

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DISCIPLING
CHURCH CONGREGANTS USING THREE CHRIST-PRACTICED
CHURCH COMMUNITIES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Bryan Wade Ewing

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the perceived impact of local church leadership's implementation of three Christ-practiced discipling communities for the equipping of local-church congregants within six local bodies in the state of Indiana. Communities are generally defined as intentional groups of different purposes within the local church. The study sought to better understand the impact of congregants being involved in weekly, corporate worship, small groups, and mentorship groups in their discipleship journey. The rationale behind the study was to explore the phenomenon of the discipleship process as certain congregants were engaged in only a weekly worship service, while some were engaged in a weekly worship service and a small group, and still, some were involved in both previous communities as well as an intentional mentorship group. How would these congregants perceive their discipleship journey including their own abilities to disciple someone else based upon their engagement in the communities of the church? Would those who were engaged in all three communities feel better equipped to serve in ministry and disciple someone else or would there be little difference between the three groups of congregants engaging in the three different communities? A sample size of 10 congregants, purposefully selected and qualified from each engagement group, were surveyed from each of the six churches involved in the study. This allowed for 7-32 participants from each church and 27-48 participants in each category for a total of 106 participants. This allowed for convincing congruencies between congregants involved in each of the communities and their perceived abilities to serve and lead in ministry.

Keywords: Discipleship, disciple-making, disciple, proxemics, explore, The Great Commission, relational ministry, leadership.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my wonderful wife Michelle and to my children, Malachi and Titus, who patiently endured the many years of college work at the dining room table. You have inspired me to become the best husband and father that I can be. I am truly blessed because of you guys.

To my parents, Robert and Nancy, and my stepparents, Dave and Cheryl, who supported me through this process by always asking how things were going and caring enough to listen. I value those phone calls more than you know.

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I thank Jesus for giving me the opportunity to do ministry each day and for giving me the path to become a better pastor and leader. I pray that this degree would be used to glorify Your kingdom and to bring more people to Christ. I am humbled by Your grace and love in my life.

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New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

In Matthew 28, Jesus speaks his final words to his disciples gathered on the mountain of Galilee. This passage in scripture, known as The Great Commission, was Jesus passing the baton of his ministry to those who had been within the inner circle of his ministry for the previous three and a half years. This commission is not for Jesus' present disciples alone but for all those who would follow in their footsteps as well. The command is based upon Jesus' authority (Matthew 28:18) and gives a final and lifelong instruction to the behavior and focus of all forthcoming disciples of Christ. Making disciples is thus the focus and goal that Jesus desires for the present group of disciples as well as the future church. The core value of disciple-making is integral to church success and church growth but has often been abandoned for other well-meaning but lesser goals within the American church. Thus, the church's ability to expand through maturity and multiplication has suffered greatly. Values such as preaching, teaching, and evangelism have replaced disciple-making. Though these are indeed important within the context of disciple-making, they are parts of the whole rather than the whole itself.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the nature of discipleship communities in a local church and the church's ability to disciple and equip congregants. The communities, the large group, small groups, and mentoring groups, became an essential vehicle for Jesus in the maturation of his disciples. One might question how well these groups further the disciple-making process in the local body today, or wonder how far the church has come in intentionally developing communities better suited for disciple-making and growth?" The Great Commission, after all, was not only given to the eleven remaining disciples after Jesus' ascension but was given to all followers of Jesus as the central value and purpose of the church

as a whole. So how has the church employed these relational communities, and to what degree have they impacted the discipleship of others because of their engagement in them?

Background of the Problem

As local church engagement and attendance have declined from 60% of Americans in 2000 to just 46% in 2015 (Barna, 2016), church leaders have sought solutions to cure the problem. Some have advanced new ways to engage younger people through the use of social media and a dynamic online presence requiring only an internet connection for people to view their services. Some have argued that the presence of an online option has had an immediate effect on the community of the local church by serving to distance people from one another and by promoting more of a consumer mindset within local congregations. Dunkelman (2014) cites the overuse of online mediums such as social media as one primary source of dividing the American community. This division has had an impact on the local church as many congregants feel they are getting the same experiences from the church be it in person or by watching online. Many pastors believe that this has created a lack of intimate community within the local body of believers (Barna, 2015).

The dominant literature on this issue suggests that many church leaders are taking a biblical approach to the connecting and growing of their congregants (Barna, 2015; Beagles, 2012; Chester & Timmis, 2008). Some church leaders have sought not a new way of connecting with others, but an ancient one. Based on Jesus' final words in the Gospel of Matthew, also known as The Great Commission, many church leaders have focused on making disciples. Experts (Barna, 2001; Chan, 2012; Wheeler, 2015) in the field of disciple-making address this resurgence by addressing questions such as, 'What is a disciple?' and 'How does one become a disciple?' and 'How does one disciple someone else?' The answers to these questions have

helped to shape, at least in part, a new wave of leaders who have shifted their focus away from seeing their Sunday attendance grow and instead have realigned their visions with seeing their people grow closer in a relationship with and imitation of Christ. Deffinbaugh (2010) writes about the shift in focus that many church pastors have made departing from counting the attendance as a focus to the health of those attending as the focus. With this shift, these leaders have sought guidance in the area of disciple-making to transform their ministries.

In his book *Discipleshift*, Jim Putman (2008) asserts that “Discipleship is, and should be, the core value of the church” (p 11). Attaching himself to Jesus' commission, Spader (2013) argues that discipleship and disciple-making are different in nature with discipleship commonly defined as helping believers grow. Spader further argues that disciple-making is the “...whole process of reaching the lost, building up the new believers, and then equipping the workers to repeat the process in the lives of others” (p. 15). Spader points out that theologically speaking, Jesus did not call his disciples to discipleship, but to disciple-making. This distinction, though seemingly minor, has a significant impact on discipleship. It assumes that the individual is first a believer, thus making discipleship “downstream” from disciple-making.

In his book *Multiply*, Chan (2012) addresses the issue found within many local congregations by noting that “...most Christians today are not known for making disciples. We have developed a culture where a minister ministers and the rest of us sit back and enjoy ‘church’ from a comfortable distance” (p. 11). According to Barna (2015), some 37% of professing Christians surveyed believed that discipleship best occurs on their own without the involvement in a local community. Thus, the call to discipleship in the minds of many local church congregants has been outsourced to vocational church staff exclusively.

What is often missed by congregants is that the call of disciple-making is not simply to vocational pastors, but to all of those who follow Christ. Barna (2015) reports that of those surveyed, 41% of practicing Christians believe that spiritual growth should be entirely private with only 21% believing that spiritual growth should include a variety of local church communities. The study resolves that “The pluralities of Christian adults who prefer solitary spiritual pursuit are worrisome for long-term spiritual health” (Barna, 2015, p. 47). This suggests that not only are congregants willing to believe that if discipleship were to occur that it would be the responsibility of a vocational staff member. Many also believe that their spiritual growth into disciples can be done on their own.

Attempting to separate disciple-making from any sort of church community seems to be growing in popularity among professing Christians in America. Yet Chester and Timmis (2008) argue that spiritual growth needs to function around content and context. They say “...the content is consistently the Christian gospel, and the context is consistently the Christian community” (p. 16). Their point is that spiritual maturation cannot be separated from Christian community despite the opinion of some professing Christians. This focus on community is what transformed the early church in Acts 2. In verses 42-47, Luke writes,

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ***And all the believers were together and had all things in common***; and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. ***And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*** (Acts 2:42-47, emphasis added)

The community of the first church was not only together but had everything in common. The result was that God added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Thus, the call of Christians is to actively engage in the local church community.

There is a gap in the literature as to what, if any, extent intentional local church communities affect the disciple-making process. The lack of a detailed study into the influence of church communities on the disciple-making process of congregants calls for further examination. Several writers have undertaken the task of focusing on one aspect of the local church community such as the need for small groups or one-on-one mentoring. However, few have offered an examination of how these communities can possibly work together with specific but different purposes, to form a cohesive community leading to discipleship. Barna (2015) has shown the need for leaders to focus on disciple-making. Chan (2012), Putman (2013), and Egli (2018) offer methods of discipling but the nature of the community in which disciple-making is to occur is left undefined. Harrington and Absalom (2016) examined different communities of disciple-making, but their argument lacks the experiences of both the leader within the church and the congregant with regard to how the process is working. Additional research is needed to further the understanding of the impact of intentional disciple-making communities on the congregants' ability to be equipped and be sent to disciple others.

The Call to Christian Community

Within God's Word, the emphasis on the importance of community is evident within the Christian walk. Jesus had a community of 70 that he encouraged, equipped, and sent into the world. He had a small group of twelve that he equipped to a greater depth and subsequently also sent into the world. From the Twelve, he had an even smaller group of three (Peter, James, and John) that were able to experience Jesus to an even greater degree than the twelve or the 70. In Acts 2, following Jesus' ascension, the founding members of the original church gathered in Christian community. Verses 42-44 outline how those who continued to follow Christ operated.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all the believers were together and had all things in common...

It is clear that both Jesus himself and the early church valued the Christian community as central to the response to and development of one's faith.

Also, the apostle Paul's writings illuminate the importance and need for Christian community. Almost all of Paul's letters are written to communities in geographical areas. When addressing these groups, it is true that Paul does sometimes refer to individuals, but they are never separate from the groups to which they belong. In accordance with an individual's behavior, Paul identifies individuals based on their groups. In Galatians 2, Paul addresses an issue with Peter by saying. "But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:14) Paul addresses Peter's behavior in the context of the group to which Peter belongs. Samra (2006) suggests that for Paul, no individual exists apart from and is unaffected by the group(s) (or communities) to which he or she belongs. Thus. The call to Christian community within the pages of Scripture is clear for the church then, and now.

Literature Gap

There is a gap in the current literature regarding the impact of intentional communities within the local church. In the field of discipleship (or disciple-making) there is an abundance of work primarily dedicated to answering the *who* and the *how* of discipling. Books, articles, blogs, and even conferences on the subject abound addressing how one is to select the right person to disciple and even more about how the discipling process is to go once an agreement of discipleship is made on the part of both parties. Yet very little is dedicated to an intentionally

holistic approach to establishing discipleship communities. Some have written on the importance of intentionally developing the weekly service. In contrast, others have written about the importance of small groups, and still, others have focused their attention on one-on-one mentoring. Yet none have attempted to address these communities as an intentional approach to discipleship from the perspective of the local church. Within the current literature, there is almost a debate about which of the communities the local church should focus on driving many in the church to abandon one for another. Thus, research is needed to explore the complementary nature of each of these communities examining their different purposes and different designs. Such research could move local churches from an “either/or” approach to a better understanding of how these groups work together.

Researcher's Relationship to the Research

The researcher is currently a vocational pastoral staff member at a small local body in northwest Indiana. The research seeks to develop a more holistic approach to disciple-making. This interest is due to the fact that he serves as the associate of both worship and youth ministries in the church where opportunities to disciple adults and students alike are presented on a weekly basis. Over his seven years in ministry, the researcher has seen the need for disciple-making in the local church and has also witnessed the lack of intentionality that many local churches exhibit in this process.

Striving to better understand the process of disciple-making, the researcher has examined Jesus' methods and anticipates finding congruence between specific relational contexts for discipling as seen in Jesus' ministry and the equipping of congregants to be sent to make disciples themselves. This research explored the phenomenon of disciple-making in these

specific relational communities with the hope of better equipping congregants to go and make disciples.

Statement of the Problem

This study attempted to understand the congruence between select local church's intentional development of three relational communities as demonstrated by Jesus, and each church's ability to disciple, grow and equip her congregants for ministry (Eph. 4:11-14). This study thus gained meaningful data from three categories of churches to see what the perceived impact these communities have on the discipleship of congregants. The researcher first examined, through interviews, the perceived success of the local churches from the perspective of the pastoral staff. Congregants were surveyed to compare their perception of the staff with the perceived discipling and equipping of the congregants to see if there was any congruency between the church's intentional offering of specific communities and a positive impact of discipling in the church. This data was then used to establish a possible precedent for other churches to employ a disciple-making strategy in their ministries to further the kingdom through an intentional development of specific local-church communities.

For this study, disciple-making is referred to as the entire process of walking alongside an individual from his or her life without a relationship with Christ to their maturation as a disciple-maker themselves. It was also understood that many individuals who are disciplined through the disciple-making process did not begin in the same spiritual place. In other words, not all people being disciplined within any of the local churches being included in this study needed to have been an unbeliever first. They may have started their discipleship journey from a place of belief and even have already begun a process of moving through the spiritual maturation process. The starting point for each individual being disciplined is of little relevance. What is of chief concern

for this study is that the church has a process in place and is striving to mature believers to the point that they are sent as disciple-makers themselves.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to discover the perceived impact of local church leadership's intentional implementation of three Christ-practiced discipling communities for the equipping of local-church congregants within six local church bodies in the state of Indiana. For the purpose of this study, the term "community" was generally defined as intentional groups of different sizes and purposes with the expressed goal of building relationships with both Christ and others in the local church. The theory guiding this study is Edward Hall's (1966) Theory of Proxemics as it has been applied to church structures by Harrington and Absalom (2013). Applying these theories was the foundation for suggesting that individuals within local bodies are better equipped for good works of ministry (Eph. 4:11-13) when involved in all three discipling communities used by Jesus during his ministry.

Research Questions

The following research questions were considered throughout this study:

RQ1. How are the communities of a local church intentionally used to disciple congregants?

RQ2. What are the perspectives of local-church leaderships regarding equipping their congregants for ministry?

RQ3. What are the perspectives of local-church congregants regarding their own abilities to lead in church ministry?

RQ4. What are the perceived benefits of engagement in one, two, or all three local-church communities regarding discipling congregants?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption made within this dissertation is that the pastoral staff being interviewed had disciple-making as a spiritual priority in their own lives and ministries. This means that they have cast a vision for disciple-making within their local bodies and are themselves engaged in the active process of disciple-making. Also, the congregants being surveyed needed to be engaged in either one, two, or all three communities that their local church offers. This means that from each of the six churches participating, there were select congregants that were surveyed who were engaged in one, two, and all three communities. The researcher attempted to gain at least 30-45 surveys from each church within the designated communities of engagement (10-15 each community).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to six churches within the state of Indiana. The weekly attendance of the churches (before COVID) was 200+ in size. The study also was delimited to Protestant churches. This included Christian Church (Restored), Baptists, Methodists, Non-denominational churches, Christ of Christ, and Disciples of Christ churches. It was further delimited to churches with the same full-time senior pastor for the previous five years.

The intended research population was the church's executive leadership teams, including pastoral staff and possible elders, of six qualifying churches and up to 45 non-randomly selected congregants of the same churches. The participants in these churches had a lead pastor that had consistently been at that local church for more than five years. Also, both the pastoral staff and eldership had been a part of developing the core values that currently define the vision of the local church.

Definition of Terms

1. *Local Church*: The gathering of congregants at a specific place and time as a local group of Christian believers.
2. *Growth*: The individual maturity through discipleship that leads to the congregant feeling equipped to do ministry (Putman, 2008)
3. *Disciple*: (1) One who follows Christ in philosophy and practice, (2) allows Christ to transform them into the follower he desires them to be, and (3) is sent to make other disciples for Christ (Matthew 4:19)
4. *Committed Congregant*: A congregant who is committed to the group(s) that they are engaged in. Committed Congregant does not denote the level of engagement of the congregant but rather the commitment in which the congregant regardless of their level of engagement.
5. *Engaged Congregant*: Referring to the level of the congregant's engagement within the local body. This could be level 1 (corporate, weekly worship), level 2 (Weekly worship and a small group) or level 3 (weekly worship, small group, and a mentorship group).
6. *Large Group*: The gathering of an entire local body regardless of the size for the purpose of weekly worship (Harrington and Absalom, 2016, p. 64)
7. *Local-Church Communities*: A regularly (weekly) gathering body of Christ-following believers that corporately congregate for the purpose of worship, prayer, and instruction.
8. *Small Group*: The gathering of a coed or single-sex group ranging from 4-20 people in size for the purpose of experiencing relational closeness, support, and the opportunity to be challenged (Harrington and Absalom, 2016, p. 130).
9. *Mentorship Group*: The gathering of a single-sex group ranging from one-on-one to one-on-three in size for the purpose of going deeper and being transparent with one another (Harrington and Absalom, 2016, p. 160).

Significance of the Study

In 2015, the Barna Group (2015) conducted a study of the state of discipleship in the American church. Surveying leaders, practicing Christians, and non-practicing Christians alike, they collected data spanning many categories to better understand exactly the condition of

discipleship in the church as well as the perceived success of local church leaders. They concluded that 68% of Christians felt comfortable with where they were spiritually while 28% even believed that Christians should not need to work on their faith as well as 28% saying that their faith was not an essential aspect of their lives. The significance of this study is that the people being surveyed were all professing Christians and not non-believers. Almost 3/10 of these professing Christians believe that their faith is not important and that Christians should need to work on their faith. The study illuminates the need for a push toward disciple-making even within the walls of the local churches in America.

How are these local churches to respond to this lack of belief even among their own congregants? Putman (2013) suggests that the local church's focus, or "primary emphasis that it commits its time and resources to achieve", should be the core value of disciple-making. Three distinct bits of understanding can help local church leaders transform their ministries toward this core value.

First, understanding *who* to disciple is essential. Jesus speaks about the "person of peace" in Luke 10:5-6 indicating that not everyone is able to be discipled at the moment that a particular believer reaches them. The second is understanding *how* a leader or layperson is to go about discipling a willing person. Putman (2013) refers to this as the combination of Jesus' teachings with Jesus' methodologies. He says that the two components cannot be divorced to attain the same results that Jesus had. Finally, the environment, or *where*, disciple-making occurs is an essential aspect of disciple-making. It is this final aspect of disciple-making that this study focused on with local churches.

This research in this study seeks to gain a better understanding of how, if in any way, engagement in three specific and intentional communities of the local church impact of the

development of disciples of that church's congregants. There is a wealth of information regarding the *who* and *how* of disciple-making, yet very little is known about the impact of where disciple-making occurs.

The Barna Group's (2015) research indicates that of the leaders surveyed, there is a great emphasis on these specific communities within the local church. Leaders report that they valued disciple-making within their church, yet they were conflicted regarding the impact of engaging their member in particular communities within the church. While over 85% reported that discipleship was influential in the local church, less than 60% valued both small groups and mentorship groups as communities of discipleship.

Summary of the Design

The pastoral staff teams were interviewed for a total of no more than one hour each (six total) to establish their perceived success discipling their congregants. Subsequently, select congregants from each church were surveyed through a link provided in an email sending them to the survey instrument. This survey included a statement with Likert scale responses followed by an open-ended aspect attached to each question. Following data collection, the researcher discarded the quantitative data leaving only the qualitative data for analysis (Pinzer, 2017). This qualified the study's methodology as being qualitative only and not mixed methods.

The study included participants from the six qualifying churches based on the virtual or in-person interviews with the senior pastors of the churches. Churches and their leadership teams were qualified through this prescreening process and had been sent a letter of approval outlining the study before any data is collected. The initial prescreening commitments included more than the study's desired number of local churches, but the process eventually yielded close to the desired amount of only six participating churches.

The process followed these steps:

- A letter inviting qualifying churches was sent to the senior pastors
- A research schedule was established for the six interviews
- Interviews were conducted via Zoom or face-to-face depending on proximity
- A letter inviting 30 congregants from each qualifying church was emailed from the church's leadership dividing the participants into three groups of 10 (one from each category of engagement of whole group, whole group, and small group, and all three groups in the church)
- A 38-question survey was sent out to the participants of each church to complete
- Recording of the interviews was transcribed for use in data tables comparing the perceived effect of engagement against the results of the surveys.
- The data from the surveys were categorized into three groups of engagement and placed on data tables for analysis.
- Analysis of the data allowed for a determination as to what degree of future research needs to be conducted on the subject.

As a phenomenological study following a qualitative methodology, the research was done in two parts, including interviews of the pastoral staff followed by open-question surveys. This in-depth interview and survey process allowed the study to take place over a six-week time frame where the interview portion took place either face-to-face or through a Zoom call with the designated pastoral staff. In contrast, the surveyed participants were emailed a 38-question response survey. Furthermore, the experiences from interviews and the survey questions were collected and processed to see if there was a congruency between the church pastoral staff's perceived discipleship success and the congregants' perceived equipping to do ministry through their engagement and discipleship in the one or more of the three communities. The leaders indicate that spiritual growth occurs in large groups (65%), or Sunday morning worship service, small group studies (90%), and one-on-one discipleship/mentorship groups (65%) (Barna, 2015,

p. 112). However, these same leaders say that the church is only doing very well or somewhat well in its discipleship process at 21%. Those who said the church was doing not well or not at all well was 77% of those surveyed. This research attempts to further understand how intentionally promoting these three communities in the local church can influence the discipleship process and equip its congregants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The call to discipleship is not a new endeavor. Nevertheless, many churches, pastors, and lay-Christians choose a different focus as the purpose of their own local church communities. For instance, most churches have a weekly corporate worship service that brings together each person in their church. They might also have several small group Bible studies that meet throughout the week. Even still, some churches have designed discipleship groups that focus on individuals being transparent with one another about the issues in their lives. Perhaps this is due to the business of life or the pursuit of an alternative cause, or maybe it is because of the implications of the call itself. Bonhoeffer (1963) writes, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die” (p. 99). This is not an appealing call for most modern people and churches because it violates an established comfort that people inherently desire.

Regarding the “alternative causes” many people and churches pursue, the source of their inception is placed at the feet of humanity. Bonhoeffer (1963) emphasizes this point by saying, “...the pure Word of Jesus has been overlaid with so much human ballast- burdensome rules and regulations, false hopes and consolations- that it has become tough to make a genuine decision for Christ” (p. 38) This overlaying of human ballast has weighed down the church as if with a millstone causing it to sink increasingly more profound into the dark water choking and drowning the call and commission of Christ.

Thus, the beginning of understanding the call and pursuit of discipleship in the church must begin with Jesus as he instituted the church. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus departs this world by saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...”

(NASB). Jesus' commission is direct and straightforward, yet it is the complexity of human doctrine that often muddies the water of discipleship.

John provides an example of Jesus' call, and those who are called, immediately entering into discipleship. John 1:43-46 says,

The next day He [Jesus] purposed to go into Galilee, and He *found Philip. And Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and *said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see. (John 1:43-46)

Note that Philip, having no training by human hands, immediately began discipling Nathaniel by simply inviting him to meet Jesus. Philip had taken no discipleship 101 classes at his local church, nor had he entered a phase-by-phase human process of discipleship. He had simply heard the call of Christ and subsequently engaged in inviting someone else to come and see the claims of Christ. Understanding that discipleship *is* based upon Jesus' ministry, *what* defines a disciple according to Jesus, and what role specific communities play in the process of discipleship based upon Jesus' chosen communities allows for a comprehensive guide for churches to disciple others.

Theological Framework

What is a disciple?

Before discussing the theological framework of the communities of discipleship, it is first essential to gain an in-depth understanding of what a disciple is and the necessary call for Christians and churches to engage in discipling as a primary goal. Establishing a baseline by which the theological framework of discipleship communities should be understood allows for an agreed-upon starting point for this research inquiry.

It might be assumed that the call to discipleship would begin with The Great Commission in Matthew 28, given by Jesus to his remaining disciples. However, The Great Commission was given and based upon an already established model and trend demonstrated by Jesus years earlier. In Matthew 4, Jesus calls his first disciples and, in doing so, established what it means to be a disciple and what the process of discipleship would look like. In verse 19, Jesus says, "Follow Me [Jesus], and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, NASB). It is here that the theological framework for discipleship and the definition of a disciple is established by Jesus.

Within this verse in Matthew, Jesus calls his first disciples. He allowed them to accept the total weight of being a disciple. Harrington and Absalom (2016) suggest three distinct elements of a disciple of Jesus. First, the disciple must follow Jesus (Follow me). Staying in the same place doing what the individual was doing before is not the conduct of a disciple. They must follow Jesus. Second, the disciple must be humble enough to be transformed by Jesus (...and I will make you...). There must be a measurable change to be more like Christ. Finally, the disciple must adopt the mission and values of Jesus by being willing to pursue his mission (..fishers of men). A disciple, therefore, is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and is committed to Jesus' kingdom mission. The greatest joy for a Christian is experiencing the full life that Jesus promised (John 10:10) by becoming like Jesus in every way, including discipling (Harrington & Absalom, 2016).

Agreeing with this sentiment, A.W. Tozer (2018) explains what constitutes a disciple of Christ in further depth. He suggests that the church often defines the application of knowledge with maturity and growth as a disciple in Western culture. Yet Tozer explains that knowledge, though necessary, is only the first step and does not equal what it means to be a disciple. Knowledge must also lead to moral commitment. For Tozer, the knowledge and moral

commitment must lead to transformation (...and I will make you...) in the disciple's life. He likens the journey of a disciple to soiled clothes, which eventually will not only become more soiled themselves but will end up dirtying the individual they are attached to. Tozer suggests that being a disciple required cleansing and prior to cleansing is an understanding of the knowledge gained. He says, "...there must be a moral commitment [from the disciple]. If there is not, there is no understanding. If there is no understanding, there is no cleansing" (Tozer, 2018, p. 31). Tozer finished by asserting that true disciples of Christ are ones that obey his truth revealed by the Holy Spirit and ones who are enjoying their freedom in Jesus Christ.

Furthering and simplifying the understanding of what a disciple actually is, Lucas (2019) offers this that a disciple is "...a follower of Christ who hears, obeys, and shares the Good News [of Christ] with others, then trains them to do the same" (p. 5). This explanation is simple yet allows for the reader to understand that not only is a disciple of Christ one who hears from Christ, obeys what they hear, and shares what they hear, but that the disciple is someone who also trains others to do the same things. This means that to fully be a disciple of Christ, one must eventually, and intentionally, train more disciples. The necessity of Christ's direct disciples, the remaining 11 men, and those who would come after, all Christians who proceeded after the 11 disciples, is not only to focus the attention on self-development but an outward process of seeing others become discipled as well.

