with phone calls to some participants. The first questionnaire was anonymous; the two followings were not. Their objective was to help participants assess their character strengths and weaknesses and know where they are strong and need to develop and grow.²³⁷ Twenty women and twelve men filled out the character assessment survey. Given the high number of participants, the researcher decided to substitute individual interviews with a follow-up questionnaire circulated to all participants.

All individual responses to the first and fourth questionnaires were aggregated into two tables and handed to one male and one female participant charged with preparing and conducting group discussions. Before these group discussions, the researcher met with the two lead participants to discuss recurrent issues identified in the survey and the object of further group discussions. Some of the themes identified as recurrent in the various surveys included evangelism, serving, ministry organization, praise and worship, and online meetings. Each theme was approached from three angles using three main questions: Is this an issue? What may be the causes? What are potential solutions? Due to COVID-19, all group discussions were conducted using Zoom. The researcher participated in all group discussions, reframing some questions, helping moderators keep the discussions focused, and taking notes.

As planned in the intervention design, weekly discipleship classes, and case studies were organized around better achieving the Great Commission through leading, growing, and multiplying healthy small groups at ECDM. The classes were an excellent opportunity for the researcher to address some misunderstandings and misperceptions that the surveys and group

²³⁷ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 171.

discussions revealed regarding Jesus's commission and who should be involved. In addition, these classes were the best setting for all participants to increase their understanding of the church vision and mission, asking questions and responding without restrictions.

The researcher emphasized Jesus's discipleship strategy and explained why reorienting the church to focus on developing women and men who are able and willing to become small group leaders who reproduce was the best strategy to fulfill the Great Commission effectively. Participants were asked to share their understanding of Jesus's command in Matt 28:19-20 to "go, make disciples, baptize, and teach." After carefully listening to all those who freely shared their perspective, the researcher explained that disciples of Jesus are made by proclaiming and showing the gospel, connecting people to Christ through the disciplines, and then gathering them in small groups that seek to fulfill God's mission.²³⁸ He explained that Jesus's command to *go* is best translated from the Greek to mean "in your going or as you are going" about your daily activities, doing so with intent and the purpose of sharing the good news with those who do not Christ.²³⁹

As for the command to *baptize*, various views were shared on how baptism should be conducted. Some contended the people should be immersed, while others argued that water could be sprinkled or poured over a person's head as a public demonstration of one's new faith in Christ. The researcher explained that whatever one believes regarding the way to conduct baptism, it is essential for the new believer in Christ to be aided to take a stand and publicly identify with the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to overtly announce that Jesus Christ is the master of their life. Lastly, in Jesus's order to *teach* the new

²³⁸ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 8.

²³⁹ Ibid.

believer to observe His teachings, the class emphasized the necessity of teaching them to love God by connecting them to His Word and abiding in God through prayer. In addition, the researcher explained to the audience that we teach people to love another by linking them to each other in small groups so they can learn how to care for one another, bear with one another, and use their spiritual gifts to serve each other.²⁴⁰

One of the class discussions and teaching focused on what makes a small group healthy. Participants noted the importance of a visionary leader, regular meeting times, sharing the Word, being united in service, and praying for one another. Other critical practices that make healthy a small group were also debated, including love, the foundation on which all the other “one another” commands are built (John 13:34).²⁴¹ The class then allowed the participants to understand that the health of a small group depends on the participants’ show of love to one another, as illustrated by moving beyond their comfort zone to affectionately greet one another every time they meet (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14), and holding each other in high esteem and actively honoring one another (Rom 12:16).²⁴² Furthermore, the researcher explained that community means “being in the family.” This is deepened as members bear with each other and forgive one another all the time (Eph 4:32), as they submit to one another (Eph 5:21), and refuse to slander someone in or outside the group (Jas 4:11). Community life is fostered as members show hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9), clothe themselves in a servant’s apron of humility (1 Pet 5:5), and motivate one another (Heb 10:24).²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 33.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁴³ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 43–44.

The following classes focused on the power of worshiping and exalting God and sharing God's Word in small group meetings. When done in spirit and truth, worship is transforming (1 Cor 3:18), puts life back into perspective (Ps 73:16–17, 26, 28), and intensifies the presence and activity of God (Matt 28:20).²⁴⁴ The importance of the Word in knowing God and the plan He has for His children and studying the Word to be better equipped to teach others and impact the world were also emphasized. This teaching helped participants understand that every small group member is called to become a minister, that every ministry matters and is vital for the edification of the other members (1 Cor 12:20–22), and that Christian service is enhanced when shared with others. The researcher also emphasized some practices to master to be an effective witness, a people-reaching group for Christ. These include having faith or developing a solid expectation that people will come if they are invited; consistently praying and believing in Christ for salvation, being patient, and understanding that it may take weeks, months, and even years of inviting, praying, loving, and hearing the Word before the soil is ready to yield a harvest.²⁴⁵

The classes discussed the importance of having leaders who understand that their role is to develop people to reach their full potential in Christ. They also focused on identifying and adequately supporting people willing to engage in the discipleship process as small group hosts or apprentices.²⁴⁶ While the role of a small group host is to create an environment that is welcoming to members, the apprentice's role is to be involved in all aspects of the group life and leadership, with reproduction and multiplication as the ultimate goal. Finally, the classes discussed ministering to difficult people and the eight practices of influential small group

²⁴⁴ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 43–44.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 56.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 66–67.

leaders. They emphasized techniques such as redirecting the discussion to include quiet members of the group, staying on topic while maintaining an attitude of acceptance toward the tangent, responding to wrong answers by soliciting a second viewpoint from someone else, giving everyone time to think through a question, and asking questions aimed at facilitating the discussion. The class also discussed habits that enhance the effectiveness of a small group leader. These include: 1) dreaming of leading a healthy, growing, multiplying group; 2) praying for group members daily; 3) inviting new people to visit the group; 4) contacting group members weekly; 5) preparing for a group meeting; 6) mentoring an apprentice leader; 7) planning group fellowship activities; 8) being committed to personal spiritual growth.²⁴⁷

The last two class sessions focused on a healthy small group multiplication process. The researcher discussed God's reproduction and multiplication plan at the creation. After creating Adam and Eve, Gen 1:28 says God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply." God reiterated His plan to multiply those He created in His likeness in Genesis 17:2; 22:17; 26: 4; 35:11; Other passages of the Scriptures exemplify that God is God of multiplication. Examples of this include the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 13:13–21; Mark 6:34–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–13), the four thousand (Matt 15:32–39; Mark 8:1–9), the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1–34), the requirement to bear much fruit to bring glory to the Father (John 15:8), and the exponential growth of the early church as mentioned in Acts 6:1,7. These unmistakably show that multiplication was God's plan to bless His people in the Old Testament and expand His church in the New Testament.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 114.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 150–151.

The class accordingly discussed four main steps for developing new leaders. These include 1) modeling leadership by asking potential apprentices to watch as ministry is conducted, just as Jesus did with His disciples (Matt 9:32–38); 2) mentoring (Matt 10:1; Acts 13:6); 3) letting potential leaders perform the tasks and encouraging them from a distance (Matt 10:5); and 4) sending potential leaders into to the harvest field (1 Cor 15:6; Acts 2:41; 4:4; 7:7; 15:39–41; 16:1–3).

The class also reviewed the stages of maturity for small groups, using the butterfly analogy. Before becoming amazingly beautiful, a butterfly undergoes a transformational four-stage process called metamorphosis. The first stage is the egg. The second stage is called the caterpillar, larva, or the nutritive stage. The third stage is called the pupal stage and constitutes the time of great transition. During this stage, the caterpillar rests and changes dramatically inside a cocoon. The last stage is the adult or reproductive stage.²⁴⁹ Similarly, every small group evolves through a certain number of growth stages, which may be healthy or unhealthy. Dempsey and Earley assert that the group's leader and members must recognize and effectively respond to the usual signs found in each stage.²⁵⁰

They explain that the initial or formation stage, which may last two months, allows group members to know each other.²⁵¹ During this stage, the leader must clearly explain the goals and mission of the group so members can band together to achieve them. The second stage, considered the exploration stage, may last two months. It allows group members to begin to see what group life is about and question the leader regarding the group's purpose. During this stage,

²⁴⁹ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 173.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

the group's leader reiterates the group's mission and discusses strategies and actions to achieve results that glorify God. The next stage, which occurs during months five through nine, is the execution stage. It is the period where the group is growing healthy, and members are committed to serving one another, inviting unchurched friends and relatives, and living in a biblical community. The fourth stage, the preparation stage, is when the group naturally grows qualitatively and quantitatively, adding new people constantly without much extra work. The fifth growth stage is called the multiplication stage and occurs during months twelve through eighteen when the group is growing healthy. It is a period when reproduction takes place, a time when the small group becomes two or more groups.²⁵²

²⁵² Dempsey and Earley, *Leading*, 174–175.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The research's main objective was to involve a maximum of ECDM adult congregants in collectively identifying the issues impeding the discipleship process in the church and construct solutions that most church members would be willing to implement to achieve the Great Commission. This chapter discusses the research results based on the observational notes from the weekly meetings, questionnaires, and open-ended discussions held with all participants during the eight-week research period. The researcher discovered that the intervention plan yielded the expected results.

Root Causes of ECDM Discipleship Problem

As shown in Figure 1 below, while about 83 percent of the thirty participants in the survey declared the church is experiencing numerical growth, 17 percent acknowledged that ECDM is not growing quantitatively, which indicates a weakness in evangelization.

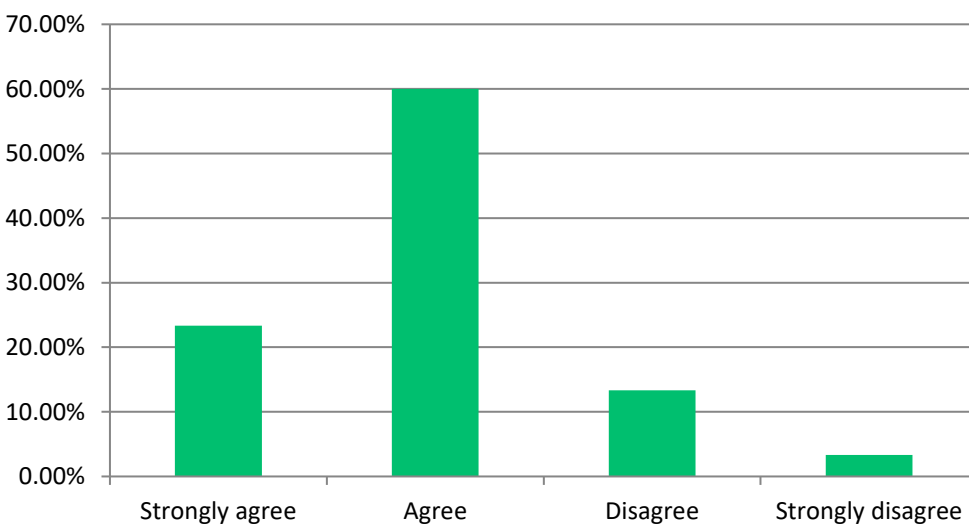


Figure 1. Respondent Answers to “Is the Church Experiencing Numerical Growth?” by Percentage

The root causes for ECDM's slow numerical growth are various. For example, as shown in Figure 2 below, 19 percent of respondents acknowledged not inviting unbelievers to ECDM programs.