The Great Commission explained

Before entertaining the idea of the communities in which discipleship might best occur, an essential examination of Matthew 28:19-20 needs to be pursued. Within this passage, The Great Commission, Jesus instructs his disciples to,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded

you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20, NASB).

Burchard (2013) suggests that within the Greek language of this verse there is one imperative part and three participle words. There is one “do this!” command and three “here’s how to do it” parts.

The English rendering of the “do this!” is “make disciples” while the participles are “go, baptize, and teach.” Burchard (2013) sees a minor but significant problem with the English rendering in that it places an imperative verb followed by a noun “make (imperative verb) disciples (noun).” The oldest copy of this text, in Greek, makes no such suggestion by simply offering the imperative verb to “disciple!” For Burchard (2013), the English rendering strips Jesus of his transformative responsibilities by placing them on the one who is doing the discipling. Referring back to Matthew 4:19, Jesus indicates that it is he that does the transforming (...I will make you...) and not his followers. Instead, Jesus’ disciples, both then and now, are responsible to “Disciple!” while allowing him to do the making and transforming (Matthew 28:19-20, Matthew 4:19). This simple shift in mindset can have a profound effect on the approach a church has to the communities in which they engage in discipleship and what they expect because of these communities.

Communities of Discipleship

But do environments, or communities, really matter when it comes to discipling people? It stands to reason that if specific communities do indeed matter, then two distinct criteria would be fulfilled. First, does Jesus in the context of his ministry utilize these communities, and second, are the communities’ application also seen within other parts of the New Testament?

In *Discipleship That Fits*, Harrington and Absolam (2016) suggest five contexts in which a Christian lives their life. These contexts are the public context, the social context, the personal

context, the transparent context, and the divine context. Though this researcher agrees with each of the contexts, the inquiry of this research project was only focused on those that involve the development of others within the local church. Thus, the public context (evangelism) and divine context (individual growth with God), though they are both crucially important, was not to be the focus on this research.

Instead, the focus revolved around the contexts, or communities, of social, personal, and transparent communities. For the purpose of this research project, these three communities are generally referred to as “whole groups”, “small groups”, and “mentorship groups.” As Harrington and Absalom determined these contexts (groups) by their physical proximity from one person to another, this research divided respondents by their engagement in the local church communities.

Whole Group

The theological approach to whole group is the most common within the American culture as it applies to the local church. For the purpose of this investigation, the idea of the whole group will refer specifically to a local church as a whole body. The size can vary from congregation to congregation and can be in the hundreds (Harrington and Absalom, 2016).

Using the two criteria already discussed, a theological approach to whole group must begin with its application by Jesus and in other Scriptures. In Luke 10:1-11, Jesus sends out 70 (or 72) “others” to prepare the way for him as he was to enter many towns. The exact nature of the 70 that were sent is not discussed within the text, but it is evident that they had been equipped and sent to do good works (Eph. 4:11-13) by Jesus. In Matthew 16 when Jesus asks the disciples whom they believe he is, Peter’s answer gets this response from Jesus: “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build My church**; and the gates of Hades will not overpower

it” (Matthew 16:18, NASB, emphasis added). It is clear that Jesus not only loves and establishes the church, but he also equipped a whole group of people (the seventy) to proclaim the good news.

When it comes to the local church it is also important to identify that many people in America no longer see the need and benefit of the local church. McConnell and McKinley (2016) see the parachurch movement as a possible problem that could hinder the local church. As in many movements, the parachurch movement is designed to come alongside the local church serving in specific ways that the local church either does not have the resources to do or does not have the manpower to provide as a ministry. The idea of the parachurch and its design is not intrinsically opposed to the local church however, McConnell and McKinley argue that many individuals have begun replacing their involvement in the local church with their service in a para-church organization.

They argue that the implementation of the parachurch, not by those who organize it but by those who misuse it, undercuts the fact that Paul wrote nine of his thirteen letters to local church bodies and the other four to individuals as instruction on how they should function within those local churches. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul writes, “And He put all things in subjection under his feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23, NASB).

McConnell and McKinley (2016) also promote the idea that it is within the local church that people grow and receive accountability to others. They write, “The local church is also important in the life of every professing Christian since it is here that we learn doctrine, receive reproof, and train in righteousness” (p. 88). In Ephesians, Paul reminds the local church of its responsibility by saying that Christ himself

gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13, NASB).

In a quantitative research study, Beagles (2012) saw an increase in spiritual growth in young people when they were engaged in the local church as a part of their discipleship process. The community of the local church allowed for more access to teaching doctrine and engaging growth beyond, and in addition to, other communities such as the family unit. She writes,

Not only do Christian young people need this type of community beyond their nuclear family, but these communities could be the very agency that could fill this need for the children and young people of our modern culture who are not already part of church 'family' and who have no other authoritative community of any kind (p.155).

The ideas of "authoritative communities" and "observational spiritual modeling" are practical applications that Christian families, Christian teachers, and the local church congregation could all make in their attempts to improve their equipping/discipling of adolescents. The bedrock of this equipping, however, needs to be the local church congregation (Beagles, 2012).

The importance of the local church community within the context of discipleship seems to be a starting block of personal and corporate development. It cannot be replaced by, but can be supported by, another community.

Small Groups

Following the already established criteria, the theological framework for small groups must first be rooted in Jesus' application as a discipler. Though Jesus' small group of disciples begins in Matthew 4:19, it continues until he has a total of twelve. This small group didn't simply meet with Jesus once per week to have a potluck and study some motivational Scriptures. Instead, they literally followed Jesus, learned from him daily, and lived with him. Though Jesus has many "followers," this group of disciples saw an even deeper picture of Christ. They were

closer to Jesus than the average follower seeing him walk on water, being taught by Jesus beyond the general teachings to larger groups (Matthew 11:1), and even being given power and authority over disease and demons (Luke 9:1-6). This small group functioned differently than the seventy because of their proximity to Jesus.

In the book of Acts, it is written,

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house**, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:46-47, NASB, emphasis added).

The idea of “breaking bread from house to house” would indicate that these household meetings were not “whole group” meetings but rather “small group” meetings of 15 to 20 or so.

Ogundiran (2013) suggests that one of the most effective strategies for discipleship in America is through the community of small groups within the local church. He proposes that

They [individuals within the church] grow within a supportive structure, and with a strategic approach. Thus, the discipleship process is a well-thought-out strategy in a sustaining structure, otherwise, any disciple produced in a haphazard and unstructured system is very likely to end up in failure (p. 53).

The haphazard and unstructured system Ogundiran refers to is the assumption that disciples magically grow organically without intentional, strategic purpose, and direction.

Though Ogundiran’s (2013) focus is on the development of leaders in the local church, the placement of said leaders is to lead small groups. Small groups are an essential strategic element of discipleship for Ogundiran. He writes,

Experience shows that leadership development and discipleship happens best in the small group ministry of a local church...The churches experiencing explosive and healthy growth are churches that are raising up disciple-making leaders in their small groups to lead their small groups (p. 66).

One aspect in which small groups differs from the local church as a whole is in its designated purpose. As Jesus gathered, trained, and sent out the seventy so the local church

should collect, train (teaching), and send out the church into the world. This purpose is very important, but it is not the only result of discipling. Discipling others aim to provide accountability and depth that is not attainable within the “whole group” setting. Small groups serve a different but equally important function for those in the church. This includes accountability, authenticity, and in-depth teaching and instruction. In *Church is a Team Sport*, Putman (2008) writes that “Churches can be full of pretentious people trying to make an impression. If everyone is fake, there can be no accountability... authentic discipleship happens in small groups (p. 188).

This level of authenticity and accountability cannot, and is not designed to, take place only once a week on Sunday mornings during “whole group” settings. According to Connolly (1996), there is a danger for the Christian that is not engaged in a small group. He writes

The primary roadblock to both personal maturity and biblical relationships is sin: sin in our lives; sin in others’ lives; a world because of sin. In each of these areas, we can find great help and hope in a committed relationship that can grow out of small groups” (p. 67).

Thus, for Connolly, the presence of small groups as a community within the church is central for the growth of the Christian.

In a closer examination of small groups, Cominsky (1998) explores the necessity of small groups development in both evangelistic and discipleship terms. He refers to these groups as home cell groups and says that these cells are “...evangelism-focused small groups that are entwined into the life of the church” (Cominsky, 1998, p. 17). Furthermore Cominsky (1998) suggests that “The ultimate goal of each cell is to multiply itself as the group grows through evangelism and then conversion” (p. 17).

This means that small groups have two fundamental characteristics without their design. First, they are not to be apart from the local church but entwined into the local church. This is

what separates a small group from a house church. House churches do not connect with or recognize any structure outside of their group whereas small groups are individuals that come from the local body. This also means that the small groups are not a replacement for a weekly worship celebration but that they work together with different expressed purposes to intentionally move toward other goals.

Second it means that the design of small groups is to evangelize and grow with the purpose of multiplying. This design works against a *country-club* type situation that is often found at churches where small groups are comfortable with their size and specific members becoming *closed* groups. Closed small groups have no desire to multiply but rather end up creating a club-like group that serves internally with no external focus. Cominsky (1998) suggests that this approach would signal a dying group and possibly a dying church.

Agreeing with Cominsky (1998), Poole (2003) suggests that small groups can be an entry point for non-believers to the church as a whole. Often, people within the church see a weekly worship service (Sunday morning for instance) as the onramp to see non-Christian become connected. Poole (2003), however, suggest that many non-Christians can become connected first in a small group community. For Poole (2003), the non-believer may not feel safe attending a larger gathering and might be overwhelmed by the presentation at a local church as their first spiritual experience. He writes that “The real beauty of a seeker small group is the remarkable extent to which seekers feel safe and secure...Seekers can investigate the claims of Christianity at their own pace” (Poole, 2003, p. 42-43).

The advantage of a robust small group presence in the local church is the affordability to learn deeper truths through discussion. The design and setup on a weekly worship service simply does not allow for such an investigation. The importance of the inquiry of the non-believer can

be seen in Jesus' twelve disciples. Though Jesus taught to and encouraged the masses, he always made time to further explain the teaching to the disciples and to answer their questions. Poole (2003) sees this process being lost in many local churches today as a great emphasis is placed on the weekly worship service while other communities of discipleship can be largely ignored.

Mentorship Groups

In the same way, mentorship groups (1-4 in size) are intentional communities that foster transparency among believers. These groups were demonstrated by Jesus throughout his ministry in the New Testament. Jesus had a small group of twelve disciples, but he also had a mentorship group of three of the disciples that he broke off with and taught regularly. Peter, James, and John became this smaller mentorship group that Jesus brought along at a deeper level than the other disciples. One example of this is the account of the Transfiguration on the Mount in Matthew 17. The text begins by saying "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves" (Matthew 17:1, NASB). This mentorship group saw Jesus become transfigured, they saw Moses and Elijah, and they audibly heard the Father tell them to listen to his Son. This group of men were the closest to Jesus and his ministry because of the intimate nature of the mentorship group they were in with Jesus.

Paul also demonstrates the need for a one-on-one to one-on-three mentorship groups with his discipleship of Timothy. Within the books of first and second Timothy, Paul instructs his young apprentice in a variety of leadership approaches encouraging Timothy and being a source of accountability. In 1 Timothy 1 Paul writes.

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. (1 Timothy 1:18-19)

In this passage, Paul refers to Timothy as his “son.” The relationship Paul and Timothy had was more in-depth than they could have had in a whole group or small group setting. This mentorship group allows Paul to further instruct and encourage his young apprentice.

Alistair McGrath (2018) points out the necessity of the mentor-mentee relationship in the process of discipleship. He begins by contrasting what he calls *the balcony* with life on *the road*. He suggests that the balcony is the realm where theoretical pursuits occur, but the road is “the place where life is tensely lived, where thought has its birth in conflict and concern, where choices are made and carried out” (McGrath, 2018, p. 63). He continues by suggesting that the Christian road of discipleship is not one where the individual can climb the balcony to see the bigger picture but one where the Christian “is on the road and knows there is no possibility of rising above that road” (p. 64).

McGrath’s framework yields two essential aspects of the Christian’s discipleship journey. First, the journey is a pilgrimage on a road rather than an inquiry in an *ivory tower*. This means that discipleship requires toil through the hard things of life and cannot simply be relegated to the intellectual (though there is nothing wrong with the intellectual if it serves to help the practical). Second is that the pilgrimage is a journey involving others. The Christian does not embark into discipleship alone. McGrath (2018) writes that the journey “...creates conceptual space for spiritual mentors, who...are integral to the process of Christian discipleship” (p. 64).

McGrath rightfully argues that a mentor is not someone who stands on the balcony directing those they disciple but instead is one who is also journeying on the road living life alongside and next to the one they are discipling. This means that a central aspect of discipleship is finding someone who is a couple of steps ahead of you on the path. They may be older, and

usually are but not always, and are wiser in spiritual matters. This vision of a mentor can clearly be seen in the way many youth pastors choose to engage their students.

Regarding the discipleship of youth, Greer (2000) indicates that when a pastor is looking for youth workers, they should consider people that are willing to serve and have a heart for mentorship. He says, “Mentoring is the process by which an older leader invests his or her life into a younger, emerging leader for the purpose of spiritual character and leadership development in an intensely relational fashion” (p. 44). For Greer, the process of discipleship must include the presence of mentorship groups.

Questions

The larger question is what perceived effect does commitment to all three groups have on the equipping of congregants for the works of the Kingdom? Was there a significant difference in how prepared congregants perceive they are equipped from one level of engagement to another?

Essentially, does participation in all three groups offer the congregant a more well- rounded discipleship process as opposed to being involved in one or two of the communities? Scripture seems to indicate that each of these groups has a distinctly different purpose offering a holistic and complete process of discipleship rather than being employed on their own.

Theoretical Framework

Purpose of Theory

A theoretical framework serves to assist in guiding a researcher by providing a lens in which the direction and data of the project are viewed. Creswell (2014) writes “...provides a lens that shapes what is looked at and the questions asked, such as ethnographies or in transformative research” (p. 51) Theoretical frameworks function differently between quantitative and

qualitative methodologies. While qualitative studies tend to test theories as explanations for answers to questions, in qualitative studies theories are used in a variety of ways. (Creswell 2014). In qualitative studies, the researcher might create a theory to be proven and place that theory after the study or they might use an established theory at the beginning of the study to create the guidelines by which the study is approached. This direction, often referred to as a lens, significantly colors the researcher's approach to their inquiry.

An example of the utilization of a lens in a study can be viewing the Disney movie *Snow White* through two distinctly different lenses. One lens might be appalled that Snow White, arriving at an unknown and very messy cabin, would be so brainwashed by a culture that though she did not know who lived there, she felt the need to do her "womanly" duty by, unquestioningly, cleaning the messes left by the dwarves. In contrast, a Marxist view of the same movie would be sympathetic toward the dwarves because they had been rejected by the bourgeoisie (those in town and the castle) subsequently having to move to the woods. To be accepted, the dwarves have taken to "hi ho-ing" all day long to gain riches presumably to be accepted in town. For the Marxist, this is an example of how capitalism separates people and degrades society. Thus, the theoretical framework or lens, by which a researcher chooses to examine their inquiry is critical to the goals, questions, and data analysis of the final results.

For this researcher's study, there were two distinct theoretical aspects that functioned in concert to form the ultimate lens and direction of research. The first theoretical perspective was introduced as a sociological theory coined by Edward Hall (1966) known as the Theory of Proxemics. This theory measures and discusses the "spaces" in which people live in proximity to one another by importance and familiarity. Proxemics can be used to evaluate the importance of communities within the local church. The second theoretical perspective focuses on the biblical

commission of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20) and is succinctly guided by Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington (2013) in *Discipleshift*. The combination of these two theoretical perspectives provided a lens by which the communities of discipleship within the local church can be viewed and how they can function.

Discipleship Theory

The theory of discipleship launches from Jesus' call of his first disciples (Matthew 4:19) to The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. Though most pastors and church leaders, as well as church congregants, would agree that discipleship is important, few actually engage in discipleship activities. Many people in the church submit to the idea that discipleship, as well as all other elements of Christendom, occur within the context of Sunday morning services and require very little from the congregant themselves. This has created a consumer environment in many churches pulling them away from discipleship as a core value. Discipleship as the value of the church is thus replaced by attraction and consumerism rather than by Jesus' last words. Calloway (2013) writes, "The problem for the church in America is that it has acquiesced...to the consumer and given it what it wants at the sake of the gospel" (para. 3).

Yet a resurgence and refocus on The Great Commission has driven other pastors and church leaders to adopt discipleship as the single-core value of their local bodies. Putman (2013) boldly suggests that the only core value of the church should be discipleship. He writes, "Discipleship is the emphasis. Relationships are the method" (p. 33). Therefore, it is through the lens of Jesus' calling of his first disciples and the Commission given in Matthew 28:19-20 that the theory of discipleship in the local church can be understood.

Putman's (2013) *Discipleshift* serves as a launching and guiding point for the theory of discipleship in the church today. He begins by focusing on Jesus' call in Matthew 4:19. In this

passage, Jesus says, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, NASB).

Putman’s (2013) examination of this passage divides it into three distinct parts to define a disciple. First, disciples “follow Jesus.”

Simply put, disciples follow, and Jesus leads. This implies that the individual accepts Jesus’ authority over their lives and commit to making him the Lord and leader of their behaviors and thoughts. The implications of “following Jesus” are often more profound than most Christians understand. It is commonplace for Christians to believe that following Jesus simply means believing in him and accepting him into their hearts. Yet the call that Jesus beckoned to his disciples had a radically different impact. Platt (2013) writes, “... Jesus beckoned these men to leave behind their professions, dreams, ambitions, family, friends, safety, and security. He bid them to abandon everything” (p. 3) This commitment is reiterated by Jesus when he says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Second, Putman (2013) examines Jesus’ words “...and I will make you...” (Matthew 4:19) as a primary element of a disciple. For Putman, “...this verse speaks of a process of transformation. This tells us that discipleship involves Jesus molding our hearts to become more like His” (p. 48). Addressing a common misconception, Putman goes on to suggest that in today’s church, many falsely believe that the process of discipleship is about information rather than transformation. Instead, he argues that becoming a disciple is about understanding that Jesus does not accept people as they are but instead moves to unmake the individual’s current condition and to remake them into something new.

Finally, Putman (2013) examines the last aspect of Jesus’ call to make them “...fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He suggests that this phrase by Jesus has embedded within it a specific

purpose that is far being a person simply bettering themselves. He writes, “...our acceptance of Jesus begins in the head and extends to the heart, it leads to a change in what we do without hands” (p. 49). This means that disciples of Jesus are to be molded, saved, and sent for a specific purpose. This purpose is outlined in Matthew 28:19-20 where Jesus instructs his disciples by saying,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (NASB).

Theory of Proxemics

In 1963, cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1966) coined the term “proxemics” referring to the cultural space in which people live and are comfortable. The implication of Hall’s theory had, and still has, a wide variety of impacts on social communities and individuals. Hall defines proxemics as “...the interrelated observation and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture” (p. 1). Kreuz and Roberts (2019) define proxemics as the non-verbal communication by which “personal space is maintained as a function of one’s culture” (para. 2). Hall further defines the exact nature of four distinct spaces in which people live and function in their culture. The spaces are labeled as intimate space (0 to 18 inches), personal space (18 inches to 4 feet), social space (4 to 10 feet), and public space (over 10 feet) (pp. 116-124).

Though this form of non-verbal communication is silent in nature, Hall (1966) expresses the power found in maintaining as well as violating these spaces. Within his theory of proxemics, Hall (1966) believed that the impacts of these defined spaces not only illuminated the nature of relationships between two individuals, but also that it explained the layout of towns and other living spaces. This would apply even to the formation of furniture and other elements of a home.

Violations of Proxemics

The individual implications of the violation of proxemics can range from a general sense of discomfort to anxiety and outright panic attacks. Hall (1966) suggests that

Encountering proxemic behavior different from one's own has been known to trigger anxiety or fight-or-flight response. Researchers have conducted experiments that prove whenever an animal experiences a violation of its personal territory, it reacts by either running away or attacking the intruder. The same holds true for humans in most cases (p.163).

Hall also identifies that individuals will often violate their own levels of comfortability to accomplish tasks. An example is when someone enters a crowded train or elevator for a duration of time to achieve their daily goals. Individuals might also temporarily violate their spaces for cultural norms such as allowing someone to enter their intimate space for a hug for just a moment. However, this behavior still requires a certain level of familiarity. In many cases, a customary greeting of someone unfamiliar would result in a handshake or a bow maintaining the 0 to 18-inch intimate space.

Intimate Space (Cultural)

Hall's (1966) intimate space is often referred to as a "bubble" of space surrounding the immediate person. Brown (2001) suggests that intimate space is "acceptable only for the closest friends and intimates." The violation of this particular space will often incite a feeling of discomfort or even a physical response such as pulling away and even panic. Only the closest individuals, family, and close friends may enter this space without violation. This space can also be violated through the merging of different cultures. Some Europeans, for instance, engage in greetings by kissing the other individual on both sides of the cheek while Americans would offer a handshake. Differences in culture then allow for a different perspective on social norms within the given spaces.

Personal Space (Cultural)

Hall's (1966) personal space (18 inches to 4 feet) refers to the space where groups of individuals such as good friends and some family. Within the context of this space happens close conversations with friends and family. Kreuz and Roberts (2019) suggest that often, strangers who lack awareness of proxemics will violate this space causing several individuals to become uncomfortable. This violation, however, lacks the potent effect of a fight-or-flight response that can occur when the intimate space is violated.

Social Space (Cultural)

Hall (1966) refers to the space from 4 feet to 10 feet as a social space. Brown (2001) indicates that social space is the "spaces in which people feel comfortable conducting routine social interactions with acquaintances as well as strangers." Situations like conversations at work would fall into the social space category allowing individuals to communicate with others at a reasonable and agreed upon distance.

Public Space (Cultural)

Being the most open of all the spaces, Hall's (1966) public space refers to any space over 10 feet from another individual. Brown (2001) refers to public space as "the area of space beyond which people will perceive interactions as impersonal and relatively anonymous" (p. 2). Public venues such as theme parks or shopping malls don't require the individual to know those around them without feeling violated. It is assumed that people within this space may temporarily violate other spaces while passing by but offer no threat to cause concern.

Congruent Spiritual Spaces (Spiritual)

Hall's (1966) defined four spaces in which people live (Intimate, Personal, Social and Public) offer a general template for an inquiry into discipleship however further refinement is

required. From a spiritual perspective, Harrington and Absalom (2016) redefine these spaces through a different lens while adding one more space: Divine space. Unlike Hall (1966) Harrington and Absalom (2016) do not only separate the spaces by distance, but rather also by group, or community, size. They suggest that the group, or communities, within a spiritual setting are divided as such:

Table 1

Overview of Various Sociological Definitions

Context	Size	Focus	Distance
Public	100s	Engage with an outside resource	12'+
Social	20-70	Sharing Snapshots that build affinity	4'-12'
Personal	4-12	Revealing private information	18"-4'
Transparent	2-4	Living in vulnerability and openness	0'-18'
Divine	Alone with God	Being with your Creator and Redeemer	Inner world

Harrington and Absalom's addition of the divine space reflects their approach from a theological perspective rather than from only societal one. Their theoretical perspective parallels the behaviors demonstrated by Jesus of Nazareth as a discipler. According to their theory, the public group is mirrored by Jesus and the crowds. The social group is Jesus and the seventy, the personal group is Jesus and the twelve, the transparent group is Jesus and the three, and the divine group is Jesus and the Father. These five groups, or communities, have very different purposes and desired results. Each of the communities has a specific expression within the context of a local church as well as a particular desired outcome base upon that expression.

Public Community (Spiritual)

The best expression of the “public community” (100+ people) is the public worship service offered by virtually every western church in the world. These services can include worship in song, teaching/preaching, offering/tithe, communion (weekly, monthly quarterly etc...), and various other elements as each Sunday requires (Mother’s Day etc...). For Harrington and Absalom (2016), the desired outcome of the public community is to inspire, gather “movementum” (movement and momentum), and preaching.

The public community does indeed have its limitations to be successful. Each of the communities must function within a given context and adhere to an established set of norms or rules. For instance, Harrington and Absalom (2016) write, “Don’t expect the public worship service to be a gathering where people feel and strong sense of community and closeness” (p. 89). This means that within the context of the public context, the expectation of a strong community element is not only absent, but it’s also not possible. It is indeed true that an individual attending Sunday service may, and often does, see, greet, and even sit with someone they are very close with but that that closeness was gained within another community. Jesus demonstrated the necessity of the public community by reaching to the crowds (Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7).

Social Community (Spiritual)

For Harrington and Absalom (2016), the “social community” (20-70 people) is the hardest to achieve and the most frequently absent from the local church. The church expression of this community is defined as “missional communities”. These groups, like the other groups, have a desired outcome which is to form community, engage in mission, and the practice of telling others about the good news (pp.93-128). This community, though often missed by the

local church, can be robust because it is “...typically the place where individuals feel the greatest sense of affinity for one another” (p. 95).

In the early church, these communities were called *oikos* communities. Wolf (2008) argues that “...*oikos* referred to one’s entire estate, people and property forming one family, a household, as the usage of *oikos* applied to the Church would imply” (para. 15) Of the early church, Harrington and Absalom (2016) explain that “...every single person in that [early church] culture belonged to an *oikos*, which existed as his or her extended family or household” (p. 99).

Agreeing with Harrington and Absalom, Wolf (2008) further suggests that the *oikos* were the organics and primary means of evangelism within the first-century church. The power of *oikos* is in the rapid growth of Christianity through the middle of the fourth century.

Sociologist Rodney Stark (1997) took note of the rapid increase of Christians from the year AD 40 to the year AD 350, highlighting that during this time, Christianity was even illegal until AD 313 under Constantine.

This increase, according to Stark (1997), was due in large part to house-to-house *oikos* communities that flourished and evangelized during that time (p. 193). Harrington and Absalom (2016) point out that the public and social communities are autonomous of one another with the social community feeding the public community. It is essential to understand that they do not function apart from one another and though they serve different goals, they are complementary in nature.

Table 2*Church Growth from AD 40 and the Middle of the Fourth Century*

Year	# of Christians	% of the Roman Empire
Day of Pentecost	1,000	0.0017%
AD 350	34 Million	56.5%

Personal Community (Spiritual)

Harrington and Absalom's (2016) theory of personal space refers to "a group between four and twelve people (or more), discipleship focused on closeness, support, and challenge." Many local churches refer to these spaces (communities) as life groups, but for this study, they are referred to as "small groups." These communities within a local church close the gap that exists in the public community by providing a place where deep, meaningful relationships do indeed flourish. It is within small groups that people can honestly know one another allowing them to let down their guard establishing trust with others.

Jesus' personal community was his twelve disciples where he committed the majority of his discipleship efforts. Harrington and Absalom point out that it is crucial to understand that Jesus' focus on his small group community differed from the focus on many churches. Often, local churches see small group communities as an extension of the organization of the church allowing them to miss the more important aspect of small groups: relationships.

One of the desired outcomes of a small group is the ability and necessity to share personal information with the group. Attempting to share such personal information, for

instance, in the public community would be inappropriate and counterproductive. This is because it is within small group communities that accountability begins to take shape for the people involved. Jesus held his twelve disciples to a higher standard of accountability than that of the crowds or the 70. He also spent more time with his small group than with the public and social communities.

Unfortunately, many churches view small groups simply as a Bible study whose function is to learn the scriptures but rarely apply them. Putman (2013) asserts that “If anyone serves Jesus, he *must* follow Jesus. There is no wiggle room in a genuine Christian’s life for a fifth characterized by compromise” (p. 33). He goes on to suggest that following Jesus means having a close relationship with others in small groups for the purpose of accountability.

Intimate Community (Spiritual)

Harrington and Absalom’s (2016) theory on intimate groups, or communities, involves two to four people who “live in intimacy and openness” (p. 158). The individuals within the intimate community usually come from the pool of people already in other communities: publicly, socially, and personally. This is to say, these people know each other within the context of other communities creating a situation for a very close bond to form. Jesus’ intimate community was a group of three of his disciples that also were part of the public, social, and personal communities: Peter, James, and John.

Neil Cole (2008) promotes that these intimate communities have a specific desire and direction when they meet. First, he suggests that they need to be of the same gender. Unlike the other communities thus far, intimate groups, due to the nature of very personal accountability and openness, need to be made up of people who are the same gender. Second, Cole argues that

these groups should meet weekly for 60-90 minutes and should feature three specific elements (pp. 23-35).

1. Answer specific accountability questions from each other.
2. Pray for the lost specifically by name
3. Discuss the chapters of the Bible they all read that week (p. 82).

This is by no means the only manner in which small groups function and they need not adhere rigidly to this model. Others, such as Robby Gallaty (2013) suggest intimate groups H.E.A.R. from God (H.E.A.R. stand for Highlight, Explain, Apply, Respond), memorize scripture, prayer, and be obedient in action to what the scriptures have to say. Whether adhering to one model or another, intimate communities need to be purposeful and involve the vulnerability of each of the members as a deeper method of accountability.

Context and Purpose of the Communities

It is important to identify that these three communities have very different functions, applications, and purposes. Deffinbaugh (2010) writes that

Instruction, worship, fellowship, and prayer are fundamental functions of the church. Note that evangelism is not a stated purpose for the church's gathering. That is because this occurs as the saints go out from the church into a lost world, proclaiming Christ (para. 2).

This means that within the context of corporate worship, the stated purpose of the local church service should include instruction, worship, fellowship, and prayer. Deffinbaugh is not suggesting that evangelism has no place in the church, but that the corporate worship service is to edify the congregants and then send them into the world to evangelize. He looks to scripture in Ephesians 4:11-13 where individuals have been given specific purposes for the furthering of the kingdom (including evangelism) yet these purposes are given to the individuals within the church and not as the purpose of the corporate gathering.

Harrington and Absalom (2016) suggest that this changes how each of these communities' function toward a distinct purpose. For instance, in the context of a Sunday morning service, they identify that pastors can write sermons that instruct in generalities rather than toward specific individuals. Though specific individuals often perceive the sermon as being written to and for them, there is a general nature to the process. They explain that general instruction is appropriate and applicable during a corporate worship service but not so within small groups. In small groups, more specific instruction can be explored even if the instruction is based upon the generalized sermon from the previous service. In his ministry, Jesus often gives a general teaching and then pulls the disciples aside to give more specific instruction for their more profound development as his disciples.

Further, Harrington and Absalom (2016) suggest that mentorship groups include transparency that would be inappropriate within the context of small groups or an entire corporate worship service. Viola (2017) recognizes these context differences and suggests that the confession of sin be as public as the sin itself was. If one sinned against the Father, confess to the Father. If one sinned against their spouse, then confess to the spouse. But do not confess a sin against an individual to the entire body of believers unless it included them as well. This can be seen by the Apostle Paul as he writes, "...there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me..." (2 Corinthians 12:7). In this passage, Paul fails to identify the thorn in the flesh causing the torment. This is because the proper context of the exactness of the thorn is not found within the letter to the church in Corinth.

Paul's letters to the church in Corinth also reveal another aspect of context. In 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul writes "...greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying." Explicitly addressing the corporate

meeting of the local church, Paul goes on to outline the appropriate manner in which tongues should be used. Noticeably absent is one's personal prayer life because of the lack of need for the edification of others. Paul's teaching in this passage addresses explicitly the unique context of the local church gathering. Thus, these three communities have different contexts, different purposes, and different applications.

Related Literature

Human/Community Dynamics

The science of sociology is wholly devoted to the theoretical approach to examining the phenomena of human interaction within a group context. The American Sociological Association (2021) defines sociology as “the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior” (American Sociological Associates, 2021). They go on to explain that sociology examines groups, organizations, and communities and precisely how human beings function within these contexts. The two significant sociology divisions are Macrosociology and Microsociology (Manzo, 2015). Macrosociology refers to more of a bigger picture (culture, whole organizations, etc.) and how humans, and more specifically their behaviors, fit into those contexts. Microsociology would examine the structure from the other vantage point examining the individual's behaviors and the impact on the culture, society, or group. Though the theoretical examination of sociology goes much deeper, the basic premise is that it is understood that humans live in relations to one another, or within defined communities, and there is an entire field of study dedicated to human groups and communities.

Biblically, the premise of community versus the individual is a common theme. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus teaches his disciples how they should pray. He says,

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily

bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (NASB)

The reader should notice the nine personal pronouns Jesus chooses to use. These pronouns present the reader with no singular pronouns with all of them being plural pronouns. The idea of community is an integral part of not just the prayer itself, but the mindset of the people that Jesus is speaking to.

This idea of community is not exclusive to the New Testament. Lambert (2021) outlines the common community within the Old Testament within the book of Jonah. As the word of the Lord comes to Jonah, God says, “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it, because *their* wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2, NASB, emphasis added). Lambert explains that the repentance of Nineveh is based upon their collective sins against God insinuating a community of people’s sins requiring a community response. When the Ninevites first hear of the transgression against God, the king says,

In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: No person, animal, herd, or flock is to taste anything. They are not to eat, or drink water. But *every* person and animal must be covered with sackcloth; and *people* are to call on God vehemently, and they are to turn, each one from his evil way, and from the violence which is in their hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish.

The approach in Nineveh of both the transgression and the possibility of repentance involves the entire community/city.

Agreeing with Lambert, Tripp (2012) suggests that “...the Christianity of the New Testament is distinctly relational, from beginning to end” (p. 83). Tripp explains that the Western mindset of just “Jesus and me” is a dangerous and damaging construct that serves to draw people away from the community of “one another’s” clearly commanded in the New Testament. Even as Jesus is challenged on the greatest of all the 613 commandments his answer is uniquely

relational. He says, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NASB). According to Jesus, the most important of all the law is a loving relationship first with God, and then with one another. Both involve love and relational community.

Community of the Local Church

As one reads through the Scriptures, it becomes apparent the importance that God places on community. The theology of community begins with God Himself in the beginning verses of Genesis. Genesis 1:1-2 states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" (NASB).

Of this verse, Campbell (2017) indicates that the Jewish pictograph of the Hebrew word *Barasheet* translated as “In the beginning” speaks to the presence of Jesus. He writes, “... the first word in the Bible, in the beginning, holds this idea; The Son of God (will be) destroyed (by his own) work on a cross” (para. 6), showing Jesus from the beginning. The presence of the Spirit of God and then God speaking in the subsequent verses indicate the theology of the Trinity. Even the word “God” that is used in verse 1 is the Hebrew word *Elohim* which is a plural noun (Strong’s 1990, #430).

The presence of the plurality of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, as seen not only in Genesis, but in John 1:1, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and Matthew 28:19 establish that though God is one being, He manifests in three Persons. Being triune in nature, God (Father, Son, and Spirit) is constantly in community with each Himself. Thus, God is a being that lives in community.

Genesis 1:26 then sets the stage for how mankind was created and how mankind was created. It says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...’” (Genesis 1:26, NASB). The misunderstanding of this verse would imply that mankind was made to *look* like God, but the appropriate understanding suggests that mankind was made to *function* like God: in community.

In the New Testament, the Trinity is further explored emphasizing the importance of community. Grudem (2005) shows all three persons of God manifesting themselves in distinctly different ways as Jesus is baptized. He writes, “At the moment (Jesus’ baptism), all three members of the Trinity were performing three distinct activities: God the Father was speaking, God the Son was being baptized, and God the Holy Spirit was resting on the Son” (p. 40).

As God is presented in perfect community with the three persons of God, having been made in God’s likeness, mankind thus desires community. Jesus offers the importance of the Christian community in Matthew 22. Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees by being asked which of the laws (613 of them) was the most important. He replies, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend on the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). Though Jesus was asked about a single law, he chose to reply with two: Love the Lord your God and love others. Jesus emphasized the need for and importance of community through loving relationships, first with God and then with others. The necessity of community in people’s lives is of paramount importance.

In *Lost Connections*, Johann Hari (2018) explores his own struggles with depression and anxiety. Though he is not a Christian or religious author, Hari spends an entire chapter devoted

to the rise in depressive states in people being attributed to their disconnected lives. He writes, “Loneliness hangs over our culture today like a big smog. More people say they feel lonely than ever before - and I wonder if this might be related to our apparent rise in depression and anxiety” (p. 88). For Hari, one of the solutions is to reconnect through physical communities and limit the times spent in virtual ones.

The importance of community in the life of the believer cannot be understated. In Matthew 6:9, Jesus famously offers a way in which people should pray. He says,

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘**Our** Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. ‘Give **us** this day **our** daily bread. ‘And forgive **us** our debts, as **we** also have forgiven **our** debtors. ‘And do not lead **us** into temptation, but deliver **us** from evil [emphasis added].

It should be understood that Jesus purposefully uses the plural pronoun eight times rather than the singular. This community mindset was assumed in Jesus’ time but not so much today. For Jesus, the idea of being connected through a common God and a common religion require an assumed community.

Alaby and Quiroga (2016) identify that the emergence of consumerism within the Western Church has presented church leaders with unique challenges not faced to this degree in previous times. They believe that this rise in consumption has led to individuals “consuming” church as just another product. They attribute this to the “me” and “I” mindsets prevalent today. Not only is it a challenge for church leaders, but it has also become a cancer for the growth of the church because consumerism’s rise requires the community’s fall. Thus, like Hari (2018), Alaby and Quiroga (2016) see an increase in people “taking in” church from the comfort of their couches and reducing the experience one should gain from the community to a transfer of information. They write that “People-instead of consuming to live-start living to consume” (p. 73) and have eventually placed their connection to the church in a consumeristic category.

Congregants regularly approach the senior pastor to congratulate him on a well-spoken sermon or to offer constructive criticism while also discussing whether the music was good “this morning” based solely upon their own favorite songs. This philosophy assumes that the worship was for the congregants rather than the congregants being for the worship. As consumerism takes hold, community gets lost.

In the same way, Thune and Walker (2013) offer a list of individualistic behaviors that threaten a healthy community. First, they suggest that self-reliance is a problem because it causes people to deal with all their problems using their own ability causing a separation from God and others. Next, self-sufficiency is a problem for community because it takes away the depth by which a real relationship in Christ requires. Also, self-importance is a detriment to community because it requires the individual to have a focus applied to the respect of others (attention) rather than to how they might serve others (sacrifice). Finally, self-will is a barrier to community because people with self-will place their own schedules and desires over the needs of others causing a separation from community.

In a 2016 study, Barna Group (2016) suggests that this shift in consumeristic culture is more prevalent in youth people. Of the faith-practicing millennials survey, virtually all value individual Bible study to evangelism, prayer, corporate worship, and Christian community (Barna Group 2016). Of those millennials, more than half believe online church is equal or better than physical attendance due to comfort and flexibility. This data suggests that as individualism and consumerism increase in the lives of believers, the necessity and value of community decreases. However, community within the church is an important aspect of faith. The author of Hebrews writes,

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **not**

forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Forgoing meeting together means that those in the church remain disconnected, without encouragement, and without accountability to anyone else.

In *Radical*, David Platt (2010), regarding the community of the church, says “Disciple-making involves inviting people into a larger community of faith where they will see the life of Christ in action and experience the love of Christ in person” (p. 97). Disciple-making, Jesus’s commission to all his believers, for Platt, absolutely requires the Christian community. Without community, the Christian would be unable to experience the life of Christ and the love of Christ in a tangible way. Spurring one another on to good works would be absent and encouraging one another would fall flat.

The purpose of community is not so pastors can have jobs or so the local church can have some sort of competition with the church down the street, it is about fellowship within one another. Within the New Testament, there are 59 “one another” phrases. It is clear that the role of community is significant within the life of the believer because they would be unable to complete any “one another’s” on their own. Community is required. Regarding fellowship, Ellis (1982) defines the term by saying, “it is a unique relationship, profoundly interconnected with the purpose of the church.”

Ellis (1982) points out that Jesus chose fellowship by selecting twelve disciples of his own and spending his life pouring into them. Though Christian fellowship is a necessary element of the Christian life, devoid of purpose it simply becomes a hangout club. He goes on to suggest that Christian fellowship requires purpose for the growth of the individual in relationship with Christ and others for the commission that Christ outlined in Matthew 28. Thus, the Christian

community is not simply a gathering for people to connect with one another for the expressed purpose of social interaction. There needs to be purpose and direction behind the community.

Samra (2006) suggests that the purpose of fellowship in community is for the maturation of the individual for the mission of the kingdom. He writes, “when believers assemble together, the Spirit is not only in each one of them but also becomes manifest through them and dwells among them. As a result, God and Christ become present in the assembled community in a unique way” (p. 135). According to Ellis (1982), this manifestation is present for the purpose of each believer maturation process but from the spiritual side and from one another.

Thus, the presence of specifically defined communities utilized by Christ in his ministry is critical elements to the discipleship process at a local body. The importance of community at the local level can be seen simply by understanding that the Apostle Paul wrote all but four of his letters to local churches. Paul, at least, was passionate about the success of the local church and valued the community of the local church. However, establishing the community of a local body is not enough. The local body must have a core value and direction that is both biblical and demonstrated by Jesus. Though a local body can have many ministries and value several aspects of their community, there can be only one primary core value. All other values will become secondary to the primary value.

Core Value: Discipleship

It is then the secondary suggestion of this study that disciple-making is the core value of the church. Though many elements fall under the umbrella of disciple-making, nothing else should be the core value of the church. Hicks (2008) in their dissertation suggests that evangelism, not disciple-making, should be the core value of the church. However, with all due respect, Jesus’ final words were not, “Go make converts” or “Go and evangelize” but instead

“Go and make disciples.” This is not to suggest that evangelism should be devalued, far from it. Evangelism is a crucial aspect of disciple-making. However, evangelism is a part of disciple-making, not the other way around.

Plenty of churches are good at evangelizing but drop the ball when discipling. For instance, in Ephesians 4, Paul writes, “And He [Christ] gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:11, NASB).

Readers should note all the “some” words Paul uses in this passage. Paul indicates that Christ gave *some* as evangelists begging the question, “Is the church, if evangelism is the core value, only meant for *some* people?” What about teachers and pastors and apostles and prophets who are not given the gift of an evangelists? It is all these elements combined that are used in disciple-making.

Barna (2001) asks the question, “Isn’t it enough to just make discipleship one of the many endeavors of the church?” Barna (2008) suggests that within the church is often a debate regarding the priority of the church, be it prayer ministry, youth ministry, worship, evangelism, etc... but that in doing so, the church becomes like James and John asking who will be first rather than who wants to be whole (Barna, 2008). Placing discipleship as the core value of the church aligns with Jesus' ministry instead of creating a new methodology that is manmade. Gallety (2015) indicates that evangelism and discipleship are not the same regarding evangelism as a core value. One (evangelism) is for an unbeliever and the other (discipleship) is for the believer. Again, it is not to minimize the impact and necessity of evangelism, but to elevate the call of Jesus to make disciples.

DeYoung and Gilbert (2011) ask the questions, “What is the mission of the church?”

Though broad in scope, it is essential in both theory and application. They concede that there has been an overuse of “mission” in recent church history. They suggest that

It used to be that *mission* referred pretty narrowly to Christians send out cross-culturally to convert non-Christians and plant churches...now *mission* is understood much more broadly. Environmental stewardship is mission. Community renewal is mission. Blessing our neighbors is mission. Mission is here. Mission is there. Mission is everywhere (DeYoung & Gilbert, 2011, p. 18).

With the diluted nature of the word mission, it is no wonder that many local churches have made a variety of well-intended aspect of the local church “mission”. Yet, DeYoung and Gilbert assert that tagging everything as mission takes the local church away from the central calling of Christ. In other words, “If everything is mission, nothing is mission” (DeYoung & Gilbert, 2011, p. 15).

The central mission of the church is to completely fulfill The Great Commission set forth by Jesus in Matthew 28. Yet according to DeYoung and Gilbert, this calling began in Genesis 12. God’s calling to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 says,

Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land
I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:1-3, NASB).

For DeYoung and Gilbert, this calling is a commission from God for Abram and his descendants not to circle the wagons of their faith but to be a blessing to other nations bringing them the blessings of God. Yet much like the Israelites who failed to bring God to other nations, DeYoung and Gilbert suggest that the same issue is happening within many local churches today. The solution for them is to make the mission of the church The Great Commission of Christ by making disciples.

Orienting the local church to make discipleship the core value as Jesus did allows the local body access to the results that Jesus and his disciples saw. In Acts 2, Peter preaches a powerful message to the crowds, and the response is overwhelming. The passage says,

Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself (Acts 2:37-39, NASB).

The result of Peter's message of repentance was that three thousand were baptized that day. This incredible moment seems to be the focus of the chapter yet something else happens after the baptism. Acts 2 goes on by saying

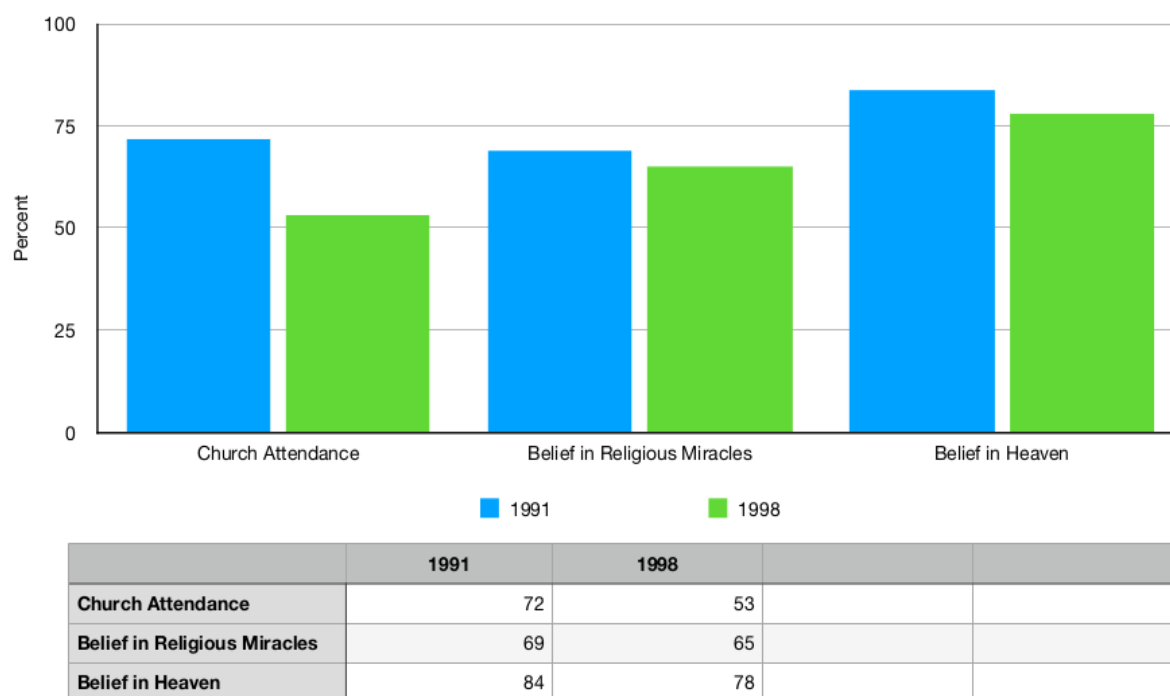
And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

The remarkable part of Acts 2 is not only were three thousand people baptized but that they continued to live together in community being discipled and it was because of this discipleship community that God continued to add to their numbers. For the local church, Chai (2016) writes, "Discipleship has always been, and is, indispensable for church life and ministry." The focus on the church in Acts 2 was the discipleship of people within the Christian community. They placed the priority on discipleship based upon both Jesus' commission as well as his actions throughout his ministry. Concerning the focus of the church today, Bill Hull (2010) concludes, "Discipling should remain at the heart of the church..." There is no indication in Scripture that the body of Christ should change focus and direction apart from the commission that Christ gave in Matthew 28.

A natural result of a focus on discipleship is the church's expansion. The Acts 2 church experienced this expansion through three thousand baptisms into the kingdom at once and God adding to their numbers daily those who were being saved. Of course, the opposite would also be true. A lack of focus on discipleship would result in the decline of the church. Sociologist Hirschle (2010) has tracked the decline in church interest and attendance in Ireland.

Figure 1

The decline of the Irish Church 1991-1998



This graph shows the decline of church attendance in Ireland from 1991 to 1998, with an almost 20% decrease in people simply attending church. As a sociologist, Hirschle (2010) is not focused on a lack of discipleship as the source of the decline, however Scripture is clear that when the church places discipleship as its core value, it will expand numerically.

In his book *Multiply*, Francis Chan (2012) writes about one of the significant results of a discipleship-focused church: Multiplication. Chan suggests that discipleship is about making disciples who make disciples. According to the book, instead of focusing on adding members to the body of Christ, discipleship is about multiplying one's self to see the church grow exponentially. He writes, "...the way your church functions does matter...If your church does not pursue God's mission [making disciples], then your community misses out on being exposed to the hope that God offers the in the gospel" (p. 75).

Leadership and Discipling Communities

The core value of discipleship in the Christian community does not happen on its own. There is intentionality that is required for the local church to have the impact that God desires in the surrounding community. This intentional direction toward discipleship as the core value of the local body must come from the leaders within the local church. Thus, biblical leadership within the local church is crucial when implementing discipleship as a core value and instilling intentional communities by which discipleship best happens.

Bredfeldt (2006) identifies the impact and the risk of becoming a leader. He writes, "...teachers have enormous influence. Long after they depart from this earth, their words and ideas continue to have a long-lasting impact" (p. 47). This impact can be positive (Jesus), or it can be negative (Karl Marx). Church leaders, including pastors, elders, and other leaders, have a responsibility to lead in such a way that works toward building God's kingdom and not their own kingdoms.

Good leadership begins with the leader being a good example. Jesus' example was to select disciples, spend his ministry training those disciples in specific communities, and finally send them to replicate his discipleship process. Jesus, then, is the perfect example of what a

leader should be for future church leaders. He exemplified the role of a leader becoming a servant. Many leaders believe that specific responsibilities are beneath them, rendering them unfit to lead as they refuse to take on the role of a servant.

Nevertheless, good leadership in the church is not about simply structuring times and dates for meetings with people. Though necessary, an intentional approach and design is required to communities within the local church to thrive as discipleship communities. Unless created with this specific intent, the church can run the risk of creating communities that neither disciple nor are even Biblical in nature. Dhati Lewis (2017) addresses this issue when writing about discipling in the city versus rural areas. He promotes the idea that discipleship is not simply mentorship, though there are some crossovers. He writes “Many of us, however, have reduced discipleship to mentorship. Discipleship is not simply a one-on-one appointment twice a month with someone who is more mature in their faith” (Lewis, 2017, p. 80). He suggests that discipleship exceeds mentorship in that mentorship can be done one-on-one exclusively, whereas discipleship requires multiple layers of engagement. He continues, “Discipleship is a corporate endeavor. It cannot be done individually” (p. 80). For Lewis, discipleship requires walking alongside someone, theological training, developing them as a leader, and then mobilizing them to do the same. There is intentionality on multiple levels of the church to see people grow in maturity with the expressed intent of sending them to make more disciples.