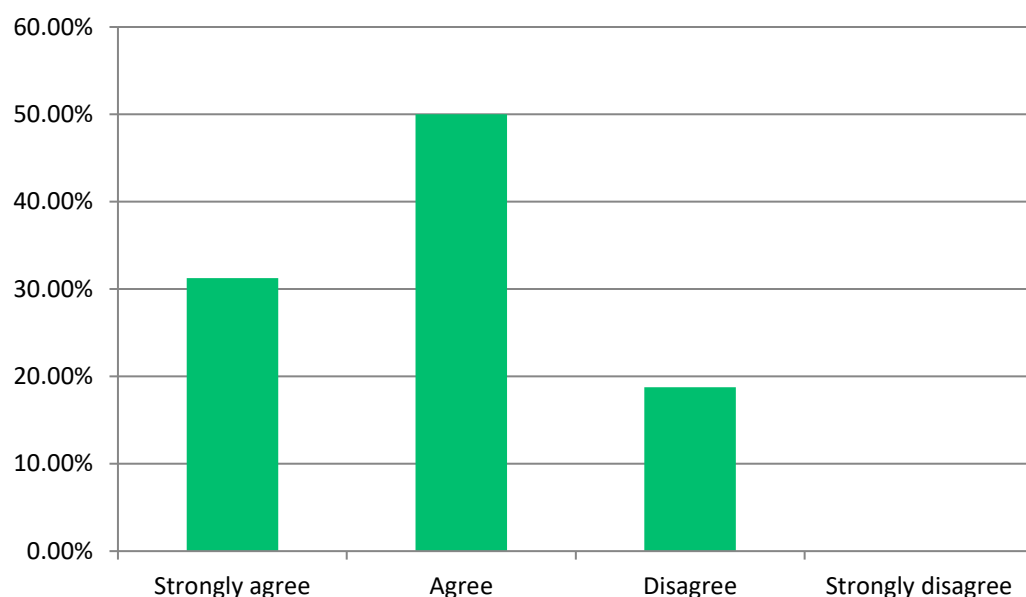


Figure 2. Respondent Answers to “I Invite Others to Services” by Percentage

As to whether respondents share the good news, 12.5 percent said they do not regularly communicate their faith with lost people. Eighty-three percent of the participants are satisfied with ECDM's growth pace, which is a big issue as those congregants do not perceive the urgency of taking action to correct the current trend. On the other hand, 19 percent of participants who said they are not inviting others to the church may not understand that no one will show up unless the church organizes around evangelism.²⁵³ Similarly, national surveys consistently show that 80 to 90 percent of those who visit a church and come to Christ do so at

²⁵³ Comiskey, *Planting Churches that Reproduce*, 31.

the invitation of a family member or friend.²⁵⁴ Earley concurs and affirms that if no one new ever comes to a church, the church cannot grow.

On the other hand, if more guests visit, the amount of growth increases. Therefore, churches whose members consistently invite new people to grow.²⁵⁵ Other problems that participants in the survey mentioned as slowing down the discipleship process in ECDM included those that are financially related (44 percent of respondents), lack of a solid and competent ministry staff team (10 percent), no vibrant and uplifting worship (13 percent), language barrier (13 percent), or a small group of people are doing much of the church's ministry (87 percent). One-third (30 percent) of respondents said that their daily tasks do not leave them enough time to participate in the church's various programs. The excuse of being too busy reveals a misunderstanding of the correlation between participation in the church's various spiritual activities, such as prayer sessions and Bible studies, and personal spiritual formation and growth. Earley explains that individual and corporate prayers save time and effort, allowing God to do things in short periods that believers could not accomplish without Him in months or even years of work.²⁵⁶ On the other hand, participation in Bible studies and Scripture meditation help the believer not be conformed to the busy trend of life of the present world but be transformed by renewing their minds to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom 12:2).

The researcher took this opportunity to discuss the following principles of the kingdom of God: 1) “without God, believers can do nothing” (John 15:5); 2) “No one can serve two masters,

²⁵⁴ Earley, *8 Habits*, 36.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 28.

for either they will be loyal to one and despise the other” (Matt 6:24); and 3) “When believers give priority to seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, God who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field will meet each of His children at the point of their needs” (Matt 6: 25-34).

Most participants were pleased with this teaching. However, they suggested ECDM leaders work on introducing more flexibility in program schedules where possible to accommodate more congregants. Three participants said ECDM ministry staff lacks ministry proficiency. Their assessment confirms that the discipleship crisis at ECDM is a product of a weak ministry team. McCallum and Lowery rightly assert that the local church must be able to raise new leadership from within its rank to grow.²⁵⁷ They affirm that spiritual growth accelerates when most people in a local church take an interest in discipling others.²⁵⁸ ECDM church leaders need to emphasize that those who feel the ministry team lacks competency should become involved.

²⁵⁷ McCallum and Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others*, 10.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

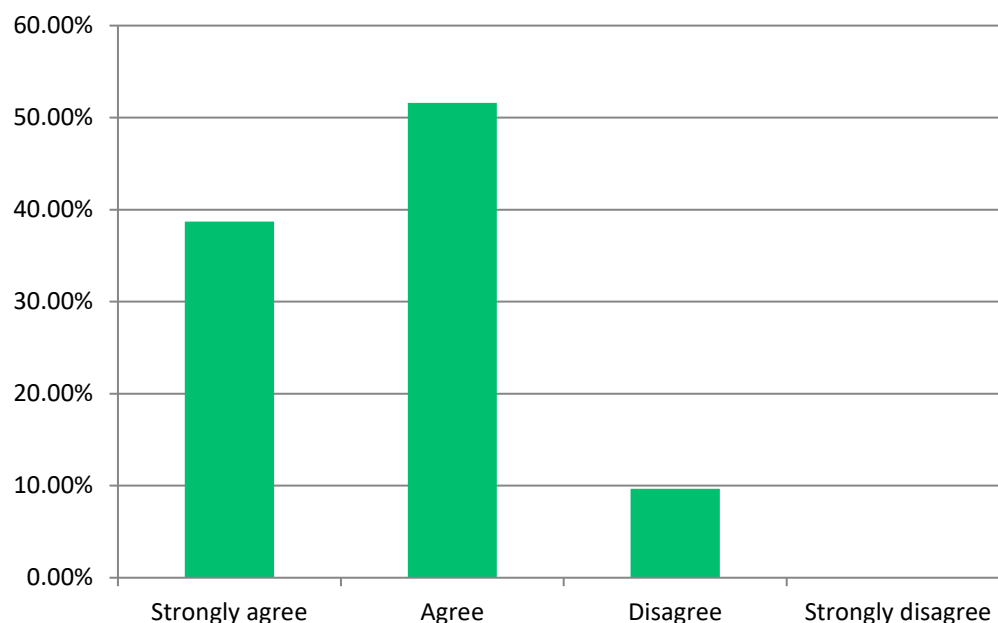


Figure 3. Respondent Answers to “The Church Has a Solid and Competent Ministry Staff Team” by Percentage

Answers to a question related to the church vision and strategy to make disciples of Jesus Christ provided valuable insights into the discipleship problem at ECDM. For example, the chart below shows that about 31 percent of participants do not believe in the church’s critical role in the spiritual development of the saints. This contrasts with Paul’s epistle to the Ephesian believers, in which he states that God appointed “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ, till believers all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:11–13). J.T. English rightly explains that the local church is the primary place where God intends to make and form holistic disciples.²⁵⁹ The local church is the tool, God’s providential instrument that He uses to grow His people into mature followers of Christ. No one has

²⁵⁹ J.T. English. *Deep Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), 52.

everything it takes to grow a disciple to the fullness of stature in Christ. The local church is where Christ sanctifies believers (1 Cor 1:2) and grows them up in the faith (1 Cor 14:12). It is where the gospel is chiefly proclaimed (2 Cor 8:18), where Christ reigns as the head (Col 1:18).²⁶⁰

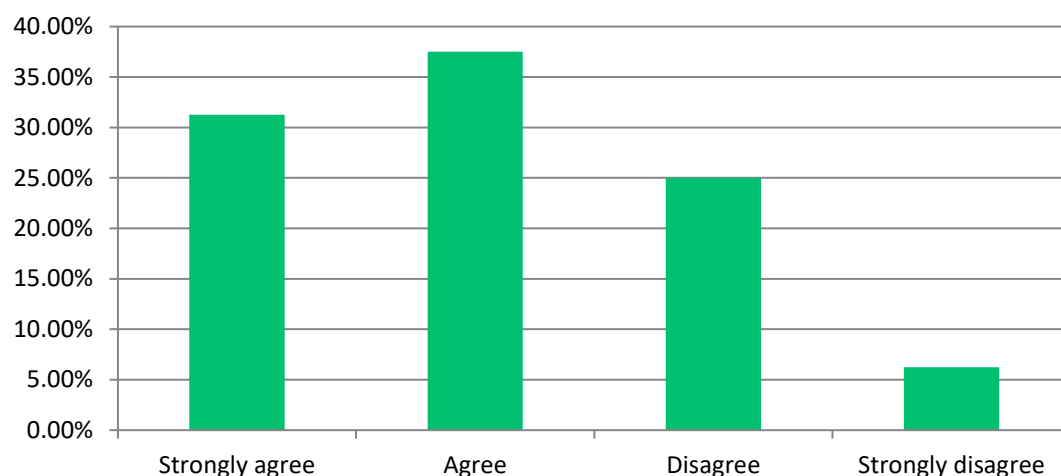


Figure 4. Respondent Answers to “I Believe that the Church Is Primarily Responsible for Spiritual Growth and Development” by Percentage

Two participants declared that the church’s current approach to disciple-making does not meet their spiritual needs. One person stated the church does not have a clear strategy for growing and maturing believers. Also, two participants said they do not believe they are responsible for their spiritual growth and development. Therefore, to leave no one behind, ECDM leaders must customize the church discipleship method, regularly reminding congregants of the church vision and mandate, the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual formation and growth, and the part the believer plays in this process.

²⁶⁰ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 52–53.