Howell (2003) utilizes both Old and New Testament individuals showing a consistent pattern of leaders who humbly served others. He uses the account of Joseph, Moses, Joshua, and Daniel within the Old Testament and Peter, Paul, and Timothy in the New. In all cases, the individual began their role as a leader by first becoming a servant to God, then to others. Of course, Jesus is exemplified as the ultimate leader because of the ultimate sacrifice that he was

willing to make for the salvation of others. Howell (2003) suggests that “...those individuals that God uses to further his saving purposes in the world demonstrates what we call a servanthood pattern of leadership” (p. 4)

The adherence to becoming a servant leader begins with the leader approaching their role with a humble spirit. There is no room for ego and self-importance in Biblical leadership. Leaders can begin in their role by refusing to see themselves as the story’s hero. Dave Ferguson (2018) confronts this issue of self-importance in pastoral leaders saying, “Everyone wants to be the hero. Yet only a few understand the power in hero making.” He identifies that Jesus understood the secret of leadership that often evades leaders today as Jesus took a small group of men and equipped them to do the heroic themselves. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (John 14:12, NABS).

Jesus’ role as a servant leader is summed up by him saying, “...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, NASB). Jesus understood that as a leader, the greatest of leaders, he was to be the greatest of servants. To his disciples, he says that whoever wants to be first must be a slave to all. Of biblical leadership, Paul writes,

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8, NASB).

Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi implies that those in the church should align their attitudes with that of Jesus which is that of a servant. Only by this alignment can church leaders begin to move a local body toward communities that focus on discipleship as their core values.

Leadership within the church is paramount in the direction of the local body and the success of being people in the kingdom. Regarding being a servant-leader, Greenleaf (1970) suggests, “The servant-leader is servant first, it begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, as opposed to, wanting power, influence, fame, or wealth” (p. 6). By committing themselves to be a servant first, church leaders open the door for their own dreams to be put aside to pursue the purpose that God has for them. This pursuit must be grounded in the pursuit and commission of Jesus: Making disciples.

Geiger and Peck (2016) explore the nature of a good church leader. They write that “The great tragedy of our leadership is not the lack of leading, but the corruption of its noble purpose” (p.58). They suggest that biblical leadership cannot include any aspect of personal gain; rather the leader needs to be solely focused on what the calling of God is for the church. In regard to the nature of the leader, they argue that leaders need to reflect God’s glory, replicate themselves, and cultivate relationships within the church.

They finish by examining Moses’ leadership identifying that Moses understood he was “called to lead *like* the Lord, not just *for* the Lord” (Geiger & Peck, 2016, p. 65). Many leaders in the church attempt to divorce answering the call of the Lord with the methodology that the Lord has called them to. Thus, many leaders, albeit with good intentions, attempt to lead local bodies of believers answering God’s call, but they supplement God’s purpose with their own desires and dreams. For local churches to adopt discipleship as their core value and utilize specifically designed communities that Jesus used, biblical leadership by a servant-leader is required.

Rationale for the Study

The importance of this study is the possible implication of specific Christian communities within the development of discipleship in local churches. The possible results are that local church bodies and leaders may adopt not only discipleship as their core value but to see the impact of three Christ-practiced communities in the development of making disciples in their local congregations. This would assist in combating the decline in religious activities and participation in the local church allowing for the maturation of individuals, the fellowship of varying sized communities within the church, and a revival in the public communities where these local churches are ministering.

A shift to discipleship as the core value of the local church and the implementation of Sunday services, small groups, and mentorship groups equally provide specific environments by which growth and passion are developed in the congregants of the local body. Paul's explanation of his own maturity to the church in Philippi is

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14, NASB).

Paul's commitment to maturation by pressing on should be the goal of all church leaders for their congregants. This study hopes that by revealing not only the *what* of discipleship but also the *where* that discipleship best occurs.

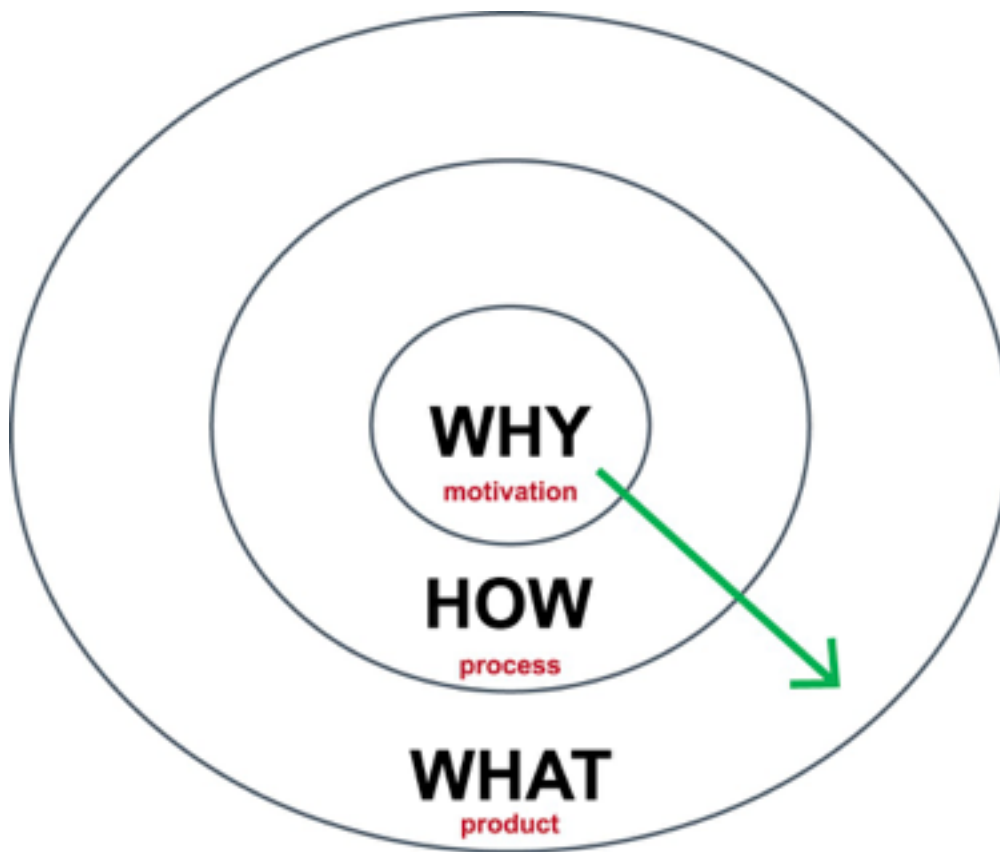
Gap in the Literature

The gap in the literature that the study aims to help close is concerning discipleship environments. Much has been devoted to explaining and exploring how individuals and churches should disciple but very little has addressed what environments are best to grow the faith of

congregants in the local church. This researcher fears that many churches have settled with the good and thus forgone the great, as Jim Collins (2001) suggests. Leadership gurus such as Simon Sinek (2009) offer suggestions regarding how leaders and organizations successfully approach their organizational models. Sinek encourages organizations to function first from a *why* perspective, then move to a *how* perspective, and finally settle on the *what* portion of what your organization offers or sells. His organizational direction is reflected in this figure:

Figure 2

From Why to What



Within the context of the church, the discussion follows suit. Many are writing and discussing *why* we disciple, *how* we disciple, and *what* needs to happen within the process of discipleship. It is not the suggestion of this researcher that these directions are false or bad, but they fail to address the *where* of discipleship. Furthermore, this study aims at understanding the

implications of these discipleship communities on the local-church congregants' feelings as they are being equipped for the good works of the kingdom (Ephesians 4:11-13, NASB).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Congregants know their ability and comfortability levels when it comes to being prepared for and equipped to do ministry, specifically when they are ready to disciple someone else. Because of this, they must be allowed to share their own journeys and stories when it comes to their own spiritual walk. These firsthand experiences from the congregants themselves, without the presence of outside bias or agendas, are needed to understand better the nature of the phenomenon of the discipleship journey. Jesus called his disciples to make disciples of others, but only after they had spent significant time with him becoming prepared to do the work of ministry. The congregants in today's churches are no different as they gain confidence and the ability to make disciples of their own.

Their perceived ability to take on making a disciple is tied directly to the local church's efforts to focus on disciple-making as a priority (Beagles, 2012). Beck (2010) suggests that the New Testament pattern of pastoral leadership requires the pastoral leader to focus their efforts on equipping others rather than being the only one that does the work of ministry. This is echoed by Paul in Ephesians 4 saying, "And He gave some *as* apostles, some *as* prophets, some *as* evangelists, some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry..." (verses 11-12). This need to equip others for ministry requires examining where the equipping best takes place, or rather, what environment is best suited for this equipping.

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenological nature of discipling within intentional communities of the local church. First demonstrated by Jesus in his ministry, these intentional communities should have different approaches and different purposes for a holistic model of complete disciple-making.

The data was collected through a two-part process of interviews with church leadership teams and surveys done by those same church congregants. However, the surveys included a Likert scale to capture the intensities of agreement and disagreement. Each question also included an open-ended section allowing the congregants to explain why they chose to answer the question in that particular way. After the data was collected, the quantitative portion was discarded, leaving only the qualitative data. Pinzer (2017) developed this qualitative survey method that incorporates the exactness of a quantitative numeric scale with the open-ended nature of a qualitative survey. Pinzer maintained the qualitative methodology without treading into a mixed-methods study by disregarding the quantitative data collected from the participating subjects. Thus, the data generated by the Leikert scales, or the equivalent, was not used in Pinzer's study, nor was it used within this researcher's qualitative methodology. This allowed the researcher to analyze the explanations qualitatively to better understand the subject's answers.

The interview/survey data was collected from six different churches in Indiana. All of the churches intentionally offer and promote weekly worship services, small groups for Bible study and fellowship, and gender-specific discipleship/mentorship groups. These different communities strived to serve different purposes and have different results in mind. The size of each congregation varied from 100-1000 in weekly attendance. The congregants surveyed were selected for being active in participating in one, two, or all three offered communities of the local church. A comparison of the survey data illuminated whether adherence to one, two, or all three local-church communities allows the congregants to feel more disciplined and equipped for ministry.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

Many modern church leaders feel stuck in the traditions of what was passed on to them throughout the years of the established and organized nature of what it means to be the church (Barna, 2015). The leadership within these local bodies often believe that they are adhering to previous models of “church”, gaining a false direction of the purpose of the local body. Thus, “church” has, in many local congregations, become an event that occurs, generally on Sunday mornings, within the manifestation of a collective meeting where specific regulations of worship (these can change depending on the local body’s tradition) occur. However, many leaders are looking for something more out of the local church. For these leaders, a shift in focus and direction of their local bodies is required for such a transformation in the members of their church. By shifting from their current model of “church” to the biblical calling of Christ, new communities within the local body could emerge to deepen the commitment and faith of the congregants within those local bodies. The intent of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the perceived equipping of congregants within a local body who are engaged in a single discipling community with those who are engaged in two or three discipling communities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study aimed to discover the perceived impact of local church leadership’s intentional implementation of three Christ-practiced discipling communities for the equipping of local-church congregants within six local church bodies in the state of Indiana. During the research, “Community” was defined for this study as intentional groups of different sizes and purposes with the expressed goal of building

relationships with both Christ and others in the local church. The theory guiding this study is Edward Hall's (1966) Theory of Proxemics, as it has been applied to church structures by Harrington and Absalom (2013). Applying these theories was the foundation for suggesting that individuals with local bodies are better equipped for good works of ministry (Eph. 4:11-13) when involved in all three discipling communities used by Jesus in his ministry.

Research Questions

The following research questions were considered for this study:

- RQ1.** How are the communities of a local church intentionally used to disciple congregants?
- RQ2.** What are the perspectives of local-church leaderships regarding equipping their congregants for ministry?
- RQ3.** What are the perspectives of local-church congregants in regard to their own abilities to lead in church ministry?
- RQ4.** What are the perceived benefits of engagement in one, two, or all three local-church communities in regard to discipling congregants?
- RQ5.** What are the perceived differences in leadership regarding the purpose of each community of the local church?

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative, interview/survey-based study, which was comparative by its design, as well as it examined and explored each church leadership's perceived success in discipling their congregants through intentional church communities and those church's congregants' perception of their own discipling and ability to lead in the ministry. This comparison allowed for a clearer picture of whether the intentional implementation of specific discipling groups within the local church by church leadership (pastors, elders, etc.) better discipled congregants for works of ministry (discipling others).

The interview data was collected through Zoom conference calls with pastors and leaders of each church and then transcribed (see Appendices A and H). Then, survey data was collected from congregant respondents through an online survey creator (see Appendix B). Once collected, the researcher analyzed the data to establish common themes among the responses.

Though quantitative data was collected from the congregants, a qualitative methodology was also used to explore the story of each church and its congregants. The interest of this study is to cast a deeper net to understand better whether congregant engagement in specific communities better serves to equip those congregants for discipling others rather than casting a wider net to understand how a particular phenomenon impacts a larger population.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research “is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). The main problem of this study revolves around the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. To his disciples, Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV). Jesus himself addressed the problem in that people need to be discipled, and this takes intentionality on the part of the church. However, many have written about *how* and *who* to disciple, but few have addressed whether there are specific communities that the local church should employ that are best for the discipling of its congregants.

Interview Settings

The setting of this study was six local congregations in the state of Indiana. The denominations of these churches were restricted to Christian churches (restored movement),

Baptist churches, non-denominational churches, and Methodist churches. The size of these local bodies was 100+ regular weekly attenders. Each local church body will be chosen because they offered all three local church communities (whole group, small group, mentorship groups). These groups were defined generally by size. The whole group community referred to the entire local church body, whatever the size, as they meet each week. Small groups generally were groups that included 4-15 congregants in size and met outside of the weekly worship service. This group may study the Bible, a Christian book, and have an element of worship and food. Discipleship/mentorship groups were defined as one-on-one to one-on-three groups that meet outside of the weekly service and small groups with the purpose of growing and discipling those involved. This group had an established individual who serves as the primary discipler with the others being those who are actively being disciplined. Thus, a meeting for lunch with no intentionality of discipleship would not constitute a discipleship/mentorship group. This group must meet to equip those involved to disciple someone else.

To preserve the confidentiality of each congregation, the researcher labeled the churches A, B, C, D, and E. Their pastors' identities were kept confidential, being referred to in similar coding such as AP1 or AP2 if there were two pastors in that church with the P referring to pastor. Congregants also received a code depending on their church and which engagement group they belonged to.

Groups were referred to as level 1, level 2, and level 3 referred to their engagement. Level 1 refers to those who only attend a weekly, corporate worship service; level 2 refers to those who engage in level 1 as well as small groups, and level 3 refers to those who engage in both level 1 and 2 communities while also adding being involved in a mentorship group. For instance, someone from church A that is only engaged in Sunday morning worship might be

referred to as ACL1, with the C referring to a surveyed congregant. This provided consistency when referencing the specific data collected.

The researcher conducted the interviews of the vocational staff members through a *Zoom* (video conference) call with a specific set of questions and sub-questions depending on the answers to some of the initial questions. The anticipated length of the *Zoom* calls ranged from 16 minutes to one hour and was recorded digitally for the researcher to reference following the call's conclusion. The call was recorded via the record option in *Zoom* and audio recorded with a digital audio recorder on the researcher's end of the call. The survey of the congregants was not randomized as the researcher wanted to collect data from those subjects attending the specific churches (A, B, C, D, or E) that connect to that local body. The researcher attempted to gain surveys from 7-40 congregants from each church, with an equal amount being selected that engage in each community. There was some variance in these numbers, with exact equality being challenging to gain.

Participants

Within the context of this study, purposive sampling will be conducted in two steps. First, the churches that are to be involved in the study needed to be established by the researcher discovering (1) the church qualifying in by offering all three of the communities within their local church and (2) the church's willingness to be involved both the interview process with the vocational staff and the inclusion of certain, nonrandom congregants. Step two, or data collection, was conducted both the interviews with the pastoral staff and to collect surveys from specific congregants. The researcher gained a sample size of at least six congregants from each local church to supply enough data for a meaningful analysis. The total number of surveys gathered from the study was 106.

Congregant subjects were included based on two criteria. First, the congregants needed to fit into one of three levels of engagement. These three levels were (1) congregants who engage only in corporate, weekly worship, (2) congregants who participate in weekly worship and a small group within the local church, and (3) congregants who are engaged in the two previous communities as well as being engaged in a mentorship group intentionally provided by the local church. The second criterion was that all subjects needed to be committed to the respective community with which they were engaged. This level of community engagement defines the line between commitment and engagement. A subject can be fully committed without being fully engaged if they are consistent in participating in the community they choose to be engaged in even if it is only one community.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role as a human instrument in this study was essential. Creswell (2014) says that "...the qualitative approach includes comments by the researcher about their role, and the specific type of qualitative strategy being used" (p. 184). For this researcher, the possibility of actually knowing some of the vocational pastoral staff is a real possibility and having intimate knowledge of the direction of each church. The researcher currently works as a vocational staff member as an associate pastor of a local body that would, unfortunately, fall into the "b" group if it were to be part of this study (it was not). Possibly knowing both the staff and specific participants can have advantages and disadvantages. The researcher might have an advantage throughout the interview and survey process by gaining more data because of his familiarity. However, such close knowledge of the vocational staff and certain participants may lead to a lack of complete honesty when interviewed or surveyed.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher strived to maintain the highest ethical considerations throughout the study in (1) the interview process, (2) the survey process, and (3) concerning the confidentiality of the churches themselves, the pastoral staff, and the congregants being surveyed. Coded pseudonyms for all participants, vocational pastoral staff and congregants, were assigned by identifying the church with the given matrix (ex. A, B, C, etc.). To identify the specific individual, the church code was added to either a “P” (Pastor) or “C” (Congregant), followed by a lettered and numerical ID. For instance, an associate pastor from church A would be identified as AP2 for the specific church and the second vocational staff members. Likewise, a congregant from church B who participates in weekly services and small groups might be referred to as BC9 as the ninth congregant from church B in the study. Both the vocational pastoral staff and the congregants received full disclosure of the nature of the study prior to their participation. The researcher respects all church’s and congregant’s rights to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were ensured that the data collected from the study were in no way used to damage the reputation of the church or individuals within the church. The researchers also adhered to all directives given by Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Collection Methods

A purposive sample for the intent of comparison was used to examine the differences between the communities offered within the six churches dividing these groups into the three distinct communities within the study. The collection of the data and the security of the information gained during the study were of the utmost importance in protecting confidential information from each church and its congregants. The data collection process took place in

multiple steps. First, the researcher vetted each local body to ensure they offered all three communities to their congregants. Once six qualifying churches were found, the researcher no longer pursued the addition of more churches unless a church subsequently withdrew from the study. Once the churches agreed to be in the study, the researcher found congregants from each church that fit within each community needed for the study itself. Once the churches and participants had been selected, the researcher conducted Zoom teleconference interview calls with the vocational staff of each local church body. This interview was documented in a notebook and recorded for later examination. Regarding interviews, Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora (2015) say, “A study with strong and clear communication between researcher and participants requires fewer participants to offer sufficient information power than a study with ambiguous or unfocused dialogues” (p. 1754). The researcher strove to establish a rapport with the staff to ensure that collaboration led to more precise and more honest answers during the interview.

The researcher took great care in collecting the data to maintain the anonymity of the churches and congregants participating in the study. The Zoom meetings were recorded for later viewing and transcription and were housed on an external hard drive safely kept at the researcher's home in a safe. The identity of the churches was not revealed during the Zoom call, and they were only identified by their church “code.” In a separate document housed on the researcher's computer was the “key” so each church could be identified. Keeping the key and the coded Zoom recording separate served and will continue to serve to protect the confidentiality of the church as a whole. For the congregants as individuals, the researcher created a questionnaire in Survey Monkey with the church's code as the only identifier ensuring the total anonymity of the congregant. The researcher then printed the results of the participating subjects from each

church and coded them in order for consistency. The congregants' actual names were not present, and their identifying code remained consistent throughout the study. The data was scanned and stored digitally on an external hard drive, a flash drive, and a security-locked folder attached to the researcher's email. The hard drive and flash drive were stored in a flood and fireproof safe in the researcher's home.

Instruments

This study utilized two instruments of data collection. First were the interviews of the pastors/elder of each church. The platform for collecting this data was two-fold. First, the interview was conducted on the Zoom software application. This recording process enabled the interview (see Appendices A and H) to be recorded visually and with audio for later transcription. Second, the researcher possessed a secondary program recording the interview audio on an iPhone 11. This process was to ensure that in the case of equipment failure, there was a backup audio of the interview to transcribe. The second instrument used was the survey of the congregants. The surveys were collected on a computer platform called Survey Monkey (See Appendix B for the survey questions). These surveys included two specific pieces of data collection. First, a question was offered to the congregant allowing them to select a "Strongly agree/Agree/Disagree/ or Strongly Disagree" option establishing an exact answer in their minds. Below each question was a follow-up question asking the congregant why they chose that specific answer to the question allowing them to explain their motives and tell their story further. It is the second *why* question that was of chief concern for the researcher's analysis in the study. Once the data was collected, the researcher was able to compare both the perceived discipling-making health of the vocational staff with the perceived growth and equipping of the congregants of each church, as well as the difference in the perceived discipling/equipping from the three

engagement groups to determine the variance in discipling based upon involvement in one, two, or three local church communities.

Protocol

The protocol during the interview and survey process assisted the researcher in maintaining focus on answering the research questions. The interview protocol followed the guidelines presented by Creswell (2014). Creswell's interview protocol suggests that the researcher ask four to five questions with additional follow-ups and record the interview by audiotape or some other audio recording method (p. 194). The researcher planned to video the call collecting both visual and audio data for later transcription. The protocol included an audio announcement of a heading (date, places, interviewer, and interviewee), an introductory greeting where gratitude was expressed by the interviewer, a set of interview questions with possible follow up questions (Appendix A), the interview itself, and a final thank-you statement acknowledging the time the interviewee spent during the interview (Creswell, 2014, p. 194).

Procedures

Once clearance from Liberty's IRB was approved, church websites of congregations in Indiana were visited to narrow the field of possible participating local bodies. These churches needed to agree that discipleship is one of their main priorities and have a congregation of 200+ (pre-Covid), and all offer each of the three communities at their local church. After evaluating the churches through their website, churches were called to see (1) if they have at least one full-time pastor on staff, (2) if the local church does indeed fit the qualifications needed, and (3) if the pastor is willing to participate in the study, and (4) if the pastor is confident the active participation of the congregants. This last step in achieving a qualified church may have required the pastor to go before the congregation and request participants. The researcher's goal was to

gain a one-hour interview with all staff from the church, which could range in size from a single pastor to multiple pastoral staff members. The senior pastor's email address was obtained for communication, and a date and time were established for the interview at the staff member's convenience (s). Once the interview was completed, the pastor received a link to a survey of disbursement to the participating congregants. Following the interview with the pastor(s), transcripts were created and then stored in separate secure files. Each survey was also placed into each church's corresponding folder for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis Methods

Once the interviews were conducted and recorded, the researcher transcribed them using Reaper software. The recordings were also stored on the same external hard drive, flash drive, and secure-locked file as the scanned surveys. Easton and McComish (2000) raise concerns that transcription can lead to the misinterpretation of a word or mishearing of a word on the part of the transcriber. Other errors occur when the person transcribing the interview does not hear the word correctly and transcribes it the way he or she interprets it" (p. 706). Conducting the interviews on video allowed the transcriber to compare the audio of the call and see the words being formed by the interviewee to avoid transcription errors. The data from the transcription was organized by each church and were subsequently paired with the results from the surveys. Each church received a unique code that identified them and provided confidentiality. These codes were as such: A, B, C, D, and E. As previously stated, congregants who participated in the study were also broken up into three categories based on their engagement in the local church. Level 1 congregants were congregants who only participated in weekly services, level 2 congregants were those who participated in both a weekly service and a small group, and level 3

congregants were those who participated in the previous two communities and intimate discipleship groups.

To gain the understanding needed to conduct a two-way analysis (from the perception of the pastors to the congregants and from one level of engagement to another), the researcher looked for common/varying themes among the answers to the interview questions and the surveys. To better evaluate the reoccurring perceptions among participants, the analysis was divided into corresponding levels of engagement. Thus, each of the three levels of engagement was analyzed separately and then as specific themes emerged alongside one another. This content analysis was evaluated on a computer software called Reaper that allows for transcription.

Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research methodologies, trustworthiness is often a tough question due to the ease with which subjectivity can play a tremendous role in the outcome of the data. The approach by the researcher is even more vital as they ensure their own subjective natures do not muddy up the waters of the results. Qualitative research can be subjective, necessitating meticulous work to ensure valid results (Easton & McComish, 2000). Great care is needed in both how the data is collected and in the process of its analysis. Because qualitative research necessitates telling others' narratives, there is a lack of exact quantitative data to examine. Thus, the search for *truth* becomes increasingly difficult with the lack of concrete, objective data.

To ensure trustworthiness throughout the study, several strategies of validity were used. Creswell (2014) suggests that eight strategies would be helpful, but the researcher employed three directly related to the study. First, the researcher extensively examined his own bias when approaching the research and strived to maintain objective accountability during the study. This

accountability ensured that the interview and the survey questions were not crafted to lean toward the researcher's desired outcome. Second, triangulation compared the data from the six churches in two different ways to establish specific themes from church to church and category to category.

Credibility

In qualitative methodologies, Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) contend that the research is “...valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize” (p. 53). This approach means that the results of the study need be believable, applicable, and be able to be replicated in later studies. The credibility of a qualitative research, though subjective, still needs to develop a theory by which a particular phenomenon can be observed, recorded from the perspective of a subject, and retested within the context of another group of subjects with an approximately similar circumstance. The intentional and rigorous approach of the researcher was aimed at developing a study and theory that adheres to a high threshold of legitimacy.

A foundational aspect of the credibility of this study is to ensure that though the subjects' level of engagements were different, the commitment of each of the subjects is at a high level. For instance, simply because a particular subject is engaged during the weekly corporate meeting, generally the Sunday service, does not mean they are uncommitted. This study strove to survey only committed subjects regardless of their level of engagement to ensure that the results revolve around the level of engagement rather than having a shadow of doubt due to a possible commitment issue from level one subjects.

The face validity was attained by gathering a group of two discipleship pastors for an expert panel. This group was to ensure that the study was credible. Each pastor on the expert

panel had at least ten years of ministry experience and evaluated both the interview questions and the survey questions. The panel was sent a copy of the research questions and the interview and survey questions to help refine the researcher's approach. This was done by ensuring that the interview/survey questions serve to understand further the answers to each research question presented by the researcher.

Dependability

Creswell (2014) says that dependability “indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (p. 201). Ensuring dependability means that the study needed be credible and when the researcher and situation are changed, replicable. For this study, the researcher drew on the work and studies of others in a variety of disciplines such as, but not limited to, leadership, theology of discipleship, local church structure, and sociology. The model of the study was indeed customized from theories by Hall (1966), Harrington and Absalom (2010), and other models of discipleship as they are applicable to the whole church body, small groups, or mentorship groups. The synthesis of these theories and previous works by other researchers has afforded the researcher to question not the theology or application of discipleship models but the intentional communities by which they were employed. Though very few have taken the time to investigate the specific communities of the local church that might foster discipleship in the congregants, many others have worked tirelessly to add to the conversation regarding the Great Commission. This researcher strove to add to the conversation in a slightly different direction, with the goal of the study being able to be replicated by others. The application of this study served to its dependability and longevity.

The researcher did a randomly assigned split-half congruency of the gathered surveys for further dependability. This application ensured that the dependability of the results was accurate

even when the surveys were placed randomly into two groups. Though the survey results will not be an exact match, there should be a 70% or above congruency between the two randomly assigned split-half groups. This process serves to make sure that the instruments were dependable.

Confirmability

According to Hays & Singh (2011), “confirmability refers to the degree to which findings of a study are genuine reflections of the participants investigated” (p. 201). To this end, an equivalent number of participants was sought from each group. This was to ensure that an overwhelming amount of data was not collected within a single category, while another group lacked enough results to get a clear picture of the perceived readiness of those engaged in that community. This process was to avoid any data that would otherwise skew the numbers and reduce the confirmability of the study.

Transferability

The researcher made all findings from the study available to readers who would like to transfer the process within the study to their respective situations. Still adhering to the confidentiality of both the churches and the participating subjects, the details of the information were still helpful for both the churches participating in the study and those who would use the results and theories from the study to further their own ministries.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the reader to the research design process, including the setting of the study, the participants, ethical considerations, data collection methods, and instruments for data collection. The researcher has also considered the trustworthiness, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study as a whole. The combination of chapters one, two,

and three remind the reader that God's plan through Christ for the church is discipleship exclusively. The Commission given in Matthew 28:19-20 establishes Jesus' authority, and based upon that authority, allows Jesus to instruct his disciples to disciple others by going, baptizing, and teaching others to obey all that he has commanded. Paul's writings to local ecclesia confirm that the early disciples and apostles understood this to be the true nature of the Commission. To the church in Ephesus, Paul writes,

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Thus, the call to disciple is not only given by Jesus but confirmed by the writers of the New Testament, referencing the actions of the early church. Understanding this call allows for further inquiry into the intentional communities that foster such a Commission. Yet the implementation of these communities within local churches requires intentionality on the part of pastors and other leaders in those churches.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, interview, and survey-based study was to explore the relationship between the intentional development of three Christ-practiced communities within the local church and the perception of the congregants within the three groups of engagement on their own ability to lead in ministry.

The study involved (1) interviews with staff from each of the six churches to determine the level of intentionality when it comes to the development and application of these communities and (2) surveys of congregants within those churches to determine if engagement within more groups led to the congregants' perception of being equipped and disciplined to lead in ministry. All pastors and leaders interviewed expressed that discipleship was occurring within their local body. Still, the primary concern was to what degree is the impact of engagement within the three Christ-practiced communities (whole group, small groups, mentorship groups) on congregants discipling them to lead in ministry? This research sought to understand both the importance of these communities from the pastors' perspective and the community's impact on discipling congregants. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1. How are the communities of a local church intentionally used to disciple congregants?

RQ2. What are the perspectives of local-church leaderships regarding equipping their congregants for ministry?

RQ3. What are the perspectives of local-church congregants regarding their own abilities to lead in church ministry?

RQ4. What are the perceived benefits of engagement in one, two, or all three local-church communities regarding discipling congregants?

This chapter will elaborate on the compilation protocol and measures, the demographic and sample data gathered, analysis and findings, and an evaluation of the research design.

The main goal of both the interviews and the surveys was to establish identifiable themes from the interviewees and those surveyed. Bradley, Curry, and Devers (2007) argue that “Themes are general propositions that emerge from diverse and detail-rich experiences of participants and provide recurrent and unifying ideas regarding the subject of inquiry” (p. 1766). By examining both the interviews and survey, the researcher can identify specific themes that relate to the perceptions of those included in the study. It is the common themes that are the core concern of the researcher.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Churches were vetted by first visiting their websites through an online directory identifying churches of various sizes in the state of Indiana. A list of 125 churches was compiled and the researcher subsequently emailed an invitation to participate in the study to the senior pastors and/or discipleship pastors of the church. Six churches were eventually included within the study and interview times were scheduled. The interviews were conducted and recorded for later transcription through the online medium Zoom. The Zoom call was captured on a computer and audio recorded on a secondary device as a backup. The researcher then used the online tool Survey Monkey to establish and collect the survey data via the questionnaires.

The study called for two different methods of data collection to analyze the intentionality of the groups from the senior/executive pastor’s perspective as well as the perception of the intentionality and equipping from the perspective of the local church congregants. The first method of data collection involved a 20–30-minute interview with the pastors from each church

which also may have included one or two leaders that were intimately involved in the development and implementation of the communities in the church.

The purpose of this interview was to gauge to what degree each church was providing information and opportunities for these communities as well as to what degree each church had intentionally designed the communities toward a specific discipleship outcome. The pastor of each church was to have been in staff for more than five years with their discipleship program having been a part of their design for more than two years. The responses given by both the pastors of the churches and the leaders that were interviewed provided great insight into the development of these communities and the clarity the church had in the community's purpose of discipleship.

Interview Transcription

In order to transcribe the interviews conducted by the researcher using Zoom, the researcher replayed the videos and manually transcribed the interviews into Word documents (see Appendix H, Church "A"- Church "F") for further examination. For consistency, the researcher was labeled as "RE". At the same time, the pastors were given a code based upon their church code ("A"- "F"), the letter "P" for the pastor, and a numerical value indicating which pastor was speaking if more than one was being interviewed. The leaders involved in the interviews (Churches "B" and "D") were also given a code with the same attributes as the pastors, with the only change being an "L" for a leader instead of a "P" for pastor. Church "B" included three leaders thus, BL1, BL2, and BL3 were used, while church "D" only included one leader, making him DL1.

Survey Collection

The second part of the data collection was a survey that included quantitative and qualitative questions. The sole purpose of the quantitative questions was to give those surveyed a solid response prior to asking the open-ended, qualitative questions. This approach was used in Pinzer's (2017) dissertation to allow those surveyed to have a level of a definitive belief before asking the open-ended question. Each quantitative question asked for a "Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree" answer with the following question: "Why did you answer the previous question that way?"

The study collected data in interview transcriptions for each church and physical copies of the surveys that each congregant filled out. Bradley, Curry, and Devers (2007) suggest that an "...approach to developing themes is to conduct a comparative analysis of concepts coded in different participant groups or setting codes" (p. 1767). The survey's primary purpose was to establish these themes through a categorized approach to the qualitative data analysis. The surveys were thus divided into three categories based on the congregants' engagement in those church communities. There were those who only participated in one community, those who participated in two communities, and those who participated in all three communities offered by the church. This data was then analyzed for common themes comparing the intentionality and clarity of those being interviewed with the perception of those being surveyed. Then the surveys were analyzed in more depth to discover themes between those in the three different communities of engagement. These themes allowed the researcher to analyze better the impact of intentional communities on the discipling and equipping of the congregants in each church.

The researcher consulted 130 websites of churches in the state of Indiana to determine if the churches met the community benchmarks of the study, called each church, providing an

overview of the study to the pastor, enlisted six churches who showed interest in participating, emailed a personalized and more in-depth explanation of the study along with a recruitment letter and consent forms for each pastor and leader involved in the interview process, providing a copy of the interview and survey questions, interviewed the each of the pastors/leaders in a recorded Zoom call, and provided a URL link to the survey to each pastor for dissemination to their congregants. The surveys were then collected and printed from SurveyMonkey for later analysis and paired with the transcription from the same church the congregant attended.

Demographic and Sample Data

Interview Demographic Data (Pastors)

Table 3

Interview Demographic Data (Pastors)

Church	Specific Role	Years in Ministry	Years at current church
Church A: Pastor	Pastor of Discipleship and Family Ministry	7 years	2 years
Church B: Pastor	Senior Pastor	28 years	15 years
Church C: Pastor	Youth and Discipleship Pastor	22 years	13 years
Church D: Pastor	Discipleship and Community Pastor	17 years	12 years
Church E: Pastor	Pastor of Discipleship and Community	15 years	13 years
Church F: Pastor	Senior Pastor	27 years	10 years

***For an expanded view of both the pastors and leaders interviewed, see appendix G.**

Table 4*Survey Demographic Data*

Church	Communities	Number of Surveys	Average years at church (Mean)	Range of years at church
Church A	1 Community	2	3.1 years	.25-6 years
	2 Communities	2	32 years	28-36 years
	3 Communities	3	6 years	3-11 years
Church B	1 Community	2	31.5 years	18-45 years
	2 Communities	6	26.8 years	2-43 years
	3 Communities	4	33.1 years	.5-44 years
Church C	1 Community	3	6.7 years	2-14 years
	2 Communities	3	5 years	1-8 years
	3 Communities	1	10 years	10 years
Church D	1 Community	8	16.6 years	3-40 years
	2 Communities	14	14.4 years	3-45 years
	3 Communities	8	22.6 years	6-64 years
Church E	1 Community	5	7 years	1-15 years
	2 Communities	18	10.7 years	2-32 years
	3 Communities	9	12.9 years	4-38 years
Church F	1 Community	7	14.3 years	2-38 years
	2 Communities	5	14.4 years	3-40 years
	3 Communities	6	9.3 years	4-13 years
Totals	1 Community	27	13.3	.25-45 years
	2 Communities	48	17.2	1-45 years
	3 Communities	31	15.5	.5-64 years

***For an expanded view of survey data, see appendix H.**

Data Analysis and Findings

While recruiting for possible churches, church pastors and leaders were asked four questions for demographic purposes to gain a better understanding of the time and work they have put into their current ministries (Table 3). The interviews consisted of eight main questions with the possibility of five follow up questions depending on the answers given using exact wording for consistency from church to church (Appendix A). The researcher then provided the pastors of the churches a link to distribute to their congregants to gather the survey data. Each church interview was organized by church pseudonym, pastor/leader pseudonym, role in the church, years in ministry, and years at their current church.

The surveys consisted of four demographic questions and were used to compile the information found in Table 4. This information gave the researcher further information on the engagement of each congregant along with their tie at the church and ministries they served within. The collected data was organized into church pseudonyms, survey number, groups engaged in (1-3), years at their current church, and ministries in which they serve. Along with demographic data, the surveys to congregants asked seventeen quantitative questions with an open-ended, qualitative “Why did you choose this answer?” (Appendix B). The quantitative data was eventually discarded, leaving only the qualitative responses.

Research Question 1

The first research question was “How are the communities of a local church intentionally used to disciple congregants?” This question was addressed within each interview with the pastors and leaders of each church. Questions 1-5, along with their possible follow up questions, addressed the issues of perceived importance of discipleship communities and the intentionality by which these communities were designed and developed. The first question of the interview

served primarily as an ice breaker as the content of the question was almost a given due to the churches being involved in the study in the first place. It did, however, allow for those being interviewed to elaborate more, or in some cases less, on the exact importance of discipleship to their church. There were three common factors found in the six interviews conducted. These factors are identified in table 5 below.

Table 5

Common Factors

1. Factor: To what degree is discipleship/disciple-making important to the church.
2. Factor: The designation of specific staff leading the discipleship communities.
3. Factor: The intentionality of the design of each community in developing disciples.

Common Factor #1

The first common factor was the degree in which discipleship/disciple-making was important to the church as a whole. Of the six churches, ten people total, who were interviewed, the importance of discipleship varied quite a bit. All interviewees, pastoral staff and leader alike, agreed that discipleship/disciple-making was important to their church, but some churches had discipleship as a central priority while others relegated it to one of many values. For instance, some interviewees perceived that discipleship/disciple-making was the overall call of the church with all other values “hanging” from the discipleship “umbrella.” These interviewees believed that values such as fellowship, prayer, Scripture reading and even evangelism were “downstream” and a part of discipleship in their church. Yet others simply saw discipleship as one of these values. Table 6 features excerpts from the interviewees regarding the importance of discipleship/disciple-making in their church.

Table 6

Interviewee's Response to the Importance of Discipleship/Disciple-making in Their Local Church

The Interviewee giving the Response	The Statement Regarding the Importance of Discipleship/Disciple-Making in their church
AP1	"We have seven of them [values] that you can find on our website. And one of them is intentional discipleship...now when you say, 'How important is it?'...[Discipleship] can sometimes be different."
BP1	"It's in our information...if we don't do it, we don't do what the church is supposed to do."
BL2	"...it [discipleship] has been emphasized a lot more than it ever was...People were trying to...get to come to church, but the discipleship part of it, I feel like it was lacking."
CP1	"...I think it is absolutely essential...but I feel like [the] church has always struggled a bit with that."
DP1	"...[Discipleship] is highly important. We're looking at this as...really trying to not just be programmatic, but changing kind of culture and what we think of what it means to be a disciple...part of discipleship is making disciples. You don't become a disciple until you make a disciple."
EP1	"I would say it us a stated goal...we seek to disciple people...in terms of kind of the form we call movements, so we want people to engage in each of those."
FP1	"...I think from a basic perspective...the concept of discipleship is not well enough defined perhaps in our church...if you were to ask that question to [our] leadership, I'm quite positive that they would say that [discipleship is important]."

According to the interviewees, the concept and importance of discipleship varies a great deal. Some suggests that it is the core values of the church as did DP1. Others still struggle to accurately identify any major tenets of discipleship as in FP1. This ambiguity was reflected in the survey responses of each church. The table below addresses the survey responses for "My local church intentionally makes discipleship a priority" in percentage by church.

Table 7

Perception of Congregants on How Important Discipleship is to Their Church

Church	Survey Answers			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A	14.3%	42.9%	42.9%	0%
B	50%	50%	0%	0%
C	0%	100%	0%	0%
D	60%	36.7%	3.3%	0%
E	46.9%	46.9%	6.3%	0%
F	22.2%	66.7%	11.1%	0%

Of those congregants surveyed that had a positive perception of their church's priority on discipleship, there was no consistency between communities of engagement (1, 2, or 3) and the congregant's answers. There were just as many congregants in all engagements that answered positively as well as negatively. It might be assumed that the congregants engaged in more communities would have a higher percentage of positive perceptions of their own church's discipleship priority, but the data did not support this conclusion. This inverse was true as well. Congregants of only 1 community did not automatically have a negative perception of their own church's discipleship priority. In fact, many (93%) of those engaged in only 1 community had an "Agree" or even a "Strongly Agree" response to the question (question #3). This means that the perception of congregants at least was that their church placed a rather high priority on the idea of discipleship (RQ 3). The below table records excerpts from the survey's qualitative element associated with the importance of discipleship at their local church.

Table 8*Congregant Surveys of Importance of Discipleship in Their Local Church*

<i>Survey Question #4: My local church intentionally makes discipleship a priority. (Response)</i> <i>Why did you answer the question this way? (Explanation)</i>			
Church Survey #	Response	Number of Communities	Explanation
Church "A" Survey #3	Disagree	3	"My church encourages getting involved in a small group...However, it does not advertise small groups as an area of discipleship."
Church "A" Survey #7	Strongly Agree	2	"Discipleship is one of our key points in our overall strategy (how we are advancing our mission). We have put significant resources toward this."
Church "A" Survey #5	Agree	1	"Our church provides opportunities for the body to be engaged in Groups, and promotes this regularly. However, I couldn't answer strongly agree, because I do not feel our budget reflects this value."
Church "B" Survey #12	Strongly Agree	3	"We provide opportunities for people to get involved in small groups as well as encourage 2-3 person discipleship groups."
Church "B" Survey #55	Strongly Agree	2	"I'm a new member and I believe [church name] does make discipleship a priority."
Church "B" Survey #14	Agree	2	"This is something that we are growing into as we engage others in bible study."
Church "C" Survey #18	Agree	1	Because that is what God wants us to do! GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES!
Church "D" Survey #22	Strongly Agree	3	"Ministry, vision, objectives, and initiatives emphasize making and growing disciples."
Church "D" Survey #49	Strongly Agree	2	[The church] Has discipleship and mentoring programs to teach you how to do so plus it has volunteers who are discipleship guides and mentors."
Church "D" Survey #39	Agree	1	"The importance of discipleship is taught, and many options for connecting with people are available and encouraged."
Church "E" Survey #65	Disagree	3	"Until recently, I have not seen efforts to discipleship people after baptism. "That may be changing with the "Rooted" program but it is too early to tell."
Church "E" Survey #59	Disagree	3	"I don't know of any hardcore discipleship bible studies, nor do I see that we're taking the truth and applying it into most of the things that I see at my church. It's full of love and mercy but God is also truth, holy and righteous. The questions was: 'My local church intentionally makes discipleship a priority?' No, they don't. We have fun and they make church enjoyable."

Church “E” Survey #87	Strongly Agree	2	“Church pastors and leaders encourage involvement in the community and encourage the sharing of God’s Word through communication and example.”
Church “E” Survey #83	Strongly Agree	2	“I have been at [church name] for about 8 years. Prior to joining this church, I shopped around. I had previously attended a church for 24 years that was not discipleship led. The ultimate result of that was a church split...I have been heavily involved at the previous church, so I took a break from getting involved until I could see for myself that this church was the ‘real thing.’”
Church “E” Survey #72	Agree	1	“There are ways they offer to make discipleship a priority for people, but it is up to each individual to walk that walk.”
Church “F” Survey #96	Agree	3	“I believe that it is a mission of the church. It regularly talks about it and tries to put programs in place to help people grow.”
Church “F” Survey #107	Disagree	3	“Because I feel like our church should step it up when it comes to discipleship, especially on the part that falls on elders.”
Church “F” Survey #106	Agree	2	“It is frequently discussed as a part of who we are as followers of God. We have many that have that calling within our church and Leadership who seek out to those new followers, those struggling and those who are strong within our church and community.”
Church “F” Survey #94	Agree	1	“It’s talked about a lot and an emphasis is placed on discipleship, but there is little done to mobilize it in our church.”
Church “F” Survey #105	Agree	1	“Not sure congregation is fully bought in. I feel we talk about it often, but we don’t always put it into action.”

In examining the responses from both the pastors and leaders alongside with the congregant perceptions, some themes begin to emerge as to the perspectives of the pastors and congregants view the leadership’s priority of discipleship. All of the pastors and leaders agreed that discipleship was important to their church but the manner in which they felt it was intentionally pursued changed to a great degree. First, the pastors from churches “A” and “F” were less sure of their own intentional processes of discipleship within their church. Consequently, both of those churches had the highest percentage of congregants that held the perception that the church did NOT have discipleship as a priority. Within the surveys of these

two churches, many congregants expressed that the church might talk about discipleship from the platform, but that there was little actual planning and execution of any meaningful discipleship programs.

Second, of the churches whose pastors and leaders expressed an intentional direction and path to discipleship, congregants of all three communities were more likely to agree that discipleship was an important value of their church. This means that churches expressing discipleship as an intentional priority have congregants involved in each community that clearly understood the position and desire of the church to disciple their congregants. Churches “B”, “C”, “D”, and “E” had surveys from all three communities affirming that the church placed a high regard to discipleship. Even if a congregant was only involved in a single community at the church, they still were aware of the church’s intentional direction toward discipling people. This is interesting because the intentionality of the church to express discipleship as a priority is not based upon the communities in which the congregants are engaged. Congregants of the four churches that expressed an intentional direction and plan in making disciples were more likely to agree that their church intentionally makes discipleship a priority regardless of community engagement.

Common Factor #2

The second common factor was whether the local church had designated a specific person to the intentional development of discipleship and community in the church. The importance of this question is that churches will spend resources, both money and staff, in areas that they feel is addressing their core values and mission. For instance, churches that place a high priority on outreach might have budgeted money and staff that is responsible for this area of ministry while churches that place a high value on youth ministry might also do the same. The

purpose of this question to leaders was to determine to what degree their value of discipleship/disciple-making was simply ideological or whether it was being put into practice by the local church. Below are the results of the interview question: Are there designated staff members and/or other church leaders (i.e. elders, deacons, etc...) charged with setting up and casting vision for these groups/communities?"

Table 9

Interview Answers about Designated Staff Members of Discipleship

The Interviewee giving the Response	The Statement Regarding the Designated Staff or other leaders charged with casting vision church communities
AP1 (Discipleship Pastor: 6 months in that position)	[I am the dedicated staff member. But] "...It will be a team effort...each of our campuses has its own groups and staff members. So, either a group's director or groups ministry that in the past...we had only the one space, the small group space, but we are looking to add more micro groups...as we begin to start these micro groups that we're developing right now, that we're designing right now, we plan to start with just our team and then prayerfully inviting two or three others into those micro groups."
BL3	"Christian Education. We have a Christian Education committee and that's where it begins. Pastors are all in on that [committee]."
CP1	"Well, [senior pastor] would be the main one and I do it as well. So, it would probably become mainly from the pastors of the church, but our elders have helped out in that area a lot as well. So, it hasn't been just us. But I would say mainly that group [pastors and elders]."
DP1	"Yeah, unfortunately it's just me trying to build some more team approaches in that. We have a discipleship team. Again, culture change is made up of ministry leaders who have traditionally been planners but I'm casting the vision. Part of that has let me back up. It's me that is presenting this but people on that discipleship team always communicating that this is the direction that God's calling us to go. This is the vision and getting them to own that a little bit with that vision. So, our mission is to help people take the next step with Jesus. That's our mission statement. And instead of a lot of small groups kind of doing their own thing, we want to look at this as specifically, how are you helping people take the next step with Jesus, both within your brother and sisters in Christ, but also about in your community and your neighborhood? We want to make sure that the discipleship vision is going with the overall church vision."
EP1	"Yeah, we've had a radical shift in our staffing here. When I came six years ago, there were three or four full-time employees in the adult area and then we have jostled around, and some people have left and COVID and you know what your base is. So, it's me and my administrator. Then I have a men's lead team, a women's lead team and the groups lead team. I'm in the process of trying to merge all of

	those groups into one master group. So I have lay folks who are working with that a little too siloed. That's why I'm trying to push them together and engage them more cooperatively. It's not that they aren't cooperative or willing to cooperate. That just hasn't been our structure"
FP1	"Yeah, no [we don't have a staff member dedicated to discipleship and community]. I mean, not specifically. I mean, I think each one of us contributes a little bit into it, but we don't have somebody as of right now yet that obviously is in a position where they're saying like, 'I'm really casting the vision. This is how this is all gonna fit together and make that happen.' So, we don't have a champion of discipleship."

It is clear from the answers given that there is a range from each local church in how important they perceived discipleship to be based on their commitment to cast vision and engage in development. This range includes churches that have a designated, paid staff member casting vision and championing discipleship and community to churches that have established committee's and have equipped lay people or other leaders to churches that have no real plan for intentionality. This range in dedication places churches in two distinct camps. The first camp are the churches that have not taken an intentional approach to designating someone, or multiple someone's, to take on the role of vision caster and leader in the development of communities. Churches "A" and "F" are the two that fall into this group. Even though church "A" does have a designated staff member over discipleship, they have only been in the role for less than six months not allowing enough time for measurable change in the church. Consequently, those two churches also have the greatest number of surveyed congregants perceiving that their church does NOT have discipleship as a core value.

The second camp includes churches that have taken measurable steps, to varying degrees, to address having an individual, team, or committee to champion the development of discipleship communities in the church. Churches "B", "C", "D", and "E" all have established designs in staff and/or teams that serve to cast vision and address the development of discipleship communities

in the church. Some have staff members overseeing communities while others have created teams that might include pastors, elders, deacon, or other lay leaders to collaborate in the process. Regardless of the exact nature of the champion chosen, there is a marketable difference in perception from the surveyed congregants of the importance of discipleship at their local church. These churches included a higher percentage of congregants that had a positive perception of the importance of discipleship to their churches.

Common Factor #3

The third common factor is the intentionality of each of the three communities at the local church and the perception of the effectiveness of these communities from the congregant surveys. For pastors and leaders in the local churches, it is important for them to face the reality of their own designs. Are the communities intentionally developed to make disciples and do the congregants perceive that discipleship is occurring within each community? Question 3-5 of the interview were created to gauge the pastors' and leaders' perception of the intentional design of each community. These three questions focused on the intentionality and differences between each community. Were the communities designed with different outcomes causing them to be developed differently? The table below highlights the interviewees' answers and how they addressed each community (whole, small, and discipleship group).