A few questions of the survey focused on ministry in small groups and disciple-making. For example, Figure 5 below shows that while a significant percentage of participants (77 percent) agree that small groups are the best vehicle to raise and develop leaders who reproduce, seven people (23 percent) do not think disciple spiritual growth occurs best in a small group relational environment. This contrasts with the examples of the Scriptures, in which we see that Jesus, during His ministry on earth, initiated a home-based movement (Matt 8:14; 9:10; 26:18; Mark 7:17–18; 9:33; 10:10; Luke 19:1–10; 10:28–30).²⁶¹ The Book of Acts confirms that the early Christians carried on Jesus’s home-based movement, meeting primarily in the homes of individual members over nearly three hundred years. Examples include the churches in Galilee, Jerusalem, Jericho, Damascus (Acts 9:10–19), Joppa (Acts 9:43; 10:6,17–18,32), Caesarea (Acts 10:1–11;21:18), Tyre (Acts 21:3–6), Philippi (Acts 16:15, 34, 40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–7), Ephesus (Acts 20:20), Troas (Acts 20:7–12), Corinth (Acts 18:3,7-8), and Rome (Acts 28:16,23,30-31). These examples clearly show that houses churches played an essential role in Christianity's rapid growth and ultimate triumph after the Pentecost, at least during the three first centuries, which belonged to the house church movement.²⁶² Cell-based ministries such as the Victory Temple in Tulsa, Oklahoma, or Bethany World Prayer Center, Louisiana, are contemporary examples of flourishing churches. Yet, 59 percent of the participants declared not belonging to a small group in ECDM, as shown in Figure 6 below. To change this deadly trend, ECDM leaders must work on developing disciples who can become leaders of small groups and reproduce.

²⁶¹ Joel Comiskey. *Biblical Foundations For The Cell-Based Church* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2016), 78.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 88.

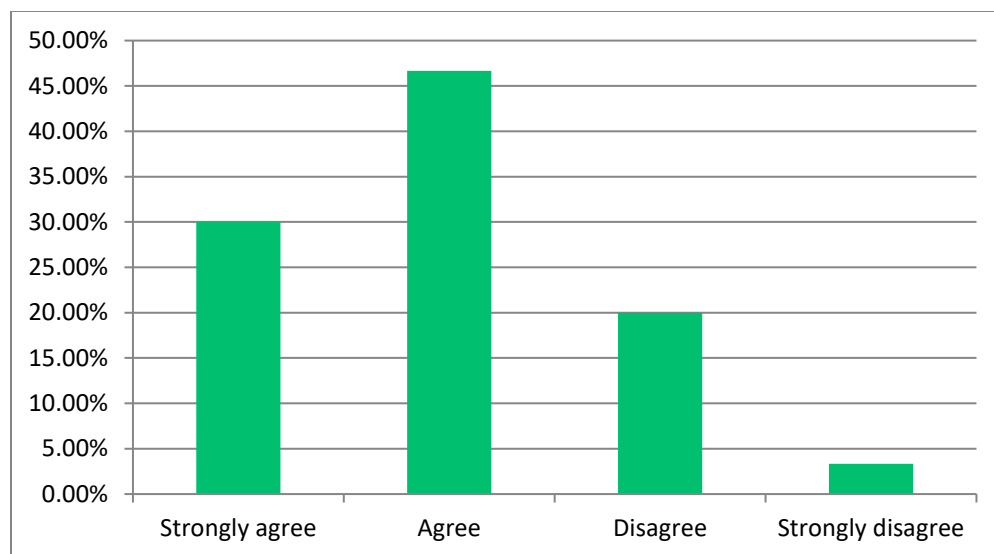


Figure 5. Respondent Answers to “I Believe Spiritual Growth Occurs Best in a Small Group” by Percentage

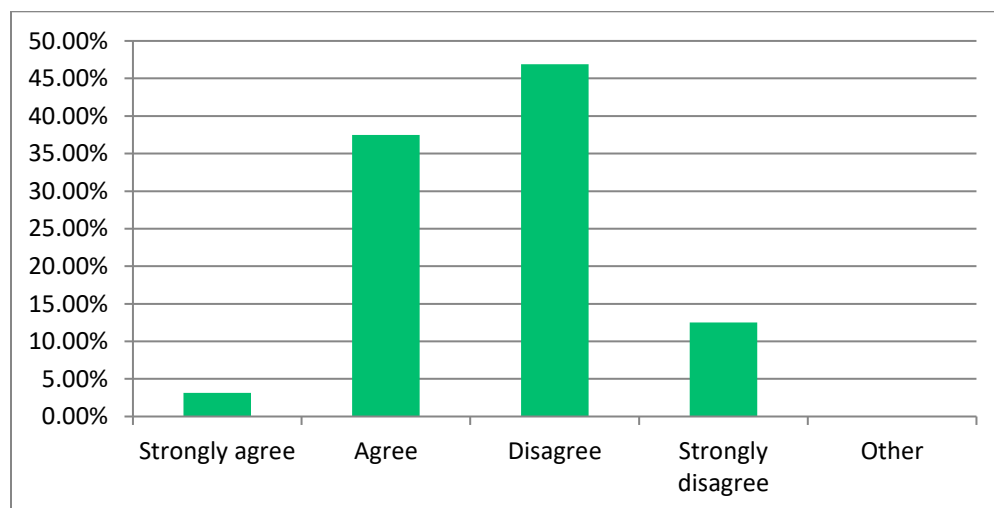


Figure 6. Respondent Answers to “I Am a Member of a Small Group Where I Share My Life” by Percentage

A question aimed at assessing respondents’ participation in current online programs put in place because of financial challenges and COVID-19 restrictions revealed that three ECDM

congregants (10 percent) do not think doing church online is adequate to accomplish Christ's mission at this time. However, most participants acknowledged that Zoom video-conferencing meetings proved necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic and have helped keep the flame alive. As shown on the graph below, twelve participants (44 percent) also reported that ECDM's financial challenges were a severe impediment to the church's disciple-making process.

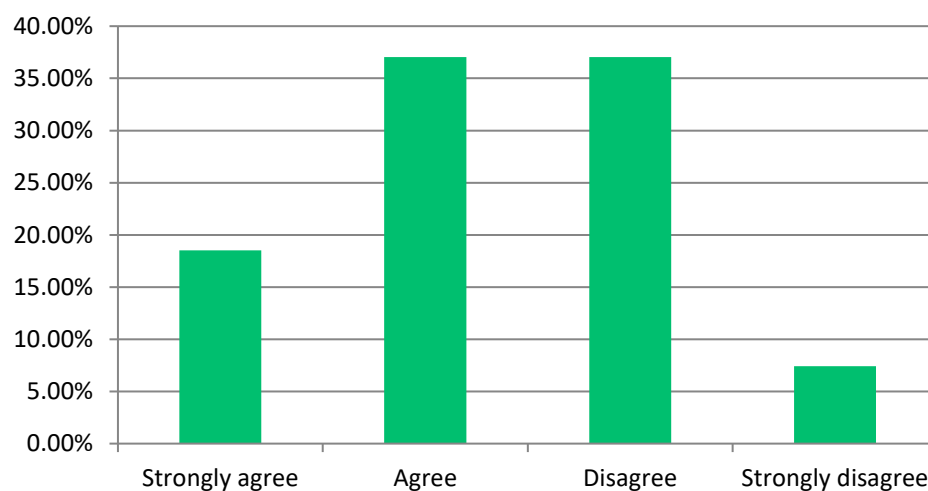


Figure 7. Respondent Answers to “The Church Seems To Be Prospering Financially” by Percentage

The church's financial limitation has led to its inability to afford a convenient place for meetings. Unfortunately, this limitation also hampers the church's ability to have a vibrant and uplifting praise and worship ministry. Thirteen percent of participants identified this as a problem, as seen in Figure 8 below.

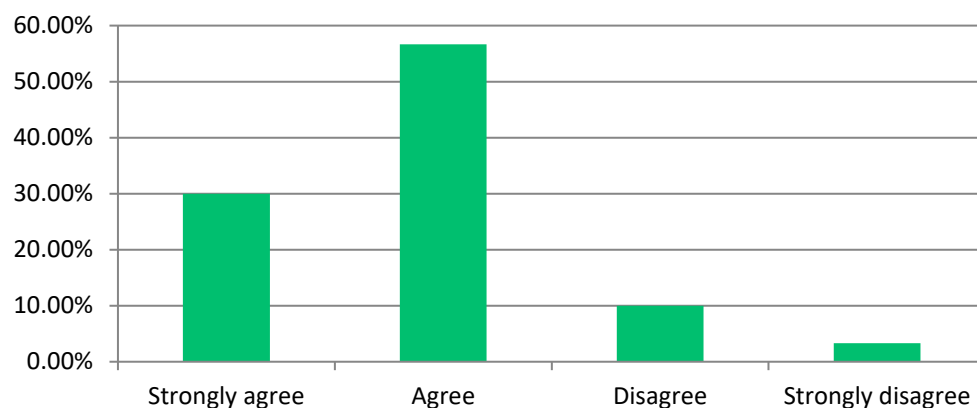


Figure 8. Respondent Answers to “The Church’s Worship Is Vibrant and Uplifting” by Percentage

The group discussions allowed both the researcher and participants to review and take stock of all the environments available for ECDM congregants to learn and grow in the Christian life. Participants were, for example, asked to share their opinion on whether the church’s settings or classes were adequate for equipping adult men, women, youth, and children. A follow-up discussion focused on getting their perspectives on whether the existing discipleship spaces were functional or dysfunctional. All the participants acknowledged that ECDM educational weekly spaces for adults were beneficial, but they lamented the absence of discipleship environments reserved explicitly for women, men, youth, and children. English asserts that local churches must create single-gender learning environments where spiritual and life-stage needs can be met to develop deep disciples.²⁶³ For ECDM, creating such discipleship spaces means identifying and developing faithful men, women, and young adults who can assume leadership responsibility in all these different areas.

The results of the ECDM discipleship inventory²⁶⁴ are provided in Table 1 below.

²⁶³ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 92.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

Table 1. Discipleship Inventory Results

Category	Existence, Usefulness, and Functionality	Discipleship Spaces
Essential and functional	ECDM has it, needs it, and it is working.	Adult educational weekly classes (Tuesday and Sunday)
Nonessential and functional	ECDM has it, and it is working but does not need it.	
Essential and dysfunctional	ECDM has it and needs it, but it is broken.	
Nonessential and dysfunctional	ECDM has it, but it is broken and does not need it.	
Essential and nonexistent	ECDM needs it but does not have it.	Education spaces exclusively for women, men, youths, and children.

English suggests that the discipleship inventory exercise should be regularly conducted for all the local churches because it forces fellowships to triage and ask hard questions about what they can keep, cut, fix, and add to their ministry spaces.²⁶⁵

Assessment of Character of God's People for Ministry

This research included character assessments for ministry. Over the years, church leaders have discovered that godly character is critical for effective ministry. However, no one is perfect, and all believers have their weaknesses, flaws, and strengths. Because a leader can be practicing authentic leadership and be blinded by their values, leading to pseudo transformational leadership in action, it is therefore essential that, through their foundational character, whether good or bad, Jesus's followers develop a value system that helps them make good decisions in

²⁶⁵ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 81.

diverse situations.²⁶⁶ Therefore, the character assessment was aimed at assisting participants in determining their character strengths and weaknesses and identifying areas that need transformation and growth. Twelve men and twenty women participated in the related questionnaires.

Results Summary of Men and Women's Character Assessment

Two men acknowledged not living a life above reproach. Three confessed to not being hospitable, and two noted that they could not teach. Two men shared their weakness toward unacceptable and addictive practices, while one man admitted being violent. Another said he could not firmly affirm that he managed his family well. Two men admitted being recent converts, while one said he was not a devout person whose life is generally pleasing to God.

On the other hand, four women declared having weak love for their children. Two admitted not adequately handling their responsibilities at home. Four said they were not submitting to their husbands, and five reported weak love for their husbands. One said she is not always doing the right things for women who profess to know and worship God. One could not affirm not slandering people, whether believers or unbelievers.

While some may not resist judging the candidness of these men and women, given the character prescriptions found in 1 Tim 2:9–10, 1 Tim 3:1–6, Tit 2:3–5, and 1 Pet 3:1–4, ECDM leaders should take the honesty of these respondents as a call for help.

²⁶⁶ Paul Petit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 144.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

A few days before going to the cross to pay the penalty His Father required for humankind's redemption, Jesus told His Father, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). This work was that of calling and developing disciples who could reproduce, thereby fulfilling God's plan at creation to multiply and fill the earth with people in His likeness (Gen 1:26–28). After His resurrection but before ascending to glory, Jesus told His followers to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19–20). This instruction, referred to as the Great Commission, can only be fulfilled in a meaningful way if disciple-making is the central focus of a local church. Bonhoeffer understood this truth and taught that Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. Christless Christianity remains an abstract idea, a myth that has a place for the Fatherhood of God but omits Christ as the living Son. A Christianity of this kind is nothing more or less than the end of discipleship.²⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this exemplifies much of Christianity in the contemporary world.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul emphasized the church's mandate concerning the spiritual development of believers. He commanded the Ephesian church to "equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12–13). Unfortunately, the local church, including ECDM, has poorly obeyed this instruction because it is in a profound crisis, the crisis of making disciples able to observe everything Christ ordered.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 59.

²⁶⁸ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 23.

This research thesis aimed to assist the ECDM congregation in discovering the root causes of its low levels of adult discipleship and develop an action plan that most adult congregants would be willing to implement to fulfill the Great Commission effectively. Thirty adult ECDM parishioners participated in this research that lasted eight weeks. The results show that the obstacles to the discipleship process at ECDM are financial, cultural (language barrier, lack of diversity), structural (a small group of staff doing 80 percent of the ministry job, absence of key ministries, including groups for men, women, youths, children, and worship ministries), and time-related (daily occupations). Participants' answers to questionnaires and interview questions also revealed a misunderstanding of the role of the church and personal responsibility regarding the Great Commission.

Collective Construction of Solutions to ECDM Discipleship Problem

The inventory and analysis of these issues that participants mentioned as obstructing the disciple-making process at ECDM led to a shared understanding that the crisis at the heart of this church is one of product: the church's inability to produce disciples who reproduce to fulfill the Great Commission.²⁶⁹ Most participants also agreed that the best environment to develop leaders who can penetrate the world to make disciples of all nations is the small group learning space. This is a relational environment where God uses people to transform people. It is also a setting where people learn to love one another genuinely (John 13:34–35), serve one another (Phil 2:4), forgive each other (Col 3:13), build each other up (Rom 14:19), and encourage each other (1 Thess 5:11). Not only that, it is an environment that is suitable for fostering compassion for one another (Heb 6:10; Eph 4:32), devotion to one another in brotherly love (Rom 12:12), instruction

²⁶⁹ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 21.

of one another (Rom 15:14), submission to one another (Eph 5:21), confession of sins to one another (Jas 5:16), humility with one another (Col 3:12; Eph 4:2), acceptance of one another (Rom 15:7), and all the other one another's mentioned in Scriptures.²⁷⁰

Thus, the participants adopted the discipleship small-group strategy and the establishment of relational and learning spaces where all members contribute to carrying out eight functions. These include: 1) a holistic discipleship process; 2) describing a leadership learning community; 3) structuring a leadership learning community; 4) developing expanding networks of small groups; 5) selecting apprentices; 6) creating evangelistic fishing pools and reproducing care groups; 7) reviewing a job description for a small group leader, and 8) reviewing a job description for a supervisory huddle leader.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Comiskey, *The Relational Disciple* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2016), 46–74.

²⁷¹ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 231.

ECDM Cell-Based Structure

Figure 9 below illustrates ECDM's holistic discipleship plan through small groups to mobilize the congregation to use its gifts.²⁷²

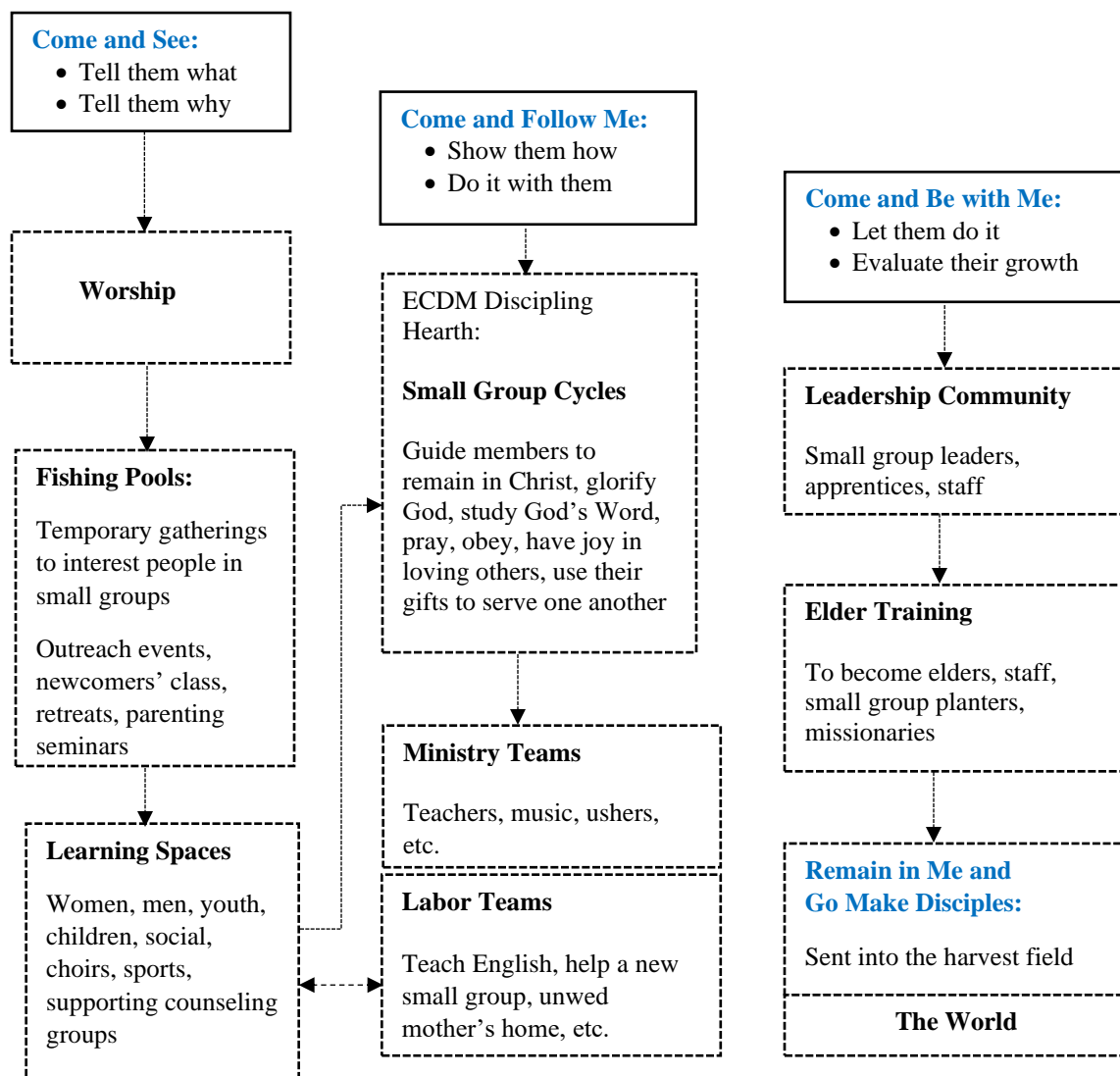


Figure 9. ECDM's Holistic Discipleship Plan

²⁷² Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 232.

Describing ECDM's Learning Leadership Community

ECDM Learning Leadership Community should be a place for small group leaders to gain personal support, expand their vision, develop ministry skills, and intern new apprentices into active leadership.²⁷³

Table 2. How ECDM Learning Leadership Community Will Grow

Learning Leadership Community	A congregational leadership unit from all ministry activities involves small groups of people; meets for dinner, worship, prayer, direction, Bible studies, and personal support.
Active Small Group	ECDM decentralizes pastoral care and responsibilities to small groups (for example, music and worship ensembles, drama teams, intervention groups, junior and senior high sponsors, small groups for youths, men, women, singles, and couples' studies).
Leaders	The leadership community is composed of those currently leading or about to enter into the active leadership level of service in a small group.
Personal Support	The shepherd of ECDM provides individualized care to the leadership community members and receives feedback from them.
Expand Vision	ECDM leadership expresses the church's core values, paints the big picture, and plans for future growth in ministry.
Develop Skills	ECDM sets time aside to train and prepare people to use their leadership gifts for effective service.
Intern Apprentices	ECDM leaders use this learning space to bring newly identified apprentices into entry-level leadership and nurture them in using their gifts.

²⁷³ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 232.

Structuring ECDM Leadership Learning Community

The ECDM leadership team has agreed to hold a two-hour leadership meeting every other week to worship together and pray for various topics, share ministry progress updates, cast vision, share testimonies, encourage one another, and extend recognition to those living out ECDM's core values. During the leadership team meeting, small group and ministries leaders can share with the audience one to two critical issues they face in their discipleship journey and receive feedback from the other leaders, including the pastor. The participants also suggested that ECDM leadership periodically plan unique leadership development spaces such as retreats to conduct strategy sessions or training times. These learning spaces and outreach events could also introduce any newcomers to small groups. Titles for ECDM leaders within the community would include: 1) *Small Group Leader*, who will shepherd ten to twelve people, including at least one apprentice; 2) *Huddle Leader*, who will coach three to five small group leaders; 3) *Apprentice*, who will be required to form a small group from their existing group and fishing-pool events, and 4) *Coordinator*, whose job will be to administrate leadership community and new fishing-pool events.²⁷⁴

Developing Expanding Networks of Small Groups

The below diagram, borrowed from *The Disciple-Making Church* by Hull, illustrates the type of group dynamics the ECDM leadership community could develop. All its small groups would unite together and bring their apprentices.