Table 10

Interviewee's Explanation of Different Community Designs

Interviewee Answering the Question	Specific Community Being Addressed	Explanation of the Community
AP1	Whole Group	"...just within that space by itself, it's pretty typical where, um, it's pretty simple, you know, song worship through song and then sermon that is given by our lead pastor or teaching pastor or a guest pastor. Those sermons are really designed to kind of help our new believers know how they can take the

	<p>Small Groups</p> <p>next step to follow Jesus. But they also give a call to action usually from every Sunday morning service.”</p> <p>“So small groups here at ***** Church are really designed right now to take the Sunday morning worship spirit experience more from a passive learning environment to an active learning one. We have something called Daily Bible Readings that...people subscribe to and it gets emailed to them every morning at 5 am. Then when they get together in their small groups during the week, hopefully what they’re doing is they’re supposed to be discussing what they’ve learned in the Daily Bible Readings and holding each other accountable to those things.”</p> <p>Discipleship Groups</p> <p>“Yeah, I really think that this is the money spot, this micro group space. I think that maybe this is the hot house for the Holy Spirit, we’ll call it. And really the use of the term mentorship is not necessarily the same idea here because ours are designed to be a little bit more shoulder to shoulder. Mentorship, they, the micro groups will all have a facilitator. So, in that vein, they are in a sense, a little bit of a mentor ship group. but we really kind of believed that, you know, these spaces are that the space where you're going to get under the hood, you're going to, um, you're going to dig into the word, um, a lot more than you will in either of our other two spaces.”</p>	
BL2	Whole Group	<p>“I feel like I'm disciplined every Sunday, you know, for the last 40 years you always come to know more and grow more. I maybe I, maybe not everybody feels that way, but in addition to worship, uh, I think that I don't ever remember leaving that I didn't learn something to apply. Okay. I took it more as not, not, uh, I guess maybe that's not, whenever you say the corporate service, you're not including Sunday school, I guess what you're saying. And I think that one of them is learning something that somebody has to say from the scripture. It may not be a dialogue. It may not be sharing about your life, but if there's learning happening there that you wouldn't have, otherwise just stumbled across, I guess.”</p>
BL3	Whole Group	<p>“Part of the idea on my end, I found in the materials when they came here was a sermon should be</p>

BL1	Small Group	<p>practical, applicable, not just head stuff. Right. And so, I've tried to follow that same kind of thing that it's something that's happened, so there's not accountability. So, it's not in that sense formation for training, but, um, the shooting it, what are you going to do with what, what are some possibilities that you might do with what we've covered today?"</p> <p>"I think just being smaller, you, you are more willing to, um, open up your life to be able to pour into other people's lives that would end up in a bunch of bigger groups. I guess it, what I put on here was it facilitated spiritual growth because you're, I guess, uh, because you're more willing to open up whatever it's a smaller group of people. I think it should be that you make it a priority because that's what God has called us to is to sound more like him. So, we want to eat, you know, for believers to encourage and push you to grow."</p>
BL1	Discipleship Groups	<p>[Discipleship Groups are important] "Cause you don't have anywhere else to hide. When it's you and two other people now it's, uh, I mean, it's, it's like when you're, you know, when you're sitting and talking with your mom, it's going to be a different conversation than when you have your whole family all around. You're not gonna bring up all terrible your kids have been. Uh, you know, you're going to talk about what's going on in your life and the real stuff. And so, I think that that's where half of it happens is when you're talking about life with just a couple of people, and they can speak back of your life with what they're seeing and the things that you guys need this study."</p>
CP1	Whole Group	<p>"That one's a hard one because, um, I mean, we always try to have the gospel message in there where, where sometimes we have salvation and sometimes, we don't. Um, we have people come forward at the end for prayer, dealing with different issues that isn't necessarily salvation issues, the struggles they're going through their life. There's always teaching. And I think some, maybe like some discipleship teaching, but I like that when you talking about discipling people, um, I mean, it's kind of a process where people come together and they maybe they're</p>

	<p>Small Groups</p> <p>kind of fed for that morning, but I don't know how much discipling actually goes on just from Sunday morning service.”</p> <p>“I think it's been a really big help. What I've kind of seen in talking to a lot of different small group leaders. I feel like it kind of feels like half are disciplined and half aren't. And I don't know that it has to do with half are seekers and half are non-seekers or why that is. Um, but I can't say everyone who's going through small groups is getting disciplined. I just know there's some that they, they just, nothing seemed to change for them. I'm just basing it off of that. There's seems to be no different fruit on the tree. And then I see others where it seems like it's made a huge difference. So we've tried to take small group deeper in and really focus on relationships, more intimacy, more privacy.”</p> <p>Discipleship Groups</p> <p>“They really go way deeper. I mean, they're both super deep studies that they're going through. Like they would say, if you were to ask them like how, how how's men's group affected you. They would probably say it's been a game changer in my life. My walk with Christ is way better now saying that we probably got men in our group and women in our group. That that may not be true of either though. So, um, I guess the bottom line for me, I still feel like there's always those who participate, but they're seekers and non-seekers. And I always feel like the seekers are going to kind of live it and do it.”</p>
DL1	<p>Whole Group</p> <p>“First of all, the, the pastoring of the service is all strictly Bible verse related. We don't get a feel-good kind of services that, you know, you'd go out there and be happy and joyful life. It's all based on the Bible. And it's all the talk and talked about. This is how you have to live your life. This is the way you should live your life. And every week we hear in our services, the thing that DP1 has said is that go and make disciples, help people grow in their faith. Uh, that is a key element in our Sunday service, along with the, the, uh, the worship music has...it's interesting that the worship leader and the pastor coordinate every week and all the songs that we sing and praise are related to the service to the sermon.</p>

DP1	Small Group	<p>It's, it's, it's very impactful. And, um, we have a wide variety of, uh, generations that attend both the contemporary service and the traditional service, but they all hear the same message.”</p> <p>“So, we encourage, Hey, jump into community, uh, just to be open transparent, kind of where we're at is the challenge is, um, helping get, um, having space for new people because of our life groups. But what we've been encouraging the last couple of years is, uh, multiplication. We actually get re-multiplied to be our fifth young adult life group. And those are like 15 to 20 now. So, they're trying to even make that even smaller. But going to your question is part of that is that future goal and vision of reestablishing the rewriting the Life Group manual that says this is, and we'll do some teaching. I won't be just a handoff of here's our manual, but really to help them understand this is what it looks like for, for life groups to, um, be in community together, but also to be disciple-making.”</p>
DL1	Discipleship Groups	<p>“I think that the mentoring part of it really helps the mentor learn with the person that they're mentoring to prepare that person, not only for what's going on in their life, but how they can take steps to be a mentor with somebody else so that we can multiply that mentoring ship that maybe me as a mentor to someone I may not be that person's mentor forever, right. Or some will go forward and then I can find another person to mentor. So, you take two to make four, and then four makes eight. Uh, it's not a real quick process because, uh, mean I've been in my mentoring relationship for almost a year and a half. Uh, I don't want to change it, but there will become a time. I think when that will be necessary in order for both myself and the person I'm mentoring to grow somebody else and bring somebody else in. So, I'm, I'm a big proponent of that. Uh, people around the church, guys, I know, hear me talking about mentoring all the time.”</p>
DP1		<p>“We want to have people where you're always have somebody that's one step behind you. And then somebody that's one step ahead is, so you have potentially not maybe at the same time, but</p>

		<p>somebody mentoring you and then you're stepping into mentoring somebody else. Uh, but here's the other part of it, going back to that culture shift and that culture change. And I think this, this is helping me kind of think through this a little bit, um, because if we are focusing on, uh, making disciples and we're getting people to Discipleshift and say, okay, what next, how what's this look like in our environment? What's this look like in our small groups? So, I think, and I think it comes down to is that I don't know why I used the word training, but, you know, building the church up, building people up to understand what does it look like to be in a mentoring relationship? And we have 40, 50 different relationships right now. And they're all kind of doing something different, but there's still this thought process of, well, if we call mentoring and the church is discipling, what's discipling mean? Well, we're going to do a Bible study together. And that doesn't mean there's some value in going to God's word, of course, but that's still the old, it's the old way of thinking through that.”</p>
EP1	<p>Whole Group</p> <p>Small Groups</p>	<p>“I've tried to push a little more intentionality when I have a voice or when I have a moment to say, um, to our worship planning team and I don't get this opportunity often. I don't take the opportunity very often, but, um, we have begun to try to make sure that the teaching team is intentional about saying here's, what's coming. So, trying to intentionally weave some of those, again, lack of a better phrase, next steps into the service is one thing we do.”</p> <p>“When we have begun to implement Rooted as a foundational framework for groups, I'm using the seven rhythms as, as a discipling model then. Okay. So how are you praying how you serving? How are, you know, so that the intentionality is within the Rooted curriculum and then as we provide next steps. So even if you guys are studying third hesitations, right, you're gonna have the seven rhythms in there. You as the leader, that's your responsibility. Now, most of them are easy. You're going to pray. You're going to have devotions. That's a no brainer, but how are you going to serve as a group and how are you going to apply the scripture beyond just more head knowledge?”</p>

	Discipleship Groups	<p>know, to be encouraged in their faith. ... you get back to the point of intentionality. I don't know that this is a part it's not a part of some bigger plan or idea towards the discipleship, but, uh, it is automatically built into that sort of, uh, experience. I think it probably leans heavily more towards education than I would say the ends being discipleship..."</p> <p>"I think probably in the few mentoring type groups that do exist in the church, um, and there are a few that do connect. I mean, um, and again, they're not necessarily plugged into a specific ministry, but there are when I think of mentor groups of people that are connecting on a weekly basis... Those groups are not set up around education, so there's not like a curriculum, generally speaking, for any of those groups. It's a weekly connection where people are actually sharing in life."</p>
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From the answers given by the pastors and leaders interviewed, some have a specific and defined level of intentionality while others have an approach that believe discipleship will occur simply by having the opportunity. Once again, however, the two churches with the least intentionality behind their communities (Churches "A" and "F") had the congregants with the widest array of responses. Those surveyed from churches "A" and "F" expressed the most uncertainty around the intentionality and purpose of the design of any of the communities of discipleship. Not surprisingly, these two churches had the lowest positive responses from congregants when asked about the church's intentionality in making discipleship a priority. Church "A" only had only 57.1% of its congregants that perceived the church made discipleship a priority while church "F" had 88.9% of its congregants having a positive perception of the church's priority on discipleship.

Churches "D" and "E" had launched new discipleship programs that featured very intentional group development but both churches, though discipleship had been a priority for

over five years, had only just begun to use a specific discipleship model to help in the process. Church “D” used a model call Discipleshift while church “E” used a program called Rooted. Both of these discipleship models are well-known and have had great success in a variety of churches. Church “D” had the most “strongly agree” answers to whether the congregants perceived the church made discipleship a priority at 60% of those surveyed. Because of the recent introduction of these new discipleship models, churches “D” and “E” still had a small percentage of surveyed congregants that disagreed that the church made discipleship a priority. Church “D” had 3.3% disagree while church “E” had 6.3% disagree. This could be because of the recent changes in the discipleship model, or it could be due to congregants who had not yet been connected.

Churches “B” and “C” had a longtime established discipleship model that had not undergone any recent changes. Both churches, in some way, had intentionally designed each of the communities to engage in a different way and to reach for slightly different outcomes. Because of the long-time and established direction of the discipleship ministries in these churches, their surveyed congregants reported a 100% positive perception of the church’s priority on discipleship. Church “B” had 50% strongly agree and 50% agree while church “C” had 100% agree that the church prioritized discipleship.

By comparing the overall themes of those interviewed from each church to the perceptions of the congregants surveyed, there is an apparent congruency between churches that have intentionality in their development of both the discipleship model, including the communities in which discipleship occurs at the church and their respective congregants’ perception that the church prioritized discipleship.

Research Question 2

The second research questions considered for this study was: What are the perspectives of local-church leaderships regarding equipping their congregants for ministry? The goal of this research question was to see if local church leaderships, pastors and leaders alike, had an honest perspective of their church's ability to make discipleships. This is important because an incorrect perception of the markers that the church desires to see in their congregants by the leaders can eventually lead to undesirable outcomes. This was seen in a study conducted from 2004-2007 at Willow Creek Church in Illinois. Rainey (2009) summarized the study as a whole, the claim from the church's leaders, and the reality of the surveys from congregants.

Research question #2 is important for an honest outlook on the part of the leadership of the church. Having an honest perception of the church's direction allows leaders to take corrective action if needed. This approach requires a certain level of intentionality on the part of the leadership. Question #7 of the interview directly addressed the issue of the pastors'/leaders' perception of whether they felt the church was discipling their congregants. Below is a concise version of the answers each pastor/leader gave to the question: How successful do you perceive these communities/groups have been in discipling and equipping your congregants for discipling others?

Table 11

How Successful are Your Discipling Communities?

Interviewee that answered	Explanation
AP1	"...if you're just asking my opinion, which is how I perceive it, right. I do not think that our public space, our Sunday morning and the small group space have been effective really at all, in helping people to disciple others. I think that when you get into a micro group and you understand

	<p>what the purpose of that group is and why you're signing up for it, and then you are intentionally being disciplined by someone who is intentional about discipling you. I think the natural result of that is that you are then equipped to go do the same thing in someone else's life. Um, but I don't think until you get to that micro group space, that it is really very effective. The, either one of those other spaces is very effective too, um, equip and discipling others.”</p>
BL1	<p>“I guess my outlook on that is we don't have a long history of doing this really. I mean, 2 years in November, I'm looking at that amount of time to reset our, our, our mind, our minds on that, how we want to go about it. I don't feel that we have that plan before.”</p>
BP1	<p>“So, when I think about the congregational setting does have a role in discipleship because just like Jesus preaching or Wesley preaching in the field or whatever it gets, certain issues brought out. It begins to draw people to God, and they give us a draw people to each other that that's designed to perpetuate itself... we haven't yet gone to the next step of how we can start another group and neither have we, it's not really done either then other than just coming back from the conference before doing that, we haven't yet. And we're hoping to be able to do that. Getting people able to disciple someone else...we want to get there; we're trying to get everything. It just doesn't seem like we're quite there yet.”</p>
CP1	<p>“I feel like, I don't know. I feel like we do a good job in trying to disciple people, but as far as them passing it on, it just feels like it's very little, I'm just being honest. It's like, you can, it's like, I tried to disciple at least one or two guys every year and I hope they disciple someone, but I think they probably usually don't. So that one's been a real tough one... Now we also know, like there may only be 10 families that do it, but at least there's 10 families that may be doing it better. But once again, do they pass it onto their kids, pass it onto their kids and their kids? I don't know. It seems like there's always a breakdown there and that one's a hard one... We actually went through one discipleship class, which was not only the super deep, it was really for like you're really super committed Christians in the church can go through, but, and end there, it was, you need to do this with someone else. And very few did, even though we had a covenant that they signed saying they would do this still didn't happen for, for most. So that's, there's just a breakdown there. And I, I don't know the answer to that one.”</p>
DL1	

DP1	<p>“I'd say moderately successful because some of it is a new direction we've taken in the last year or so, um, there's much more conversation going on about it among the people in the church. Um, we have had more groups come together in the past year than we've had in the past, but we also recognize that we still have a long way to go to be where we think God wants us to be. But I think we can, we can actually celebrate a little bit the success we've had with, um, growing people in their faith and having more discipleship, uh, with between people.”</p> <p>“...we do like a bi-monthly survey, like for mentoring, just to say, Hey, how is your relationship going? What is the, how are people being disciplined and growing in it? And like DL1 says, I think there's a, there are some relationships that are working in that, or there are men and women that are being disciplined and are growing in it. Um, and that's in that mentoring, um, environment. And I guess just an add on to that. This is where we don't honestly have a lot in that two the five, or I should say three, the five is one, two is the more of that mentoring. Um, and that's what we want to encourage to, cause we really believe that's going to be another space where we are helping people be more disciplined.”</p>
EP1	<p>“...it's been as successful as an individual here, they have grabbed the vision and then realized this is something I need to do. Overall, I would not say that I am satisfied with those kind of outcomes. Um, we've had a pocket or two where we intentionally started a group like, okay, you three guys meet for six months. And then in six months you're going to identify two or three guys. And, um, that's a lot more focus than guys or groups, uh, or men or whatever, um, seem to have and without, and the person who was kind of driving that, um, is no longer here. So, uh, I don't know that he actually even made it through like a second generation of that. Um, so I think that's a huge need. I was going to mention related to that or related to all these questions, but it seems appropriate here.”</p>
FP1	<p>“I think moderately it's happening. It's just not something we measure. So, it's not like, well, we know that we have successfully brought 25% of our congregants into, you know, they've, they've completed X, Y, and Z. And so, we kind of know that at least there a point where they understand better what this is, you know? So, um, yeah, but moderately successful. I mean, we're not like, I don't think we're failures at it. I just don't think we're as good as we could be.”</p>

The pastors and leaders interviewed had a range of answers when it came to how successful they perceived their discipleship model worked. Continuing in how the interviewees perceived their own discipleship models at the church, it was interesting that the churches with the strongest positive congregant surveys to the churches importance regarding discipleship also felt that their models were either in development, or not as successful as it could have been. Church “B” suggested that their discipling process had not been overly successful due to their short history implementing the model while church “C” said that they were trying but had not yielded the results that had hoped for. Church “D” suggested that their discipleship model was moderately successful but said that they were not satisfied with their progress. Church “E” also said they were not satisfied with the outcomes as their discipleship model was only as good as those individuals who participated fully. The interesting results came from churches “A” and “F” who both felt that their discipleship models, at least the discipleship groups, had been intentional in making disciples and that discipleship was occurring within their churches. Yet these two churches yielded the highest congregant dissatisfaction in their church’s discipleship priority. It remains to be seen as to whether the models of each church have had real-life results when it came to equipping congregants for ministry. Research Question #3 focused solely on the congregants’ perception of their own equipping to join and lead in ministry within their local church.

Research Question 3

Research Question #3 focused solely on the congregants’ perception of their own equipping to join and lead in ministry within their local church. It was intended to be answered solely by the congregants of the churches in the surveys. The questions being answered was: What are the perspectives of local-church congregants regarding their own abilities to lead in

church ministry? Survey questions #27 and #29 addressed the congregants' perception on their own equipping in two distinct areas. First, question #27 asked congregants to examine "I feel equipped to serve in ministry. (i.e. children's ministry, youth, etc...)"'. This question served to understand the congregants' perception of their own comfortability in simply serving in a ministry within the church. Second, question #29 asked congregants to examine "I feel equipped to *lead* in a ministry. (i.e. children's ministry, youth, etc...)"'.

Within the context of these two questions, there are two limitations that could have affected the results. First, congregants might feel that they are equipped to either serve in or lead in a ministry based upon an experience prior to the equipping, or lack thereof, at their current church. This could have skewed the answers a bit to insinuate that their current church might have been responsible for their equipping when that may not have been the case. The researcher understands this limitation but without exhaustive vetting, nothing could have been done to prevent such responses. Second, there is a substantial difference between someone perceiving themselves equipped to serve in a ministry versus those who perceive themselves equipped to lead a ministry. Some congregants felt that they were equipped to serve but not to lead as the front person. The researcher understands that there is a difference and that a church equipping congregants to serve might not result in the congregant being equipped necessarily to lead that given ministry. For the purpose of this study, the researcher deemed it important to ask and examine both perceptions with the understanding that the primary goal in seeing congregants equipped to serve knowing that some, not all, will also being equipped to lead in ministry as well. Below are the results of each church divided by communities of engagement regarding both perceptions of congregants. Question #27 addressed whether the congregant perceived

themselves equipped to serve while question #29 addressed whether the congregant perceived themselves equipped to lead in ministry.

Table 12

Survey on Perception of Equipping to Serve and Lead

Church	Communities of Engagement	Perception on Serving in Ministry				Perception on Leading in Ministry			
		Strongly Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A	1	50%	50%	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
	2	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
	3	67%	33%	0%	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%
B	1	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
	2	17%	67%	17%	0%	17%	50%	33%	0%
	3	75%	25%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
C	1	33%	67%	0%	0%	33%	33%	33%	0%
	2	33%	33%	33%	0%	33%	0%	67%	0%
	3	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
D	1	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%	50%	17%	33%
	2	36%	50%	7%	7%	38%	13%	50%	0%
	3	50%	38%	13%	0%	38%	13%	50%	0%
E	1	0%	80%	0%	20%	0%	40%	40%	20%
	2	33%	44%	22%	0%	11%	56%	33%	0%
	3	22%	78%	0%	0%	22%	56%	11%	11%
F	1	14%	57%	29%	0%	14%	14%	33%	29%
	2	20%	80%	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%	0%
	3	17%	83%	0%	0%	17%	66%	17%	0%
Totals	1	16%	62%	19%	3%	16%	31%	38%	15%
	2	40%	46%	13%	1%	33%	35%	32%	1%
	3	38%	60%	2%	0%	27%	60%	13%	0%

This data illuminates two things. First it allows for a comparison from RQ#2's results to see if the pastors'/leaders' perception of their own disciple-making models resulted in

congregants believing that they were equipped for ministry. For instance, Church “A”, whose pastor believed their discipleship model was doing well, had no negative perceptions from those surveyed regarding their equipping to serve in ministry. This included all levels of engagement. In every other church there was an apparent congruency between levels of engagement and the perception that the congregant was equipped to serve in ministry. Almost every church saw a sliding scale of positive perceptions of equipping as the communities of the congregants increased. In general, congregants who were only involved during Sunday worship had a higher rate of disagreement with their perception of equipping to serve in ministry while those in two communities had a lower rate of disagreement. Those involved in three communities had only two respondents (both from Church “D”) that disagreed that they were equipped to serve.

Overall, the data from those surveyed showed a direct decline in the perception from those engaged in the different community from three communities down to one community. Those engaged in a single community at their local church had a 78% positive response to perceiving whether they felt equipped to serve while those engaged in two communities had an 86% positive response to their own equipping. Those involved in three communities in the local church had a 98% positive perception of their own equipping to serve in ministry. These numbers are important to understand as the examination of the qualitative aspects of the surveys is highlighted. Below are excerpts from congregants from all three levels of engagement as to their responses to these two questions regarding the congregants’ perceptions as to whether they felt equipped to serve and lead in ministry.

Table 13

Congregant Surveys for Reasons to Serve and Lead

Church Survey #	Community Engagement	I am equipped to serve... Reasoning	I am equipped to lead... Reasoning

Church "A"			
Survey #3	3 Communities	Strongly Agree "I think when you are disabled well you naturally want to disciple others. At least that was true for me."	Agree "I've been surrounded by strong leaders and so I know that when I have questions they are someone I can go to."
Survey #4	1 Community	Agree "I believe that disciples can serve."	Disagree "That's daunting..."
Survey #5	1 Community	Strongly Agree "There is nothing holding me back from serving in ministry."	Strongly Agree "Through the word of God and encouraging people, [our church] has equipped me to be a leader in ministry."
Church "B"			
Survey #12	3 Communities	Strongly Agree "Because I have gifts that I can use for the church's benefit."	Strongly Agree "When I feel God's calling to lead a group or class, I know He will be the one to do the work, and I get to help Him through the Spirit."
Survey #14	2 Communities	Agree "I can share in supporting these ministries but I am not a teacher."	Disagree "I can organize and help, but I feel like I am best at supporting projects."
Survey #10	1 Community	Disagree "[I am] not ready yet."	Disagree "[I am] definitely not ready yet."
Church "C"			
Survey #20	3 Communities	Agree	Agree

Survey #18	1 Community	<p>“I am good serving with kids.”</p> <p>Strongly Agree “I know how to drum.”</p>	<p>“Because I believe it’s important.”</p> <p>Disagree “I am not good at leading.”</p>
Church “D” Survey #47	3 Communities	<p>Agree “God gives me the guidance to teach along with the curriculum ideas provided. There isn’t much personal help.”</p>	<p>Disagree “I’m not leading right now.”</p>
Survey #48	3 Communities	<p>Agree “I do that already.”</p>	<p>Disagree “My role isn’t leading but supporting. I don’t enjoy leading.”</p>
Survey #43	2 Communities	<p>Agree “I have already served and will continue to serve.”</p>	<p>Agree “I have led in the past and would continue to do if I weren’t so old and unable.”</p>
Survey #49	1 Community	<p>Agree “I never truly feel equipped but I’m willing to offer my availability!”</p>	<p>Agree “Again, I offer my availability and certainly love the Lord and never feel fully equipped but willing to be used.”</p>
Survey #42	1 Community	<p>Strongly Agree “Because I have the skills.”</p>	<p>Agree “Maybe I have the skills- Time commitment may not be available at that point in my life.”</p>
Survey #39	1 Community	<p>Agree “I have served in the past.”</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree “I don’t have the level of knowledge.”</p>
Church “E” Survey #73	3 Communities	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree</p>

Survey #65	3 Communities	<p>“I prefer to serve behind the scenes... Not teaching or leading a group.”</p> <p>Agree “I serve now.”</p>	<p>“I’m not really a good leader in that capacity.”</p> <p>Disagree “I am not as skilled in theology so that I am comfortable with some of the questions that come up.”</p>
Survey #87	2 Communities	<p>Disagree “I am not seeking to serve in any church ministries at this time.”</p>	<p>Disagree “I am not prepared to lead now.”</p>
Survey #68	1 Community	<p>Strongly Disagree “I don’t feel I know enough to do that [serve] right now. Although I do talk to my family about it.”</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree “I don’t know enough.”</p>
Survey #72	1 Community	<p>Agree “[Our Church] Great resources to lean on to be able to minister [serve].”</p>	<p>Disagree “[About Leading]... not at this point in life right now – maybe one day.”</p>
Church “F”			
Survey #96	3 Communities	<p>Agree “I actively serve in several ministries. I feel like the church gives the training in guidance to help people who want to serve.”</p>	<p>Disagree “I feel like my strong point is serving and not leading.”</p>
Survey #91	2 Communities	<p>Agree “I feel I would be able to communicate my understanding of Jesus and the comfort that he can give to others.”</p>	<p>Disagree “This [leading] requires that you want to lead.”</p>
Survey #95	2 Communities	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree

Survey #105	1 Community	<p>“I have been serving in ministry most of my life and do feel equipped to do so.”</p> <p>Agree “I do feel I can do it [serve] but always feel I can do better.”</p>	<p>“Again I do feel equipped to lead in ministry because I have had people over the course of my life help equip me to do that.”</p> <p>Disagree “Leading is a struggle for me, I don’t always feel I am the best at it.”</p>
Survey #94	1 Community	<p>Disagree “We have a great team of leaders that help prepare majestically, but there’s little done to help spiritually.”</p>	<p>Strongly Disagree “The setup of our church makes it really difficult to serve in a ministry unless you’re part of the leadership team. It causes the leader who is not part of the team to feel ostracized and often that they don’t know the direction of the ministry as a whole. It is a set up for failure.”</p>

From the excerpts in the congregant surveys, several themes emerged. First, it is interesting that a variety of congregants perceived themselves equipped for serving in ministry regardless of community engagement. This meant that of those surveyed, being engaged in a single community did not necessarily mean the congregant felt they were unequipped to serve. In fact, according to Table 12, 78% of single community congregants perceived themselves equipped to serve in ministry. Yet congregants engaged in a single community were less likely to attribute their equipping to serve directly to the church’s efforts. In fact, though many single community congregants had a positive response to their perception of their own equipping, most attribute it to having served in the past in some form or another. Those congregants from two and three community engagement were much more likely to directly attribute their equipping to the church’s efforts in discipling them. For instance, Survey #96 explains that “I actively serve in

several ministries. I feel like the church gives the training in guidance to help people who want to serve.” This theme of attributing their equipping to the discipleship and training of the local church was present far more often in two and three community engagement congregants.