²⁷⁴ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 233–234.

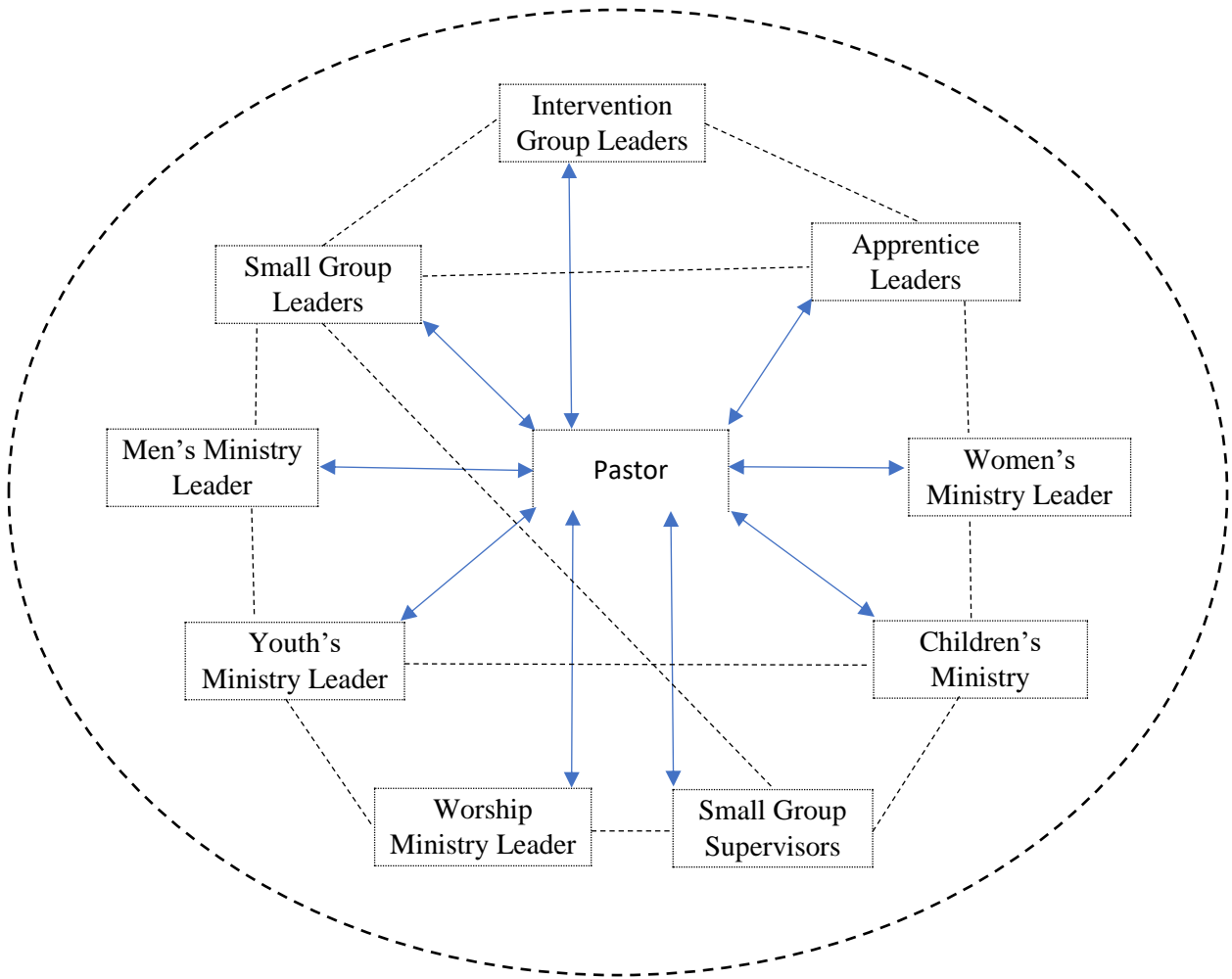


Figure 10. Group Dynamics that ECDM Could Develop. Source: Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010).

The benefits of networking small groups together are multiple. They include increased communication between different areas, an effective way to expand new groups, increased sharing of ministry experience, and enhanced possibility to think out how to win entire families to Christ.²⁷⁵ For example, Figure 11, taken from *The Disciple-Making Church*,²⁷⁶ shows how ECDM could divide its leadership community time.

²⁷⁵ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 234–235.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 232.

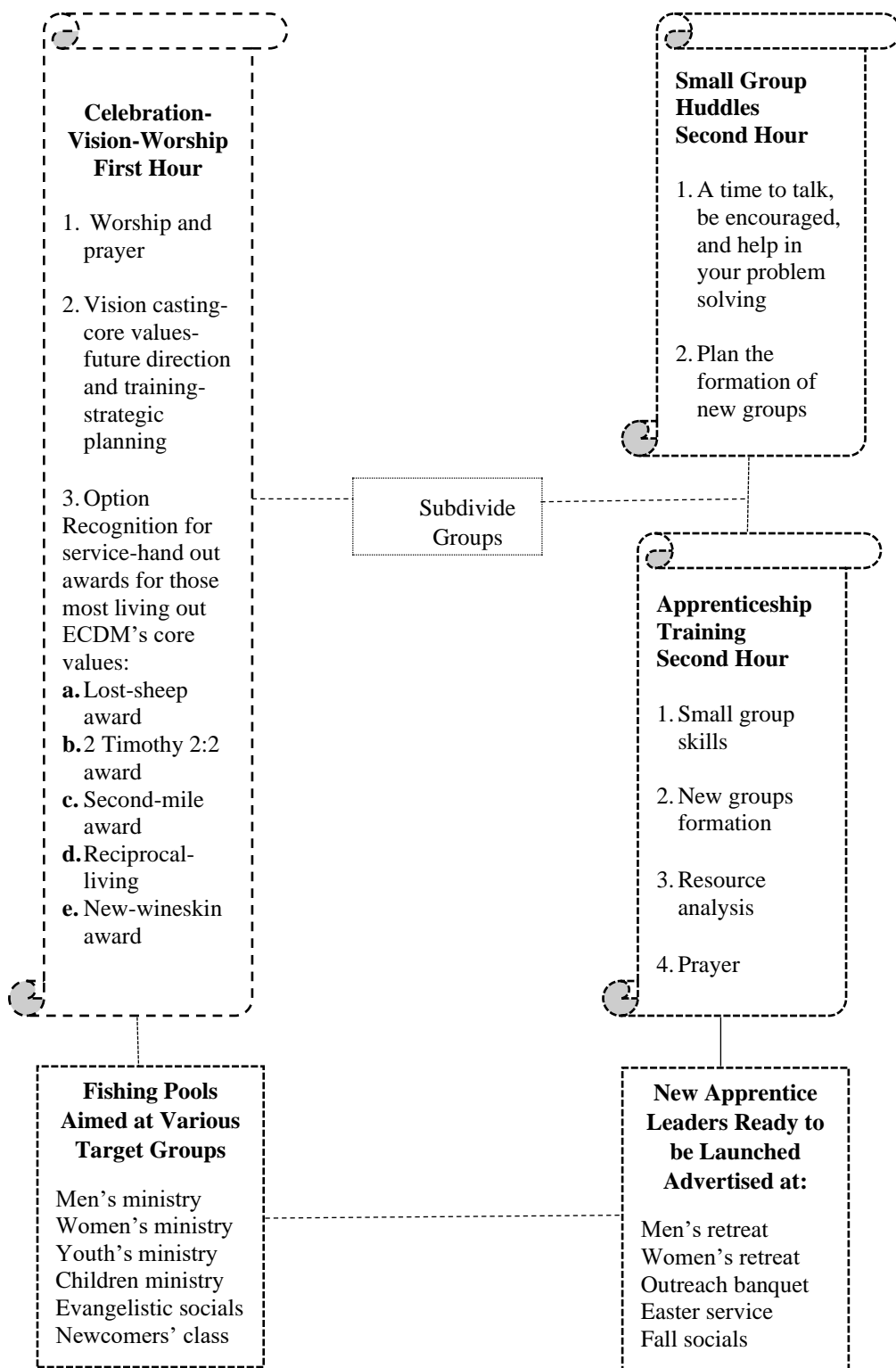


Figure 11. How ECDM Could Divide Its Leadership Time. Source: Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010).

Selecting Apprentices in ECDM

Description of an Apprentice

An apprentice is a small group member committed to developing Christian character and ministry skills under the guiding influence of a trained disciple-maker.²⁷⁷

Qualifications for Apprentices in ECDM

Apprentices must be willing to join the leadership community and submit to the small group leader's training process. In addition, they must demonstrate a variety of attributes and aptitudes, including 1) leadership characteristics for the job, beginning with those mentioned in 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Tit 1:5–9; 2) aspiration to join the leadership community; 3) possession of a heart burning for spiritual things; 4) spiritually giftedness for leadership; 5) teachability and attractiveness to others; 6) not having any disqualifying weaknesses or emotional immaturity; 7) ability to gather a group around them; and 8) ability to work through others and facilitate a group to minister to others.²⁷⁸ Before joining the leadership community, ECDM leaders should pray and make a list of potential apprentices. Then, the small group leader would clear the potential candidate with their huddle supervisor to verify that the eight qualifications for apprenticeship are met. Next, the small group leader should meet with the apprentice candidate to go over their commitment to training. The apprentice will then be assigned a huddle leader.²⁷⁹

Creating Evangelistic Fishing Pools and Reproducing Care Groups

A fishing pool at ECDM is an intentional outreach event to attract people, identify their affinities, and interest them in new small groups that are about to start. Fishing pools have four

²⁷⁷ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 235.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 236.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

specific goals: 1) identifying specific affinity or target groups; 2) reaching out and gathering new people; 3) accomplishing a stated purpose; and 4) allowing apprentices to fill their groups.

Examples of fishing pools may include newcomer classes, women's coffees, parenting seminars, retreats for men or women, marriage-enrichment weekends, evangelistic Bible studies, camping trips, service projects for the poor and oppressed, marketplace Bible studies, or sports teams.²⁸⁰

Small-Group Leaders at ECDM

Small group leaders are tasked with creating an environment for personal growth. They should organize small group meetings to apply God's Word, build supportive and mutually accountable relationships, and exhort the church to fulfill the "one another" that God has given His children. Small group leaders must also help members of their groups worship God for who He is, coach them on using their spiritual gifts with one another, give them service opportunities, and train apprentices to become small group leaders.²⁸¹

Supervisory Huddle Leaders at ECDM

The job of a huddle leader is to troubleshoot small groups' problems. They should use problem-solving techniques to help small group leaders formulate goals and plans. They also monitor and evaluate small groups' management and encourage and affirm their effectiveness and reproduction.²⁸²

Structuring Small Groups

Developing healthy small groups that multiply at ECDM will require a planning exercise that involves defining the meaning of a small group, clarifying its aim, focusing on its goal,

²⁸⁰ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 238.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 240.

²⁸² Ibid.

constantly casting the vision and reminding about the church's core values, and identifying precisely the results expected from each small group.

Defining a Small Group at ECDM

A small group is a learning space composed of ten to twelve people who gather regularly with the common goal of helping each other grow in the knowledge of the Son of God and the adventure of a Christ-honoring lifestyle. The shared purposes are to worship Christ, minister to one another, unite as disciples of Christ with a common cause, and prepare for the mission of making disciples worldwide. ECDM small groups are open to people who do not know where they are with God but are willing to find out and to those who have already committed to Jesus Christ but are unchurched and desire the help of others' experience and support. ECDM small groups are the best vehicle to help learn about Christ's love, overcome life's obstacles, and experience new accomplishments.²⁸³

Clarifying ECDM Small Groups' Aim and Goals

ECDM small groups should aim to help God's children take another step in developing a Christ-honoring lifestyle where they live, work, and play. To achieve this aim, ECDM small groups shall pursue six group goals: 1) decentralize pastoral care and support; 2) love one another and the neighbor in word and deed; 3) invite others to join the group and the events of the church to create well-incorporated disciples; 4) help the group's members identify their giftedness, develop it, and use it to serve one another and penetrate the world; 5) develop apprentices as small group leaders for future leadership roles; 6) encourage creative expression in new ministries as members grow and develop their giftedness.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 248.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 250.

What ECDM Wants Small Group Members to Know

ECDM leadership desires that members of its small groups know how to worship their heavenly Father and enjoy a vital prayer life in their relationship with Christ, study the Word of God, using a variety of resources to help them deepen their understanding of God's Word. The church's leadership also aims to want small group members to know how to love in word and action, believers and their neighbor, and live out a God-honoring work ethic with their coworkers, employers, and the customers they serve. Last but not least, ECDM leadership desires to teach group members to utilize the church family as their team for loving their extended families and inviting them to share in the good news of Jesus Christ and minister to hurting people, using their distinct abilities.

Identifying What ECDM's Small Group Members Shall Do

Small group members at ECDM should prioritize attendance at group meetings, actively participate in group activities, invite new people to every meeting and provide loving care to the rest of the group and the friends they invite to join the group. In addition, they should live up to their commitment to belong to the group, applying the principles they study in God's Word to their lives and working to start new groups as they share their faith.²⁸⁵

What ECDM Wants its Small Group Members to Become

Small group members should grow holistically in their spiritual lives as they discover what God revealed about Himself and His purpose for their lives in Jesus Christ. They shall flourish in their relationships with their families and others, seeking more profound levels of maturity and understanding, and in their relationship to their career as they gain new appreciation

²⁸⁵ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 249.

and insights for God's providential work and begin to see themselves as ethical stewards who minister for God in their workplaces.²⁸⁶

Structuring ECDM Small Group Life as a Way of Life

Life in ECDM small groups shall be fruitful and bring glory to God, as mentioned in John 15. Small group members should live a God-honoring abundant life by remaining in prayer and communion with God through regular meditation of the Word, bearing fruit in words and deeds, obeying God's leading by striving to make the most outstanding contribution to His redemptive work, living joyfully, and loving others and helping them in their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs.²⁸⁷

Defining Small Groups' Success Indicators

To keep themselves on track, each small group member shall measure the following aspects of their life:²⁸⁸

Web factor: Who is God putting on my heart to add to my prayer list?

Affinity Factor: Who is responding to my love? Why?

Proximity: What activities can I do to deepen my relationships with those at work, home, and church?

Love factor: Whom have I had in my home? What notes, cards, and gifts have I sent to others?

Cost factor: Is there anything God is asking me to do right now that I am unwilling to do?

²⁸⁶ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 250.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 252.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 252–253.

Friendship factor: What do I notice about the questions and needs of my friends? In which areas do I need their help?

Stress receptivity factor: Who around me is under stress and in pain? Is there anything I or we can do to help them?

Prayer factor: With who have I prayed lately?

Team factor: Who in my church or group will I introduce to my friends? When? How?

Declaration factor: How am I declaring my love for Christ by symbols, actions, prayer, or words?

Intimacy factor: What had God shown me about Himself this week? In what areas do I feel He wants me to grow?

Stewardship factor: In light of the resources and responsibilities God has entrusted me, what am I doing at my place of employment, neighborhood, and family to make the most significant contribution possible to the lives of other people?

If this discipleship small-group-based strategy is implemented, the researcher believes it could help develop a discipleship culture at ECDM that encourages congregants to serve together, nurture healthy relationships, and establish learning spaces intentionally designed to encourage every believer to contribute to the achievement of the Great Commission meaningfully.

Special Focus on Equipping Men in Christ

Why is it essential for every church to focus on finding innovative ways to disciple their men? First, a “men problem” needs a particular solution. Eighty percent of men are emotionally impaired, meaning they cannot express or even identify their feelings. Sixty percent of men are in financial trouble, 50 percent of men who attend church actively seek out pornography, and 40

percent divorce, affecting one million children each year.²⁸⁹ The conclusion is inescapable: men have become one of society's largest neglected people groups. While the toll on men is horrific, says Morley, the collateral damage on marriages and families is staggering. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the research has confirmed that there is also a man problem in the Christian community. Ninety percent of Christian men lead lukewarm, stagnant, defeated lives. They are mired in spiritual mediocrity, and they hate it.²⁹⁰ "But the world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and through, and in, and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him."²⁹¹ Discipleship is, therefore, the solution.

At ECDM, discipling men effectively would begin with the understanding that men want something they can give themselves to make a difference. They long for a calling that satisfies their deep desire for value and meaning. Next, it would require an all-inclusive mindset: a vision to disciple all the church's men, not just those willing to join men's activities. Finally, it would require a strategy customized to feed the needs of the five types of men, as shown in figure 12 below from *Pastoring Men*.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Morley, *Pastoring Men*, 72.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 20.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid., 139.

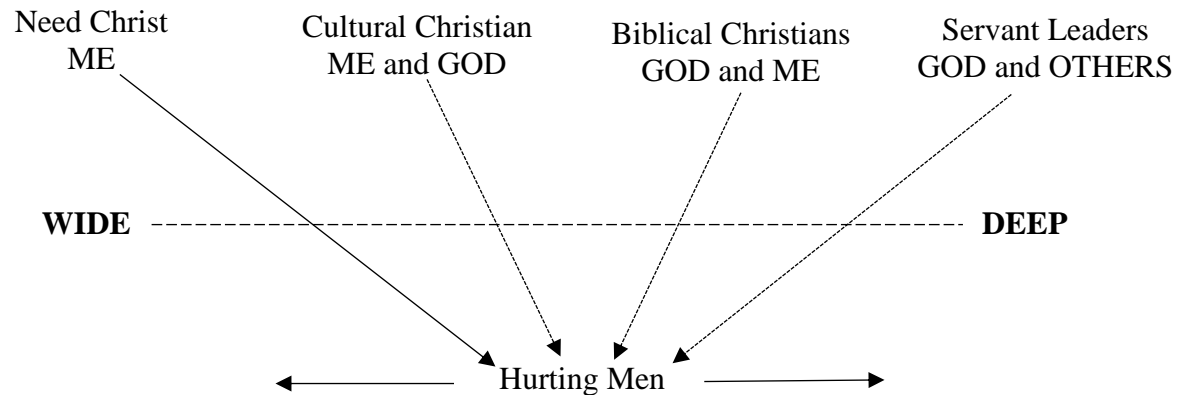


Figure 12. How to Meet the Needs of Five Types of Men. Source: Patrick Morley, *Pastoring Men* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

To the far left, men need Christ. Next are cultural Christians, men who lead lukewarm lives. Next comes men who are biblical Christians, those who are disciples or want to be. To the far right are servant leaders, men who are disciple-makers, and candidates for leadership roles in the church.²⁹³

Some of the critical things ECDM could do to interest and assist its men in the disciple-making process include 1) telling them that until they find a cause worth dying for, they will not have a cause worth living for; 2) telling them they would rather die for a worthy cause than live for no reason; 3) teach them that no amount of success at work will ever be adequate to compensate for failure at home; 4) teach them to prove their love by the way they spend their time;²⁹⁴ 5) regularly present the gospel and invite men to put their faith in Jesus; 6) be there for men when they feel the need; 7) teach the difference between commitment and surrender and call them to surrender their lives to Christ, and teach them how to abide in Christ; 8) encourage them

²⁹³ Morley, *Pastoring Men*, 139.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 57.

to create spaces where they can build camaraderie and discuss the challenges of being a male follower of Christ Jesus.²⁹⁵

Making ECDM A Multiethnic Community

One of the problems participants mentioned during the research as negatively impacting discipleship at ECDM is a lack of diversity. Scripture does not support an ethnic or cultural exclusivism that retreats into an inwardly focused, self-serving existence.²⁹⁶ Instead, as with Abraham, the local church has been blessed to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3). The local church is a steward of a great treasure, not to enrich itself only but to share with the multitudes around it. The church is not called to eradicate cultural diversity, homogenize it into a uniform soup, or find a neutral form that eliminates all flavor. Instead, the local church must recognize that cultural diversity reflects the creative nature of God, in whose image each group of people is created. For this to become a reality in ECDM, the church's leaders must understand that their corporate strength is related to their level of cultural intelligence.²⁹⁷ In other words, they must grow in their ability to share the good news and their lives with those different from them.²⁹⁸

Some of the actions ECDM leaders could take to promote diversity in their church include²⁹⁹:

²⁹⁵ Morley, *Pastoring Men*, 86–87.

²⁹⁶ Gary L. McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why it Matters and How it Works* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 179.

²⁹⁷ McIntosh and McMahan, *Being the Church*, 182.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ McIntosh and McMahan, *Being the Church*, 187–189.

Preaching: communicate the gospel in ways that make sense to an audience composed of various cultural perspectives. Not only must the preaching content be shaped to speak to multiple cultures, but the ways that the message is delivered needs reevaluation.

Worship: worship music and liturgy should be shaped to relate to the various cultural traditions of the congregation. Blending services, holding multiple services shaped to a portion of the audience or rotating musical teams and worship leaders should be considered. In summary, worship must include some degree of a cultural blend to have culturally appropriate communication, such as storytelling, preaching, level of emotion, and the like.