The next theme that was found from those surveyed was that less congregants felt they were equipped to lead a ministry than serve in one. This was not surprising as some people perceive themselves not as leaders but as supporters. However, single community engaged congregants that responded positively (strongly agree or agree) to serving in ministry were much more likely to also respond negatively (disagree or strongly disagree) to leading in ministry. Those who were engaged in two or three groups were far more likely to also perceive themselves as equipped to lead in ministry as well. An example is Survey #3 (three community) who, in answering whether they felt equipped to lead, responded “I’ve been surrounded by strong leaders and so I know that when I have questions, they are someone I can go to.” The idea of attributing their equipping to the direct efforts of the church through discipleship and disciple making was a much stronger theme in those who were engaged in two and three communities in the church.

Research Question 4

At the end of both the interviews and the surveys, one major goal was to see if the pastors/leaders of the church as well as the congregants perceived any benefits from congregants being involved in one, two, or three Christ-practiced communities. Research question 4 asks “What are the perceived benefits of engagement in one, two, or all three local-church communities regarding discipling congregants?” This was answered in two parts with the first being addressed in the interview (pastors/leaders) in question #8 and the second being addressed in the survey (congregants) questions 35 and 36. Below are the excerpts from interview question #8.

Table 14*Does Congregant Engagement Lead to Their Equipping*

Church Interviewee	Do you perceive a difference in successfully equipping your congregants depending on their engagement in one, two, or three communities/groups?
Church “A” AP1	<p>“I do. I do think so. And I don't think that I would be doing the job that I am currently in if I didn't think that there was a difference. I firmly believe that there are the people who experience, a discipleship environment, like a micro group. I think that they grow the most in their faith. And I think that they are the ones who also in turn go out and do the same thing with others and discipling them. I think it's a little bit like, like Jesus and his ministry where, you know, he preached to the crowds. Um, then he had his 70, he had his 12, um, and then he had his, his three to his inner circles, three to four, and Jesus preached hard messages. And not everyone asked the meaning of those hard messages.</p> <p>Not everyone walked through the door to say, Jesus, tell me more about some people heard that hard message and they walked away and that's okay. Um, what Jesus was looking for were the people who wanted to dig in, who wanted to lean in, who wanted to know what is the meaning of this parable? What is the meaning of this hard teaching that, that you're giving us Jesus? And so that's what we're trying to do too, is we're trying to create spaces where those people who want to know more and want to dig in a little bit more, um, where they can ask those questions where they can be a part of that type of a community so that they can grow, um, and their knowledge of Jesus and in their love of him.”</p>
Church “B” BL1	<p>“I think there's a definite more opportunity for that to happen. For sure. I don't want to say that that's going to happen because it might not happen, you know? Um, but yeah, if you, if, if somebody were to, you know, be involved in all of those other things, there'll be a really good chance that they would grow. Just because you have [3 community engagement], it doesn't mean it's [discipleship] going to happen. And just because you make people go doesn't mean it's going to happen. But if you provide that opportunity and people feel the need to feel like they need to go, then there's a, probably a good chance that that's going to happen.”</p>
Church “C” CP1	<p>“I would, I would say that. And I actually, I'm trying to push right now that, that if you become a member of our church, you have to be involved in at least small groups and at least one ministry or more because we're trying to raise the bar maybe on really trying to get people to think about, you know, what, what it is to be, to be a part of the church. But we've got, we've got some, like I said, people that are involved in all those things are definitely, you know, the ones who are, seem to be bearing more fruit.</p>

	<p>We've got some that aren't really involved in ministry, but they're involved in small groups and we see some growth in them and we've got some that are involved in, you know, uh, opposite and you can still see some growth in them.</p> <p>So those are involved in ministry and those who are involved in small groups, especially, but when you do both, I feel like that's the key though. If you can get them in both, because if you're doing small groups without ministry or doing ministry without small groups, I still there's still something missing I felt like. So, I think the key is really to try to get them both if you can, but, but the church is full of volunteers. So you can't sometimes wish we use this force it, okay. Everyone's going through discipleship one-on-one and then after that everyone's going through discipleship one or two, you have no choice. It doesn't work that way."</p>
Church "D" DP1	<p>"Yeah, absolutely. I would say you're going to see those results come in to where transformation is happening because people have other people that are part of their life and it's not just a Sunday morning experience. And I think that and I know you're not necessarily separating all, all those out, but again, in our context, it's mostly going to be that, that where you have that six to 20, but probably more like 15 to 20, um, where there's still going to be a difference between yes, I'm growing more because I'm in relationship. And I think we have room to grow there. If we get that even smaller or it is more intimate, transparent, uh, then you would see even more, a difference between, um, growth and transformation compared to just going to Sunday morning service. So, I mean, Sunday mornings, there's power there's, there's, uh, inspiration that can happen there. Um, but if you're just going there and that's all you ever do, may that is the space for somebody for a while."</p>
Church "E" EPI	<p>"As a general statement? The, the answer is definitely yes. My only caveats are you find those unique, maybe rare is a, is a good word. Individuals who are, they're not engaged, maybe so much with stuff here inside our building, but then you realize, oh, they're running that ministry in town? Or they're engaged with, you know, some other way of serving or just the way they run their business. They are developing disciples in a non-Christian atmosphere. So, with that, I mean, I think the, the answer is implied in the question. Yes, I think those who attend worship, who, um, and we do have those who are regular, and worship are in a co-ed group and do a gender group, um, or a mentor group if you use it, that term that way. And, and those folks get it, they're seeking to grow. They are growing, they're helping the people they meet with grow. So I'm never know [which] one of those which comes first, the chicken or the egg? I think most of them got to a point of discipleship where they just enjoy that.</p>

	They feel called to that they, they get energy from that. And so, they're investing in people.”
Church “F” FP1	“Yeah. So, there's definitely a difference and the people that are, you know, obviously more engaged. And people that are more engaged in multiple platforms, are obviously notably different in terms of how they function in their faith than those that maybe only do one, like, you know, the standard would be the Sunday morning thing. Um, uh, and some extent, you know, which is, which is first the chicken or the egg, right? So, are they more of a disciple and they're seeking out those things? And so, they're in those areas and discipleship is a natural part of what they're seeking out or have those things somehow crafted a greater depth in them in terms of, you know, them being a disciple. And I would probably say it's probably a little bit of both. I mean, you know, people who are going to more during the week and engaging in other areas are probably people who are more serious about their faith to start with, and then hopefully in those groups that are connecting in and having it, but in terms of them, I think the perception is definitely a yes. And I think that the more that are involved with you can see greater depth in them than someone who's only coming to one thing during the course of the week. Um, so, you know, I think that, I think that's true.”

The overwhelming response for church pastors and leaders is that in general, the level of engagement among congregants does indeed contribute to the successful equipping of local congregants. The admission does not come without a greater understanding of the intentionality of those communities, however. Each of those interviewed gave a degree of intentionality within the context of their responses. Church “A” expressed their following Jesus’ community setup with the 70, the 12, and then the three focusing primarily on what they call “micro-groups” (Discipleship groups). Church “B” said that the groups were opportunities but without intentionality, discipleship is not necessarily going to happen while church “C” was trying to intentionally engage members beyond Sunday morning and into small groups and serving in at least one ministry. Church “D” expressed that their groups are intentionally designed to be a certain size to increase the probability of discipleship occurring and Church “E” said that the

communities were designed to allow those who are seeking spiritual growth an environment in which to grow. Finally, Church “F” directly related community engagement with a willingness to engage in other meaningful ways in the church.

Though the pastors/leaders of each church expressed a positive congruency to engagement in more communities and the congregant being equipped and disciplined, the perception regarding their own discipling was addressed in the surveys. Several questions in the survey were designed to build up the respondents to answering questions 35 and 36. Question 35 asked if the congregant perceived their engagement in the church’s communities had equipped them to disciple others. Below outlines the results of the respondents’ answer, by percentage, to question 35 based upon their community of engagement.

Table 15

Community Engagement and Perception of the Church Equipping Them to Disciple Others

Communities Engaged by Respondent	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	23%	65%	12%	0%
2	21%	58%	21%	0%
1	4%	37%	52%	7%

The statistical data shows an apparent congruency between the communities in which a congregant is engaged and their perception of whether they believe their local church has equipped them to disciple someone else. As the table shows, 41% of congregants engaged only on Sunday morning perceived themselves equipped to disciple someone else. The number almost doubles when the congregant was engaged on Sunday morning and a small group rising to 79%. When engaged in all three Christ-practiced communities, 88% of the congregants surveyed perceived they were equipped to disciple someone else. This data suggests that the

pastors/leaders interviewed were correct when saying that the more discipleship communities a congregant was involved in the more likely they were to feel equipped to disciple others.

Though this data is helpful, it does not tell the whole story of those surveyed. Below are some excerpts from specific congregants as to why they did, or did not, perceived themselves equipped to disciple someone else based on their community engagement at their local church. There are excerpts from respondents in all three communities from each church surveyed.

Table 16

Congregant Responses: Do You Feel Equipped to Disciple Others Based on Your Community/Group Engagement?

Survey #	Communities Engaged	Answer	Response: I feel that my engagement in my church's communities/groups has equipped me to disciple others.
Survey #12	3 Communities	Strongly Agree	"It definitely helps having been in these groups to lead them."
Survey #37		Strongly Agree	"Our church does a great job making disciples who make disciples."
Survey #63		Strongly Agree	"I do recognize better the opportunities to share my faith when they come along. In the past, I have missed them completely."
Survey #6		Agree	"All of my experiences led me to today and have made me a strong disciple and leader."
Survey #2		Agree	"Feel confident in discipling at the group level."
Survey #11		Agree	"This is the natural path of growth."
Survey #20		Agree	"Because I believe it is important."
Survey #30		Agree	"My church is a teaching church about discipling others."

Survey #47		Agree	"It [my church] gives me ongoing biblical wisdom and prayer support."
Survey #70		Agree	"I feel that my engagement in my church's communities/groups has equipped me to disciple others."
Survey #96		Agree	"There are skills that you will learn by being engaged in these groups."
Survey #92		Agree	"I think they [communities/groups] have helped, but again, I don't feel that I have received any training or feel totally equipped and ready to do so [disciple other].
Survey #79		Disagree	"I think only being mentored will prepare you to mentor [someone else]."
	2 Communities		
Survey #7		Strongly Agree	"[I] Learned from my mistakes and experience."
Survey #58		Strongly Agree	"We have addressed what it means to be a disciple in church and in study groups."
Survey #54		Agree	"I'm a follower of Christ and being part of groups has helped me grow in my faith. I feel like I can share with others the benefits of following God and helping bring them to God."
Survey #8		Agree	"To a degree, but I need more knowledge, growth, and self-assurance."
Survey #21		Agree	"It [being part of community] definitely helps."
Survey #26		Agree	"Classes have helped prepare me more."
Survey #62		Agree	"I came to this church already having experience, so it wasn't necessary this particular church that equipped me. It wasn't really a church it was the Holy Spirit over the years."

Survey #91		Agree	“Without my church support, I would’ve never stepped out of my comfort zone to lead a group.”
Survey #100		Agree	“[We have] solid pastors and leadership team.”
Survey #1		Disagree	“My Training/experience has been outside of my church.”
Survey #32		Disagree	“I personally need to be more engaged in order to be equipped to do so [disciple others].”
Survey #71		Disagree	“I feel equipped, but I was equipped before I joined this church.”
	1 Community		
Survey #98		Strongly Agree	“I believe the knowledge I have gained has been self-sought and taught involvement in other ministries.”
Survey #5		Agree	“It has mostly equipped me to disciple others is my time around other staff members”
Survey #4		Agree	“In past experience, confidence that I agreed with the churches/para-church’s beliefs and the structure they provided to articulate it and walk alongside someone in their faith made me feel equipped to disciple others.”
Survey #24		Agree	“I have had many experiences in my church which would help me in this area.”
Survey #10		Disagree	“I don’t participate yet.”
Survey #35		Disagree	“I haven’t engaged enough to feel comfortable or equipped.”
Survey #72		Disagree	“I need some spiritual growth.”
Survey #88		Disagree	“I do help disciple in the children’s ministries, but I’m not equipped to go further at this time.”

Survey #94		Disagree	“I have always been involved in church.”
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These responses illuminate a greater depth into why those surveyed perceived themselves as either able to or not able to disciple someone else based on their engagement in their church's communities. It is important to note that due to the specific nature of the question being asked, some congregants (Surveys #1, #71, and #94) disagreed not being they perceived themselves as lacking the equipping to disciple someone else but because their equipping came from a previous church or ministry. This means that though they answered “disagree”, they perceived themselves to be equipped just not by their current church. Based on the data presented in Table 14, those involved only on Sunday mornings were perceived themselves less equipped to disciple someone else (only 41% felt equipped) than those involved in two or three communities (79% and 88% respectively). Many of those engaged in a single community expressed a lack of training and knowledge as their primary reason for not feeling equipped to disciple someone else. Only one respondent (survey #32) from two or three communities of engagement expressed a lack of engagement as the reason for not being equipped.

The response from congregants further verifies the pastors'/leaders' perception that those engaged in more Christ practices communities in the church would be better equipped to serve and disciple others. According to the interviews, however, simply being involved in a community that was not designed intentionally to disciple won't produce congregants that are equipped for ministry. The respondents to the surveys echoed this sentiment citing the church's intentional equipping and training to disciple others. Survey #30 says “My church is a teaching church about discipling others” while survey #54 says “I'm a follower of Christ, and being part

of groups has helped me grow in my faith. I feel like I can share with others the benefits of following God and helping bring them to God.” In both cases, the church’s intentional design of their communities has been a driving force behind the congregants perceiving themselves as being equipped to disciple someone else.

Researcher’s Additional Findings

In addition to the direct responses from the interviews and surveys, there were other possible apparent congruencies among the congregants in the three communities. One of the questions that presented itself during the data analysis process was to what degree, if any, was a congregants’ years of attendance at a local church a contributing factor in the congregants’ participation in one, two, or three Christ-practiced communities. For example, do the years that a congregant spends at a church increase their level of engagement in the three Christ-practiced communities? The table below shows the average number of years a congregant spent in their local church, broken up by community engagement.

Table 17

Congregants' Average Years Attending

Communities Engaged	Average Number of Years Attended
3 Communities	16.6 Years
2 Communities	14.7 Years
1 Community	13.3 Years

This table would initially suggest a slight increase in the average years a congregant attended based on their community engaged. The growth is indeed small rising from 13.3 (one community) to 16.6 (three communities), but the table does not tell the whole story. The researcher also analyzed the range of years based on each community the respondents were

engaged. The range is significant because it shows the top and bottom years of people's engagement. Below is the table of the range of years based on the community engaged in.

Table 18

Congregants' Range of Years Attending

Communities Engaged	Range of Years Attended
3 Communities	6 months – 64 years
2 Communities	1 year – 45 years
1 Community	3 Months – 45 Years

Once again, the data might suggest that those attending the church for a longer duration of time would be more apt to engage in more Christ-practiced communities. However, there was only a single respondent in three communities of engagement that had been attending the church for 64 years. The next longest congregants in three communities had been attending for 45 years. This means that if the longest congregant attending in three communities had been discarded, the averages for each group would have been almost identical. There is only a nine-month difference in the lower end of years from congregants, and without the single outlier, the top end of years was exactly the same between the three communities. This was an interesting outcome as the assumption by the researcher was that the longer a congregant attended a church, the more involved and engaged they would have become in the three Christ-practiced communities. However, the number of years attending a church seems to have no impact on the congregants' level of engagement in the communities of the church.

Another point of interest was the apparent congruency between congregants' perception of being able to disciple someone else and their actual involvement in ministry. In the survey, two questions directly addressed the respondents' perception of being equipped to disciple others and their actual involvement in ministry. Question #35 asked "I feel that my engagement in my

church's communities/groups has equipped me to disciple others" with the congregant being able to reply with "Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree" as their options. The researcher categorized the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" as positive responses while categorizing "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" as negative responses. Below are the results of the congregants' answers to this question based on category by community engagement side-by-side with the percentage of congregants that were engaged in a ministry within their church.

Table 19

Comparing Perceptions of Equipping with Actually Serving in Ministry

Communities Engaged	Positives and Negatives	Congregants Serving	Percentage Serving in a Ministry
3 Communities	Positive: 88% Negative: 12%	29 of 31 serve	Serving: 93.5%
2 Communities	Positive: 79% Negative: 21%	38 of 48 serve	Serving: 79.1%
1 Community	Positive: 41% Negative: 59%	11 of 27 serve	Serving: 40.7%

The side-by-side comparison of the data between those congregants who perceived themselves equipped to serve in ministry with those who were actually serving at the time they took the survey is almost exact. Of the three community congregants, 88% positively said they were equipped to disciple someone else while 93.5 % were actually serving in a ministry in their church. Of the two community congregants, 79% positively said they were equipped to disciple someone else, while 79.1 % were actually serving in a ministry in their church. Of the one community congregants, 41% positively said they were equipped to disciple someone else while 40.7% were actually serving in a ministry in their church. This means that the congregants'

perception of their own equipping to disciple others directly affected their involvement in ministry at their church. Thus, their perception and their realities were very similar.

What is also interesting is that when congregants simply go from a single community to being involved in two communities at the church, their perception of and actual equipping to serve in ministry almost doubles. There is also a rise from two to three communities, but the larger jump in those serving is between congregants from a single to two communities.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The qualitative interview/survey-based research design called for a descriptive, cross-analysis of the perception of pastor/leaders and the perception of their congregants as to the effectiveness of the three Christ-practiced communities on the equipped and discipline of local church congregants. This qualitative research described the international of the three Christ-practiced communities in local churches by conducting interviews via Zoom web calls with six local church pastors and leaders. Following the interview, a survey was sent out by each church to their congregation. The data from both the interviews and the surveys were collected and analyzed. The “cross” analysis occurred in the research design by first comparing the perceptions of those being interviewed with the perceptions of those being surveyed. The second aspect of the analysis was conducted by comparing each of those congregants’ perceptions based on their level of engagement at the church by community. This afforded the researcher a clearer picture of analysis by evaluating the accuracy of the perceptions of the leadership of the church with that of their congregants. It also afforded an analysis comparing the similarities and differences of those congregants’ surveys from each of the engagement groups. Common patterns and themes emerged from the cross-analysis of the findings.

The researcher investigated the commonalities between the leadership and the congregants as well as the communities in which congregants were engaged to further understand the central themes of the church's discipleship groups. The six churches that participated in the study included three variables qualifying them. First, each church's senior pastor had to have been there for more than five years. Second, each church needed to have discipleship/disciple-making as a core value of the church. And finally, each church needed to offer all three Christ-practiced communities as ministries within the church. The interviews were conducted specifically with pastors and possibly with some leaders from each church. The pastors might have been the senior pastor, but it was not necessary as a community or discipleship pastor could have fulfilled the interview requirements as well. Two of the six churches included leaders from the church as well (Churches "B" and "D"). The surveys used a random sampling technique as the number of people involved in each of the subgroups (3 communities) varied by each church. There was not an exact number of congregants represented in each group. From the one-community group, 27 congregants were surveyed, from the two-communities group, 48 congregants were surveyed, and from the three-communities group, 31 congregants were surveyed.

The researcher vetted each church by consulting Lifeway's list of growing churches in America and then filtering the results by state using only the state of Indiana. This was done to ensure that the churches being approached were already familiar with a survey process, since they had been surveyed by Lifeway. The researcher then visited each church's website to further ensure that the church offered the three Christ-practiced communities, and that discipleship was a core value of the church. Once these qualifications were met, the researcher called each church and sent an invitation letter (see Appendix E) to the appropriate pastor to gain their participation

in the study. The pastors who agreed to participate then signed a consent form (see Appendix D) and received an introductory letter from the researcher that they emailed to their congregation (see Appendix F) inviting them to take the survey. The letter included the hyperlink to the survey, which was conducted on Survey Monkey's website. Once the data was collected, the researcher progressed through a complex system of analysis using the traditional methods of pen and paper to identify themes in the interviews and surveys while were available to the researcher in printed form.

Overall, the process of using the survey method established by Pinzer (2017) of first collecting qualitative answers follow with an open-ended quantitative response worked well to ensure a qualitative answer that had a fixed and exact point in space. In hindsight, the surveys were too long and could have been cut by 40-50% and still achieved the same amount of useful data.

Regarding the interviews, the questions that were asked yielded good data from the pastors/leaders that participated. However, the interview could have used more follow questions and perhaps 2-3 more main questions to gain more data on the exact nature of the intentionality behind the development and implementation of each group.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Overview

This chapter will conclude the dissertation by examining the purpose statement, the purpose statement, the research questions, the research conclusion, implications and applications, the research limits, and the further research that may be conducted based on the research already conducted in this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to discover the perceived impact of local church leadership's intentional implementation of three Christ-practiced discipling communities for the equipping of local-church congregants within six local church bodies in the state of Indiana.

Research Questions

RQ1. How are the communities of a local church intentionally used to disciple congregants?

RQ2. What are the perspectives of local-church leaderships regarding equipping their congregants for ministry?

RQ3. What are the perspectives of local-church congregants regarding their own abilities to lead in church ministry?

RQ4. What are the perceived benefits of engagement in one, two, or all three local-church communities regarding discipling congregants?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Conclusions

The development of the research questions was designed to answer the issue proposed within the purpose statement. The research questions were designed and implemented to address the two chief concerns of the purpose statement specifically. The first issue was to discover the

perceptions of local church pastors and leaders in the intentional development of their discipleship model in successfully discipling their church congregants. The primary area of inquiry revolved around the intentional development of three Christ-practiced communities where discipleship might occur. These groups were the whole group (Sunday morning or other weekly corporate services), small groups (Bible studies ranging from 6-18 people in size), and discipleship groups (single-sex one-on-one to one-on-four groups of accountability). The goal was to see if the pastors and leaders perceived a varying impact on the discipleship of their local congregants when the congregants were engaged in multiple intentionally designed communities at the church. The second issue was the perception of local church congregants as to whether their church intentionally had discipleship as a core value and whether the designed communities resulted in a marketable impact on the congregants' confidence in discipling others.

Conclusion of RQ1

RQ 1 asked, "How are communities of a local church intentionally used to disciple congregants?" The key to answering this question, as well as a pervasive theme throughout the data collection process, was the level of intentionality. Though each interviewee expressed a level of intentionality within their discipleship model, there were degrees of intentionality espoused by the pastors/leaders that were interviewed. The study examined three Christ-practiced communities offered, to whatever degree, by the local churches involved in the study. These three groups were

- 1: the whole group (weekly services)
- 2: small group (Bible studies of mixed gender or single gender being 6-20 in size)
- 3: discipleship groups (single-gender groups from 2-6 people in size).

The leaders offered varying levels of intentionality for each group, which ended up being a bit of a surprise. Churches “B,” “C,” “D,” and “E” offered the most concise and clear visions of the development of these groups. Their levels of intentionality included size regulations, directions of study (some more specific than others), and desired outcomes for the specific group. Some churches used specific curriculums to train and help the discipleship groups become more equipped to disciple others. Churches “D” and “E” both used these types of programs. Church “D” used the discipleship training curriculum from Real Life Ministries in Idaho called *Discipleshift*. This curriculum, developed by Jim Putman, is an easy-to-follow method of taking someone from any given spiritual place and bringing them along to disciple others. Church “E” used a curriculum called Rooted that does much of the same thing. In both cases, the degree of intentionality in their discipleship groups was precise (see Table 10).

Churches “B” and “C” also expressed intentionality in their community’s design. Though they did not reveal a specific program, their communities were all developed and executed with a level of intentionality. From all churches “B” through “E”, this intentionality yielded congregational surveys that were more positive when asked about the church’s priority on discipleship. The congregants from these four churches expressed a higher favorable agreement that their church placed great value on discipleship. Interestingly, this message was conveyed by those surveyed regardless of the level of community engagement.

Though not 100% in all cases, except for churches “B” and “C”, those surveyed positively expressed the church having discipleship as a core value whether they were engaged in one, two, or three communities in the church. Several one-community congregants expressed that their church made the information regarding each community readily available. They strongly encouraged the congregation to get more involved in their own development. Many

congregants also expressed that their church communicated why becoming involved was beneficial for the individual and the church.

Churches “A” and “F” expressed the least amount of intentionality behind the development of their communities. Church “A” had only recently (within six months) hired a staff member designated explicitly for overseeing discipleship and communities, while church “F” was going through a transition of a staff member from youth ministry to discipleship and community. It is possible that though both churches offered the three Christ-practiced communities, they had not cast a specific vision and intentional design for those communities. Consequently, both churches had a high degree of negative responses to the churches having discipleship as a priority. Inversely to the other churches, the level of engagement of the congregant did not seem to matter. The negative responses came equally from those involved in only one community and those involved in all three. In fact, some of the qualitative responses that were the most critical came from respondents involved in all three communities citing a lack of intentionality on the part of the church leadership. They suggested that the primary reason for any success in small groups or discipleship groups came from the initiatives of the congregants rather than from the leadership in the church.