Evangelism: evangelism strategies should focus on reaching a particular ethnicity or people group. When they come to Christ, special attention should be given to how to disciple them in a multicultural setting.

Welcoming hospitality: hospitality should be expressed through the greeting practices, music, foods, worship styles, services organization, including translation availability.

Leadership: The church leadership team should be composed in such a way as to reflect the diversity of the congregation.

Cross-cultural competence: classes, seminars, and personalized coaching should be focused on equipping leaders to understand the ministry's context, including the tools and perspectives for learning about the groups that make up the populations in the ministry area.³⁰⁰

Summary of the Research and Application

This research was conducted from the presupposition that disciple-making is the foremost mission Jesus gave His followers before ascending to glory. Discipleship is not an optional

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 192.

endeavor for Christians and the local church. It is commanded for every Christian and church. As Hull rightly put it, the discipling church is the “normal” church.³⁰¹ During the first three centuries, Christianity expanded at a pace never attained again in church history because the early followers of Jesus took His command to make disciples seriously. The first Christians made winning the lost and developing them to their full potential for Christ and His mission their *top priority*, the *raison d’être* of their Christian life. Unfortunately, this flame has not kept burning steadily throughout the ages. The condition of the local church today is that of a church in profound crisis, the crisis of failing to uphold its God’s given mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19–20).

This research aimed to help understand the nature of that crisis at ECDM. Chapter One defines the word “disciple,” establishes the importance of discipleship as the central focus of the local church, describes the impetus for and the importance of understanding ECDM’s low levels of adult engagement in discipleship. It also anticipates the research’s finding that a small group’s ministry provides the best context for spiritual growth, gives an example of attractive and irresistible communities to a lost world, and creates a way for a church to live counterculturally.

Chapter Two discussed adult discipleship in the local church, focusing on why discipleship levels are dropping, and also considered the development of a cell ministry, which many Bible scholars present as the best solution to the identified problem. It also discussed the scriptural basis for making disciples, reviewing examples from the Old and the New Testament, showing that building up and equipping people to accomplish God’s mission has remained at the center of God’s redemptive plan. Finally, this section discussed discipleship models and strategies and showed that several past and current practices inform the topic.

³⁰¹ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 17.

Chapter Three laid down the research design and plan, discussing the methods used, the research boundaries and limitations, and the specific actions taken to increase participants' appreciation of the ECDM adult discipleship problem and the collective formulation of a plan of action to effect change.

The intervention results are found in Chapter Four and are based on the observational notes from the weekly meetings, questionnaires, character assessments, and open-ended discussions held with all participants during the eight-week research period. They confirm Hull's conclusion that the crisis at the heart of the local church is one of the products.³⁰² The local church, including ECDM, struggles to produce the kind of disciples who reproduce to fulfill the Great Commission. The root cause is that the church's attention has shifted from making disciples to making converts and the widely accepted idea that people can be Christians without submitting to and following Jesus.

The research confirmed that small groups provide the best environment for disciple-making.³⁰³ Therefore, the small group ministry at ECDM must be designed to provide a means for the average person to become an established disciple of Jesus Christ. This requires a planning exercise that involves defining the meaning of a small group, clarifying its aim, focusing on its goal, constantly casting the vision and reminding about the church's core values, and identifying the results expected from each small group.

ECDM small groups ministry must also be built around the following principles: 1) each church member must be part of a small group; 2) group members must be committed to the group life, regularly attending the meetings, participating in the training, and being mutually

³⁰² Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 21.

³⁰³ Ibid., 283.

accountable for the spiritual growth of each other; 3) because no leader possesses all the required giftedness or experience to sufficiently disciple group members, the group must be small enough to avoid spectators but large enough to provide variety as the group works best when varieties of gifts and life experience exist in it; 4) the groups must meet often and long enough for the training process to work; 5) the groups must teach basic skills that act as tools to reach the objective of building members. They must facilitate establishing a disciple support system that promotes a working knowledge of the Scriptures, an effective prayer life, meaningful relationships, an appreciation of accountability, and a positive attitude toward evangelism and ministry skills. 6) Finally, the groups' leaders must identify potential faithful leaders in the "come and be with me" apprenticeship training process to perpetuate leadership development, without which, it will not be possible to achieve the Great Commission.

Opportunity for Further Study

This research provides recommendations for implementing a small groups ministry at EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries to enhance its discipleship process, considering most of its members' African roots and cultures. Some of these recommendations stem from increasing the cultural intelligence proficiency of ECDM leaders to enhance diversity in the church, notably through preaching, worship, evangelism, and a leadership management style that has a certain degree of cultural blend that is appealing to people from other cultures. However, this study did not investigate the issues of enculturation, acculturation, assimilation, and multiculturalism in the discipleship process at ECDM.

Enculturation is how people learn what is standard for their culture.³⁰⁴ It refers to the way people are socialized by their parents and peers to become acceptable members of a given

³⁰⁴ McIntosh and McMahan, *Being the Church*, 126.

society. On the other hand, acculturation is how people learn a second culture. It occurs as two cultures interact with each other.³⁰⁵ Typically, people from minority groups are expected to acculturate to the values and cultural norms of the dominant group. But the reality is that, as two cultures come into contact with each other, both groups are altered and pick up the flavor of the other.³⁰⁶ A major issue with most churches composed of a great majority of immigrants, such as ECDM, is how to maintain the identity of family, culture, and religion while at the same time learning and adapting to the culture of the new land.

Assimilation assumes or actively encourages people from a minority group to adopt the dominant culture and its values.³⁰⁷ On the other hand, multiculturalism seeks to recognize, appraise, and advocate for multiple cultures operating in a familiar context. Each group has equal access to resources and is fairly represented in governance. In contrast to assimilation strategies, which seek to combine ethnicities, multiculturalism seeks to accelerate or emphasize the difference.³⁰⁸

How much should ECDM enculturate rather than acculturate? How does its desire to blend the cultures at some level balance the need to assimilate newcomers into a communal theology and practice while recognizing all that each contributing ethnic group has to offer? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions evade quick solutions. They require further efforts to analyze how to optimally balance these various cultural strategies to enhance the discipleship proficiency of ECDM and other immigrant churches.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

Second, further research is required to understand how people adjust toward being more multicultural and get a clear picture of increasing levels of healthy multiculturalism.

Finally, additional exploration should be made to increase the understanding of how people's background, economic status, occupation, and social environment make them more open or not to a church like ECDM, which is intentional about crossing cultural boundaries and welcoming others. Such research could help ECDM and other churches with similar backgrounds understand how people from different cultures are on a journey to becoming more culturally inclusive and joining with what God is doing in their hearts and lives.

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Appendix A: Consent

A Study of Adult Discipleship Process at EndTime Christ Discipling Ministries (ECDM)

Sylvestre Bea
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to participate in a research study on the disciple-making process at ECDM. To participate, you must:

1. Be at least twenty years old at the start of the project and a parishioner of ECDM.
2. Express an interest in being an intentional contributor to the entire research process; and
3. Be willing to sign this consent and confidentiality agreement document.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

The purpose of this study is to assess and improve the disciple-making process at ECDM.

Procedure: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete preintervention and postintervention questionnaires within the respective schedule. Each questionnaire will take about 30 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in launching a workshop for the study that will take two hours
3. Participate in a face-to-face or Zoom videoconferencing individual interview with the researcher. This interview will take one hour.
4. Participate in a focus group interview that another participant will facilitate. The focus group will be approximately two hours long and will be videotaped.
5. Participate in a group interview that will include all the other participants. This group discussion will last two hours.
6. Attend a two-hour discipleship class for eight weeks.
7. All interviews will be videotaped.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from participating in this study are:

1. An expansion of their understanding of the Great Commission, the discipleship process, and roles and responsibilities in fulfilling Jesus' command.
2. Participants may also develop skills to witness more effectively, lead a small group to help others grow, and develop for Christ and His mission to their full potential.
3. Contribute to building an influential discipleship culture where adult parishioners will be willing to grow spiritually and help others do so.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of Christ's command to make disciples and what this process entails in terms of roles and responsibilities.

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

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

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes. The completed questionnaires will be deposited in a locked box located in the researcher's home. Interviews dates, times, and venues will be agreed on with participants.
- The data will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home or on the researcher's password-protected computer. Three years after the completion of the project, all research data will be destroyed.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded on an SD card and stored in a locked box. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other focus group members will not share what will be discussed with persons outside of the group.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. However, those who complete and submit the questionnaires on time will receive a \$5 gift card. The gift card will be given during a pizza party after all is completed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, ECDM, or the researcher-pastor. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sylvestre Bea. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at phone number [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Fred H. Smith, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Statement of Consent: *I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. Therefore, I consent to participate in the study.*

☐

The researcher has my permission to video-record my interview and focus group participation as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B : Preintervention Individual Questionnaire**ECDM**
Baseline information

Participant information:

Male or Female

Age group 20—29, 30—39, 40—49, 50—59, 60—and above

Length of time as a Christian:

Length of time in the church:

Leadership position, if any:

Directions: Circle the number that best expresses your level of agreement with each of these statements. Would you please use line “E” to add any additional answers you may have?

1. I invite others to the services:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

2. The church has a clear statement of vision and mission:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

3. I can state the church’s vision and mission:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

4. As a church, we are accomplishing the discipleship mandate well:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
5. The church is very clear about what we think God wants to accomplish through us over the next five to ten years:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
6. When I think about the church's future five to ten years from now, does a clear, exciting picture come to mind?
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
7. I am satisfied with the church's role in my spiritual development:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
8. The church's current approach for disciple-making meets my spiritual needs:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
9. The church has a clear strategy for growing and maturing its believers:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

10. I believe that the church is primarily responsible for my spiritual growth and development:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
11. I believe that I need to take responsibility for my spiritual growth and development:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
12. I regularly share faith with lost people:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
13. The church seems to be prospering financially:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
14. The church is experiencing numerical growth:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
15. Doing church online is an adequate means for accomplishing our mission:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

16. The church has a solid and competent ministry staff team:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
17. The church's worship is vibrant and uplifting:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
18. A small group of people is doing much of the church's ministry:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
19. The church invites constructive feedback that leads to necessary changes:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
20. The church is well aware of who lives in its geographical community:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
21. I am aware of the pressing needs of my spiritual growth:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

22. The church is aware of the pressing needs of its community:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

23. The church leaders create a relational environment for growth:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

24. I believe spiritual growth occurs best in a small group:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

25. I am relational:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

26. I am a member of a small group where I share my life:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

27. The church ministers regularly in and to its community:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

Appendix C: Post-intervention Individual Questionnaire

ECDM Baseline information

Participant information:

Male or Female

Age group 20—29, 30—39, 40—49, 50—59, 60—and above

Length of time as a Christian:

Length of time in the church:

Leadership position, if any:

Direction: Circle the number that best expresses your level of agreement with each of these statements. Would you please use line “E” to add any additional answers you may have?

1. I invite others to the services:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

2. The church has a clear statement of vision and mission:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

3. I can state the church’s vision and mission:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

4. As a church, we are accomplishing the discipleship mandate well:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
5. The church is very clear about what we think God wants to accomplish through us over the next five to ten years:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
6. When I think about the church's future five to ten years from now, does a clear, exciting picture come to mind?
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
7. I am satisfied with the church's role in my spiritual development:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
8. The church's current approach for disciple-making meets my spiritual needs:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
9. The church has a clear strategy for growing and maturing its believers:
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

10. I believe that the church is primarily responsible for my spiritual growth and development:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
11. I believe that I need to take responsibility for my spiritual growth and development:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
12. I regularly share faith with lost people:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
13. The church seems to be prospering financially:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
14. The church is experiencing numerical growth:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
15. Doing church online is an adequate means for accomplishing our mission:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

16. The church has a solid and competent ministry staff team:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
17. The church's worship is vibrant and uplifting:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
18. A small group of people is doing much of the church's ministry:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
19. The church invites constructive feedback that leads to necessary changes:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
20. The church is well aware of who lives in its geographical community:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.
21. I am aware of the pressing needs of my spiritual growth:
- A. Strongly agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
 - E.

22. The church is aware of the pressing needs of its community:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

23. The church leaders create a relational environment for growth:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

24. I believe spiritual growth occurs best in a small group:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

25. I am relational:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

26. I am a member of a small group where I share my life:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

27. The church ministers regularly in and to its community:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E.

Appendix D: Postintervention Questionnaire

(Possible questionnaire – TBD)

The second set of postintervention questions are for comparative analyses to the baseline interview questions

Would you please circle the best-fitting answer and write an answer where it is appropriate?

1. ECDM has a vision statement: YES NO NOT SURE
2. I know ECDM vision statement: YES NO NOT SURE
3. I understand Jesus' command to make disciple: YES NO NOT SURE
4. I understand what it means to follow Jesus: YES NO NOT SURE
5. I understand the mandate of the church regarding disciple-making: YES NO NOT SURE
6. I understand roles and responsibilities regarding the Great Commission: YES NO NOT SURE
7. I understand the role of apprenticeship in the discipleship process: YES NO NOT SURE
8. I understand my responsibilities in the disciple-making process. YES NO NOT SURE
9. I understand the pastor's role in the discipleship process: YES NO NOT SURE
10. I get excited about intentionally participating in ECDM disciple-making process: YES NO NOT SURE
11. Has the information presented today changed your perception of the discipleship process?
YES NO. If so, how?
12. Do you think the information presented today would benefit you or ECDM? YES NO If so, how?

Appendix E: Interview Questions

ECDM Baseline information

Interview Questions will include:

1. How long have you attended this church?
2. Where do you live?
3. How far do you drive to get to church?
4. Why do you attend this church?
5. Do you invite others to the services?
6. What is the one thing this church does best?
7. Why do people come to this church?
8. Why is this church not growing numerically?
9. What are some of the church's greatest strengths?
10. Why do people leave this church?
11. What are some of the most significant weaknesses of this church?
12. What is the vision and mission of this church?
13. As a church, how well are we accomplishing our Great Commission mandate?
14. What do you think God wants to achieve through this church over the next five to ten years?
15. What picture comes to mind when you think about this church today?
16. What image comes to mind when you think about this church five or ten years from now?
Does it excite you?
17. In what church programs and activities are you involved?
18. Are you satisfied with the church's role in your spiritual development?
19. Does the church have a clear strategy for growing and maturing its believers? If so, can you articulate it?
20. What could the church do differently to help you grow spiritually?
21. Is the church responsible for your spiritual growth and development?
22. Do you regularly share your faith with lost people?
23. Is the church prospering financially?
24. Is the church experiencing numerical growth? If not, what do you think are the roots cause of that situation?
25. Is the pastor an inspiring, intentional, and visionary leader?
26. Is the pastor a good preacher?
27. Does the church have a solid and competent ministry staff team?
28. Is the church's worship vibrant and uplifting?
29. Does the church have a vital small-group ministry?
30. Are you willing to become a small group leader?
31. Does the church invite constructive feedback and make necessary changes?
32. Who lives in the church's geographical community?
33. What are some pressing needs of our community?
34. Is the church involved in ministry in and to its community?

Appendix F: Follow-Up Interview Questions

ECDM Baseline information

The second set of interview questions for comparative analyses to the baseline interview questions

1. How can I pray for you and your family?
2. How has the church trained you in outreach?
3. How has God been at work in your life this week?
4. What has God been teaching you through Bible study and prayer?
5. How do you currently reach out to people who do not attend church?
6. What would you do if someone told you about a need that they have?
7. Are you involved in the discipleship process?
 - If yes, describe the process.
 - If no, why are you not involved?
 - What do you think the discipleship process should include?
8. How has the church trained you to lead a discipleship process?
9. How would you lead someone in a prayer to accept Christ as their savior?
10. How would explain the Great Commission?
11. How do you feel about becoming a small group leader
12. Are you identifying people in your life who have not yet accepted Christ as their savior?
 - If so, how are you identifying them?
 - If so, how are you praying for them?
13. How can I assist you in your discipleship journey?
14. Which issues have you identified in the church discipleship process?
15. What do you think should be done to improve the church disciple-making process?
16. How is an improvement of the disciple-making process evaluated?
17. What will life look like down the road if that problem is not solved?
18. Anything you would like to add?
19. What should I have asked you that I did think to ask?

Appendix G: Men's Character Assessment for Ministry

(To be handed out with the preintervention questionnaire)

Direction: Circle the number that best represents how you would rate yourself in each area.

1. I am above reproach. I have a good reputation among people in general. I have done nothing that someone could use as an accusation against me.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
2. I am the husband of one wife. I have only one wife if married, but I am not physically or mentally promiscuous, for I am focused only on her.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
3. I am "temperate." I am a well-balanced person. I do not overdo my use of alcohol, etc. I am not excessive in any behavior or given to extremes in beliefs, etc.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
4. I am "sensible." I show good judgment in life and have a proper (humble) perspective regarding myself and my abilities.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
5. I am "respectable." I conduct my life in an honorable way, and people have and show respect for me.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
6. I am "hospitable." I use my residence as a place to serve and minister to Christians and non-Christians alike.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
7. I am "able to teach." When I teach the Bible, I show an aptitude for handling the Scriptures with reasonable skill.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
8. I am "not given to drunkenness." I do so in moderation if I drink alcoholic beverages or indulge in other acceptable but potentially addictive practices.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong
9. I am "not violent." I am under control. I do not lose control to the point that I strike or cause damage to other people or their property.
Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

10. I am "gentle." I am a kind, meek (not weak), and a forbearing person who does not insist on his rights or resort to violence.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

11. I am "not quarrelsome." I am an uncontentious peacemaker who avoids hostile situations with people.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

12. I am "not a lover of money." Making money is not a top priority for me. I seek first his righteousness, knowing that God will supply my needs.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

13. I manage my family well. If I am married and have a family, my children are believers who obey me with respect. People do not think of or accuse them of being wild or disobedient.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

14. I am "not a recent convert." I am not a new Christian, and I do not constantly struggle with pride and conceit.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

15. I have "a good reputation with outsiders." Though most people may disagree with my religious convictions, they still respect me as a person.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

16. I am "not overbearing." I am not self-willed, stubborn, or arrogant.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

17. I am not quick-tempered. I am not inclined toward anger (an angry person), and I do not lose my temper quickly and easily.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

18. I am "not pursuing dishonest gain." I am not fond of or involved in any wrongful practices that result in a fraudulent gain.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

19. I love what is good. I love the things that honor God.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

20. I am "upright." I live following the laws of God and man.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

21. I am holy. I am a devout person whose life is generally pleasing to God.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

22. I hold firmly to the faith. I understand, hold to, and attempt to guard
God's truth. I also encourage others while refuting those who oppose the truth.
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------|
| Weak | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Strong |
|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------|

Appendix H: Women's Character Assessment for Ministry

(To be handed out with the preintervention questionnaire)

Direction: Circle the number that best represents how you would rate yourself in each area.

1. I am worthy of respect. Most people who know me respect me and tend to honor me as a dignified person who is serious about spiritual things.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

2. I am not a malicious talker. I do not defame people, whether believers or unbelievers.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

3. I am "temperate." I am a well-balanced person. I do not overdo my use of alcohol, etc. I am not excessive in my behavior or given to extremes in beliefs, etc.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

4. I am trustworthy in everything. The Lord and people find me to be a faithful person in everything.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

5. I live reverently. I have a deep respect for God and live in awe of him.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

6. I am not addicted to much wine. If I drink alcoholic beverages, I do so in moderation. I am not addicted to them.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

7. I teach what is good. I share with other women what God has taught me from his Word and life in general.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

8. I love my husband. If I am married, I love my husband according to 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

9. I love my children. If I am married and have children, I love my children.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

10. I am self-controlled. I do not let other people or things run my life, and I am not a person of extremes or excessive behavior.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

11. I am pure. I am not involved emotionally or physically in sexual immorality.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

12. I am busy at home. If I am a married person, then I take care of my responsibilities at home.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

13. I am kind. I am essentially a good person.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

14. I am subject to my husband. I let my husband take responsibility for and lead our marriage if I am married, and I follow his lead.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

15. I have a gentle and quiet spirit. I am a mild, easygoing person who wins others over by a pure and reverent life more than by my words.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

16. I dress modestly. I wear clothing that is decent and shows the propriety

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

17. I do good deeds. I do appropriate things for women who profess to know and worship God.

Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Strong

Appendix I: IRB Approval

IRB Approval

September 28, 2021

Sylvestre Bea
Fred Smith

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-246 Addressing the Issue of Low Discipleship Among Adults

Dear Sylvestre Bea and Fred Smith,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

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

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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

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LETTER OF PERMISSION

June 13, 2022

Liberty University
Attn: Sylvestre Bea
[REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to make two (2) print copies of the following material from *The Disciple-Making Church* by Bill Hull:

- "A Church-Centered Discipleship Making Plan" from page 232
- "Leadership Community" from page 233
- "Developing Expanding Networks of Small Groups" from page 234
- "Leadership-Community Time" from page 235

You indicated this material will be used in your dissertation, titled "Addressing the Issue of Low Discipleship Among Adults," at Liberty University.

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To: Bea, Sylvestre [REDACTED]
Subject: [External] Re: Act-On Form Submit Alert (Form: Permissions Form New, Submitter: sbea@liberty.edu)

Hi Sylvestre,

Thanks for writing! Yes, you may have permission to quote the figure on p.139 of Patrick Morley's book *Pastoring Men* in your doctoral dissertation, provided that you adequately cite the source.

Best of luck!



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