The conclusion from RQ 1 is twofold. First is that the intentionality behind the development, implementation, and desired results matter the most for equipping congregants to serve in ministry and disciple others. The churches with precise and intentional communities, as described by the pastors/leader, had corresponding survey results from congregants that featured a higher probability of congregants that perceived themselves as able to serve and disciple someone else. Churches with defined and intentional communities even had congregants from all three community groups with more positive responses to the church’s discipleship models. The

two churches with less clear and intentional communities had a spectrum of results from all three communities. These churches had the highest negative view of the church's discipleship model and the congregants perceiving themselves as less equipped to serve and disciple someone else from the respondents engaged in three communities.

The second conclusion from RQ1 is that when churches had a clearer and more intentional design behind their communities of engagement, they also featured a more straightforward level of communication with their congregants. Pastors/leaders from churches "B", "C", "D", and "E" reported that they announced the communities from the stage, printing information in the bulletins, had specific areas on their website featuring the communities and their benefits, and often had sermons relating to becoming more engaged. Churches "A" and "F" had a less intentional approach, with both pastors using the word "organic" rather than being more intentional. When asked about how congregants might find information regarding these communities, both pastors and congregants responded that it happened by word-of-mouth. This response means that intentional design combined with intentional communication with the congregation allows for a much better understanding from the congregation's perspective.

Conclusion of RQ2

RQ 2 asked, "What are the perspectives of local-church leaderships regarding equipping their congregants for ministry?" As far as the perception of pastors/leaders regarding the equipping of their congregants, each interviewee expressed some level of trepidation as to their own success (see Table 11). AP1 said that they perceived their Sunday morning AND small group communities as ineffective. They expressed hope for growth as what they call "micro-groups", or discipleship groups for this study, but that no meaningful discipleship was occurring in the other two communities. This may be in part due to the limited intentionality of Church

“A,” but all of the other churches echoed a similar sentiment. Church “B” expressed a lack of history in disciple-making as a culprit for their limited success, while Church “C” said they were good at trying to disciple but had experienced little success in seeing their congregants move on to disciple others. Church “D” used the term “moderately” when describing their success even after expressing the creation of many new communities within the church and conducting a bi-monthly survey to get feedback from their congregation. Church “E” expressed concern saying that the ability for the church to equip their congregants was limited by the desire of the individual rather than the encouragement and efforts of the church as a whole. Church “F” also used the term “moderately” while confessing that the equipping was not generally a metric that the church leadership took into consideration.

Rainey reports that Willow Creek’s claimed that “...the more a person far from God participates in church activities, the more likely it is those activities will produce a person who loves God and loves others” (para. 1). Rainey concluded that church programming was beneficial for early seekers but failed to develop disciples as congregants grew in their faith. The result was that the perception of the programmatic discipleship model set forth by the pastors and leaders with the assumption that the model was creating disciples was off target. The leadership of Willow Creek failed to accurately assess its discipleship model, causing the church to spend years falsely believing that its model was working.

As to the results and publication of the detailed study done at Willow Creek, Hawkins and Parkinson (2007) came to the same conclusion as Rainey but with a different solution. They, along with Willow Creek’s leadership, concluded that they had not been doing a good enough job implementing the failing model and suggested an increase in their efforts rather than thoroughly examining the validity of the model and its desired outcomes.

The leaders interviewed in this dissertation project had asked hard questions of themselves and their church regarding both the validity of the discipleship model and establishing intentional directions toward growth and their desired outcomes. This level of intentionality, coupled with an honest assessment of their current discipleship model and direction, opened doors for spiritual development among the congregants. This is not to say that each church had its perfect model, but rather that they were asking great questions and moving in good directions. The responses also do not mean that the pastors/leaders were satisfied with the results of their discipleship models.

The conclusion from the interviews was that each of the pastors/leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the results of their discipleship model regardless of their level of intentionality or communication. This dissatisfaction could be because these individuals were all overachievers that worked tirelessly always to do better. It could also be because they soberly viewed their discipleship model and saw legitimate areas that needed improvement. Also, it could be because they had not seen a lot of measurable results. They either were just starting an intentional discipleship program or had not embraced discipleship as their core value for a long time. It is probably a combination of the three reasons depending on the specific church in question.

Conclusion of RQ3

RQ 3 asked, “What are the perspectives of local-church congregants regarding their own abilities to lead in church ministry?” This question focused on the perception of those being interviewed and, in concert with RQ2, allowed for a clearer picture of each church’s effectiveness when it came to equipping their congregants. It was important for the study to gain the perception of the pastors/leaders regarding the effectiveness of their discipleship

communities, but the perception of the congregants when it came to their own equipping allowed for a fuller picture of the community's true impact. Survey questions 21-26 asked if the congregants perceived themselves fully disciplined by their engagement in one, two, or all three Christ-practiced communities within their local church to establish a baseline for questions 27-34. These questions asked for the congregants' perception of whether they felt equipped to serve in a ministry, lead a ministry, and if they felt equipped by their church to disciple someone else.

Questions 27-30 specifically address the congregants' perception of whether they felt equipped to serve in and lead a ministry. The researcher understood the limitations of these two questions as many people who perceive themselves equipped to serve might not, and may never, perceive themselves as equipped to lead a ministry. This research study aimed not to discover if churches were equipping congregants to both serve and lead in ministry but to discover whether churches were effectively equipping their congregants to disciple others through the ministry based on their engagement in the three Christ-practiced communities. This means the researcher expected that fewer congregants would feel equipped to lead than those who felt equipped to serve. This was indeed the case, with many congregants expressing that they were far better at a "behind the scenes" or "supportive" role in ministry. Within each church and overall, congregants who were engaged in three communities, perceived themselves as more equipped than those who were engaged in two communities. Also, those congregants engaged in two communities perceived themselves as better equipped to serve than those engaged in only one community.

Questions 35-36 asked if the congregants felt their church had equipped them to disciple someone else. This was a fundamental question in the survey, having had several questions leading up to it. Once again, those congregants engaged in three communities perceived

themselves as better equipped to disciple someone else than those in two communities of engagement. Furthermore, those congregants engaged in two communities were more likely to perceive themselves as equipped to disciple someone else than those congregants engaged in only one community. Many of the congregants who perceived themselves as equipped expressed that their existing engagement in the various communities had given them ample opportunities to practice discipling and being disciplined directly by someone else. Several of those who expressed disagreement with their equipping to disciple expressed a lack of opportunity and knowledge as to their reason for not being equipped.

The responses from the congregants as it declined based on the level of community engagement was not that much of a surprise. What was a surprise was the comparison between those who tangibly served in their church and those who perceived themselves as equipped to disciple someone else based on their community engagement. Of those surveyed from one community, 40.7% served somewhere in their church, while 40% perceived themselves as equipped to disciple someone else. Of those surveyed from two communities, 79.1% served somewhere in their church, while 79.1% also perceived themselves as equipped to disciple someone else. Of those surveyed from three communities, 93.5% served somewhere in their church, while 88% perceived themselves as equipped to disciple someone else. Of this last group, question 35 asked if the congregants' engagement in their church had equipped them to disciple someone else. Two respondents disagreed, stating that they had been equipped at another church but DID feel equipped to disciple someone else. When those two surveys were changed to the positive, the three communities of engagement perception of their ability to disciple someone else rose to 93.5%.

The conclusion gained from RQ3 is that though it never occurred at 100%, being engaged in more Christ-practiced communities generally led congregants to perceive themselves as more equipped to serve and disciple someone else.

Conclusion of RQ4

RQ 4 asked, “What are the perceived benefits of engagement in one, two, or all three local-church communities regarding discipling congregants?” From the interviews and the qualitative responses by those surveyed, there were several benefits of being involved in more Christ-practiced communities at the local church. The first benefit was that both the pastors/leaders and the congregants expressed accountability from being connected in different ways. The few interviewed leaders said that the level of accountability in a discipleship group was transparent and fulfilling. Congregants from the three communities of engagement echoed the same sentiments. They said that having someone they could be accountable to AND that was accountable to them helped them in their own walks with Christ. This level of accountability most often led to communication throughout the week and not simply during designated times of meeting. Inversely, those in only one community of engagement often expressed dissatisfaction from being disconnected and having a lack of knowledge. This was mostly cited as reasons why congregants from those communities perceived themselves unequipped to serve or disciple someone else.

The second benefit of being connected in various Christ-practiced communities was an increase in spiritual development and growth from the congregants. As previously stated, regardless of years attending the church, congregants involved in three communities of engagement were far more likely to perceive themselves as equipped to serve and disciple someone else. During the interviews, everyone being interviewed expressed that they saw the

most spiritual growth from those engaged in the discipleship group (the smallest group). Both the interviewees and the congregants articulated the intimacy found in the discipleship groups as a significant factor in their own spiritual development and maturation. On the other side, congregants who had relegated themselves to only Sunday morning service often expressed their lack of equipping resulting from spiritual development and growth. Whether their limited engagement was due to time constraints or a lack of willingness to become engaged, the theme of a lack of knowledge and spiritual maturity kept resurfacing in the surveys.

The final benefit of being connected in three Christ-practiced communities was the willingness for congregants to use their spiritual maturity to disciple someone else either through serving in a ministry, leading a ministry, or just being willing to disciple someone else. Coleman (1993) writes, “Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of the world” (p. 99) while referencing John 15:16, which says, “Go and bring forth fruit.” The process of sharing one’s faith and discipling someone else is often missed within the church ignoring Jesus’ final words to his disciples when he said,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” Matthew 28:18-20.

This passage, known as The Great Commission, insinuates that the spiritual development of the individual is not complete until that individual “goes,” “baptizes,” and “teaches” others to follow Christ. The major benefit of the congregants involved in both the two and three Christ-practiced communities is that they were far more likely (at least twice as likely) to perceive themselves as equipped to disciple someone else and to actually serve in their local church. The data suggests that based on their level of engagement in the church’s intentionally designed communities,

those engaged in two and three communities were willing to apply The Great Commission in their lives.

Implications

The implications of this study for local churches are three-fold in nature. First, the intentional design of each of the Christ-practiced communities is vitally important to the effectiveness and success of those groups. Simply launching different groups and communities within the local church without having an expressed design and expectant result will not yield disciples who make disciples. For many of those being interviewed, this included assuring that each community's design coincided with the local body's overall core values and mission. Church "D" suggested that a departure from this harmony between the overall church's mission and values and that of the design of the Christ-practiced communities was a recipe for division and ultimately failure of both the communities and even possibly the church as a whole.

The second implication was that the design of the communities does not matter much unless the church effectively communicates the purpose and benefits behind the congregants' engagement. Many of the congregants who disagreed that their local church prioritized discipleship said they did not know where to find that information if it was available. Their concern was that the church either did not have discipleship as a priority or that the church failed to communicate it well enough to the congregation. Communicating "This is what we do, and this is why we do it" allows the church to articulate the purpose and reason behind becoming more involved. This communication does not mean that all congregants of all churches will immediately get involved if this were the case. However, some (23.7%) of those surveyed expressed discontentment with the church's level of communication. Some (16.5%) expressed

that the church did offer small groups or discipleship groups but that there seemed to be no way to access that information.

The third implication was that intentionally designed communities were indeed effective in discipling congregants to perceive themselves as equipped to disciple others. One of the limitations of this research study was that addressing the effectiveness of attending church events was not the direction of the inquiry. The results were based on the intentional development and application of three Christ-practiced communities rather than simply being at the church building multiple times during the week.

In the spiritual development of the Christian, there must be a transition from self-development to developing others. In Matthew 28, Jesus commands his discipleship to “Go, therefore, and make disciples...” (Matthew 28:19, NASB). This command is far from a suggestion in the life of the believer but central to the calling of Christ. In his book *Radical Disciple*, Scott (2010) suggests that “Our common way of avoiding radical discipleship is to be selective: choosing those areas in which commitment suits us and staying away from those areas in which it will be costly. But because Jesus is Lord, we have no right to pick and choose the areas in which we will submit to His authority” (p. 15-16). Thus, the call to disciple someone else is a significant step in one’s discipleship process.

The direct result of the phenomenon of the intentional development of discipleship communities was specifically relegated to congregants’ engagement within those communities and the corresponding results of their perception of equipping to serve in ministry and their willingness to disciple others. The qualitative data shows that those involved in more communities were more likely to disciple someone else and serve in the church. The data shows that those involved in fewer communities were generally less likely to do the same. The

implication is that local churches should consider intentionally developing Christ-practiced communities for the discipling and development of their congregants.

Applications

The application of this study could assist local church pastors and leaders in two different ways. First, it could shed light on the importance of discipleship/disciple-making as a core value of the church regardless of its mission statement. This is important because many church leaders chase core values, albeit good things, as primary while missing the Commission that Christ gave in Matthew 28. Second, this study revealed that the intentional development of three Christ-practiced communities and the clear communication regarding these communities to congregants had applicable and the apparent congruent results on both the positive and negative ends of those congregant engagements. Church pastors and leaders may find new ways to implement and engage their congregants in the Christ-practiced communities to better equip them for their spiritual development and eventually disciple others.

A modification for the design of the research study would be to interview more leaders from each church in a variety of capacities to gain a better understanding of the specifics of the design and implementation of each community. This inquiry would be beneficial in pinpointing each group's exact setup of expectations, while also allowing a side-by-side comparison of the differences as designed by each church.

Research Limitations

This research is limited to a small group of individuals specifically within local church bodies. These people are both the vocational pastors at the church as well as various lay leaders. More specifically, this study was limited to those pastors and leaders seeking to better understand the impact of intentional communities within their own local church. This study

smaller implications for online church experiences and larger denominational districts as a whole. Though the data from this study could be used by denominations and online church experiences, the results from those interviewed and surveys came from a different demographic making any application from a district or online experience limited in its usefulness.

Further Research

Further research into the communities of discipleship may include but is not limited to, the following three ideas. The first idea would be to expand the breadth of the study to include more churches from different regions of America. Because of time constraints, the researcher was limited in the geographic reach of the study and was also limited in the inclusion of more local churches. Expanding the number of churches included would give less polarized data and allow for a further understanding of the impact of the three Christ-practiced communities on the equipping of local church congregants. Expanding the study's geographic reach would allow the study to reveal possible common themes that may occur due to traditions within a specific region. For instance, would a church in California yield similar results to a church found in the Bible-belt of America? These would be interesting results that would be discovered if time allowed for a more comprehensive study.

The second idea would be to change the methodology and conduct a proper mixed-methods study with a designated focus on the numerical data. Though numerical data was gathered in this study, its use was limited to the application within the qualitative data. A mixed-methods study would allow for a more extensive inquiry into the congruencies between the cross-examination of the two types of data collected. Combined with the first idea of expanding the study's reach, a mixed-methods study would permit the analysis of some fascinating sets of

data allowing for an even further understanding of discipleship in Christian community as a phenomenon.

The third idea would be to structure the interviews and surveys differently, allowing for more content of the former while a more significant number of the latter. In hindsight, the researcher would have expanded the interview questions to gain a better picture of the pastors'/leaders' approach to the intentional development of each Christ-practiced community. This would afford the research study to be more profound in understanding the "whys" of each church. Also, the researcher felt that the surveys were a bit too long. Some questions collected interesting data but added little to the overall direction and purpose of the study as a whole. The surveys could have been reduced by 33% and still have served their purpose. This would have allowed to gather more surveys instead of having some people skip the survey because of the length. Having more surveys would have also allowed for better and more comprehensive data.

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Appendix

A. Interview Questions Draft

1. How important is disciple-making/discipleship to the core mission of your church? (RQ1)
Optional follow-up: Is disciple-making/discipleship a stated value of the church and how can congregants access this information?
2. How do the use of intentional groups/communities within the church help in the disciple-making process? (RQ1)
Optional follow-up: Are there designated staff members and/or other church leaders (i.e. elders, deacons, etc...) charged with setting up and casting vision for these groups/communities?
3. How specifically is the weekly corporate service (Sunday mornings usually) designed to help disciple congregants? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ5)
Optional follow-up: How are the elements of Sunday morning (i.e. worship, sermon, etc...) intentionally developed to fit the weekly service community?
4. How specifically are small groups designed to help disciple congregants? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ5)
Optional follow-up: Do small group leaders engage their group with the same intentionality?
5. How specifically are mentorship groups designed to help disciple congregants? (RQ1, RQ2, RQ5)
Optional follow-up: Are the mentors of these groups aware of the intentionality of the group's design?
6. How does the purpose of each community/group change, if at all, to match the designated design of that group? (RQ 5)
7. How successful do you perceive these communities/groups have been in discipling and equipping your congregants for discipling others? (RQ2)
8. Do you perceive a difference in successfully equipping your congregants depending on their engagement in one, two, or all three communities/groups? (RQ2, RQ4)

B. Survey Questions Draft

1. What is the name of your church?

2. I am engaged in these communities at my local church. (Mark all that apply)
 - A. Weekly Worship (i.e. Sunday morning)
 - B. A Small Group
 - C. A Mentorship Group
3. My local church intentionally makes discipleship a priority.
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly Disagree
4. Why did you choose this answer?

5. My participation in the community of the local church is important.
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly Disagree
6. Why did you choose this answer?

7. My church intentionally offers small groups and mentorship groups to the congregants.
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly Disagree
8. Why did you choose this answer?

9. I know how to become connected to a small group/mentorship group in my church.
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Disagree
 - D. Strongly Disagree
10. Why did you choose this answer?

11. Our weekly service (i.e. Sunday morning) is important in making disciples of congregants.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

12. Why did you choose this answer?

13. Our Small groups are important in making disciples of congregants.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

14. Why did you choose this answer?

15. Our Mentorship Groups are important in making disciples of congregants.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

16. Why did you choose this answer?

17. Disciples of Jesus should be actively engaged in being disciplined by someone else.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

18. Why did you choose this answer?

19. Disciples of Jesus should be actively discipling someone else.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

20. Why did you choose this answer?

21. I feel completely disciplined by attending the weekly worship service only.

- A. Strongly Agree

- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

22. Why did you choose this answer?

23. I feel completely disciplined by attending the weekly service AND a small group.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

24. Why did you choose this answer?

25. I feel completely disciplined by attending the weekly service, a small group, AND a mentorship group.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

26. Why did you choose this answer?

27. I feel equipped to serve in a ministry. (i.e. children's ministry, youth, etc...)

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

28. Why did you choose this answer?

29. I feel equipped to LEAD in a ministry. (i.e. children's ministry, youth, etc...)

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

30. Why did you choose this answer?

31. I feel equipped to lead a small group of adults.

- A. Strongly Agree

- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

32. Why did you choose this answer?

33. I feel equipped to mentor someone else in my church.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

34. Why did you choose this answer?

35. I feel that my engagement in my church's communities/group has equipped me to disciple others.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree

36. Why did you choose this answer?

Demographic Questions:

37. I have been attending my church for _____ years.

38. I currently serve in the _____ ministry? (N/A if not applicable)

C. Consent Form: Leaders

Consent: Leader Interview

Title of the Project: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DISCIPLING CHURCH CONGREGANTS USING THREE CHRIST-PRACTICED COMMUNITIES

Principal Investigator: Bryan Ewing, Doctoral student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over 18 years old and currently a leader/pastor at the local church involved in the study.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the phenomenon of discipleship as it occurred specifically within different communities in the local church. The study seeks to better understand the impact of levels of congregant engagement on their perceived ability to serve/lead in ministry. It also seeks to understand if the perceptions of church leadership demonstrate the same themes as congregant perceptions.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Be available to participate in a 1-hour *Zoom* interview.
2. The interview will be recorded (video and audio) for later transcription.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

By participating in this study, you will help local church leaderships better understand the intentional impact of groups/communities on the discipleship process.

Benefits to society include helping many local churches develop discipleship models with the intentionality of purposeful groups in mind

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of coded pseudonyms.

- Interview recordings will be stored on a password-locked, personal computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Bryan Ewing. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED] or e-mail [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary J. Bredfeldt, at [REDACTED].

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

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

Your Consent

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

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to record (video and audio) the person named below as part of their participation in this study.

Printed Name

Signature and Date

D. Consent Form: Congregants

Consent: Congregant Surveys

Title of the Project: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DISCIPLING CHURCH CONGREGANTS USING THREE CHRIST-PRACTICED COMMUNITIES
Principal Investigator: Bryan Ewing, Doctoral student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over 18 years old and currently attending the local church also involved in the study. You must also be engaged in one of three communities at the church. These communities are (1) a weekly, corporate worship service, (2) the weekly service as well as a small group, or (3) the previous two communities as well as a mentorship group

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the phenomenon of discipleship as it occurred specifically within different communities in the local church. The study seeks to better understand the impact of levels of congregant engagement on their perceived ability to serve/lead in ministry. It also seeks to understand if the perceptions of church leadership demonstrate the same themes as congregant perceptions.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

3. Be available to take a 30–40-minute 20 question survey that would include multiple choice answers as well as write-in answers

How could you or others benefit from this study?

By participating in this study, you will help local church leaderships better understand the intentional impact of groups/communities on the discipleship process. Your input will assist leader in the church formulate possible changes that would directly benefit you, the congregant.

Benefits to society include helping many local churches develop discipleship models with the intentionality of purposeful groups in mind

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of coded pseudonyms.
- Survey data will be stored on a password-locked, personal computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Bryan Ewing. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED] or e-mail [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary J. Bredfeldt, at [REDACTED].

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

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

Your Consent

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

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name

Signature and Date

E. Pastor/Leader Invitation Email

Local Church Pastor/Leader

Dear Pastor/Leader:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in Christian leadership. The purpose of my research is to understand what impact, if any, engagement in one, two, or three Christ-practiced communities has on the discipleship and equipping of local church congregants. The research will also seek to understand perceived benefits of these communities from the leaders of the local churches. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must (1) currently be a pastor/leader at a local church that intentionally offers weekly worship services, small groups, and mentorship groups; (2) have had the same senior pastor for the last 5 years; (3) have discipleship as a core value of the church; (4) be from an American evangelical, Protestant, church; (5) have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; and (6) be currently practicing discipleship in their own personal lives.

The procedure for the research is as follows:

1. Participants are requested join a pre-screening phone call to insure they meet the established requirements of the study.
2. Candidates will complete a research consent form (attached), necessary for inclusion in the research.
3. Upon completion of the pre-screening phone call and the consent form, eligible candidates will be selected for the research. Zoom interview times will then be agreed upon at the convenience of the candidates' schedule. Contact will occur within two weeks of receipt of participant's Consent form.
4. Research will be via a single, 1 hour video conferencing interview.
5. In the event an additional interview is necessary, the researcher will contact the participant to schedule the interview.

Sincerely,
 Bryan Ewing, Doctoral Student and Research Principle
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 Email: [REDACTED]

F. Congregant Invitation Email

Local Church Congregant

Dear Congregant:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in Christian leadership. The purpose of my research is to understand what impact, if any, engagement in one, two, or three Christ-practiced communities has on the discipleship and equipping of local church congregants. The research will also seek to understand perceived benefits of these communities from the leaders of the local churches. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must (1) currently be a congregant at a participating local church and (2) be involved in at least one or more local church community being weekly worship services, small groups, and mentorship groups.

The procedure for the research is as follows:

1. Participants will be pre-screened by their leadership based upon their engagement in one, two, or three local church communities.
2. Candidates will complete a research consent form (attached), necessary for inclusion in the research.
3. Upon completion of the pre-screening and the consent form, eligible candidates will be selected for the research. Contact from the researcher will occur within two weeks of receipt of participant's Consent form.
4. Research will be via a single 30-40 minute survey.
5. In the event an interview is necessary, the researcher will contact the participant to schedule the interview.

Sincerely,
Bryan Ewing, Doctoral Student and Research Principle
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

G. Expanded pastor/leader demographic data

Church and Title	Role in Current Church	Years in Ministry	Years at Current Church
Church "A"			
Pastor 1	Pastor of Discipleship and Family Ministry	7 Years	2 Years
Church "B"			
Pastor	Senior Pastor	28 Years	15 Years
Leader 1	Women's Ministry Leader	21 Years	10 Years
Leader 2	Women's Ministry Group Leader	15 Years	8 Years
Leader 3	Family Ministry Leader	10 Years	7 Years
Church "C"			
Pastor	Youth and Discipleship Pastor	22 Years	13 Years
Church "D"			
Pastor	Discipleship and Community Pastor	17 Years	12 Years
Leader	Men's Group/Discipleship Group Leader	12 Years	9 Years
Church "E"			
Pastor	Pastor of Discipleship and Community	15 Years	13 Years
Church "F"			
Pastor	Senior Pastor	27 Years	10 Years

H. Expanded Survey Demographic Data

Church and Survey Number	Number of Communities Engaged in (1-3)	Time Attending Current Church	Ministries Involved in (if any)
Church "A"			
Survey #1	2 Communities	28 Years	European Leadership Forum
Survey #2	3 Communities	3 Years	Youth Ministry
Survey #3	3 Communities	4 Years	Youth and Discipleship Ministry
Survey #4	1 Community	3 Months	n/a
Survey #5	1 Community	6 Years	n/a
Survey #6	3 Communities	11 Years	Outreach Ministry
Survey #7	2 Communities	36 Years	n/a
Church "B"			
Survey #8	2 Communities	2 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #9	1 Community	45 Years	Sunday School Teaching
Survey #10	1 Community	18 Years	n/a
Survey #11	3 Communities	44 Years	Worship and Children's Ministry
Survey #12	3 Communities	27 Years	Worship Team, Nursery, Discipleship Ministry
Survey #13	2 Communities	42 Years	Nursery and Children's Ministry
Survey #14	2 Communities	41 Years	Outreach, Missions, Nursery Ministry
Survey #52	3 Communities	61 Years	Discipleship Ministry
Survey #53	2 Communities	43 Years	Worship Team/Small Group Leader
Survey #54	2 Communities	2 Years	n/a
Survey #55	2 Communities	31 Years	Adult Teacher ESL
Survey #56	3 Communities	6 Months	n/a
Church "C"			
Survey #15	1 Community	2 Years	n/a
Survey #16	2 Communities	6 Years	Preaching, Men's Ministry
Survey #17	2 Communities	8 Years	Usher
Survey #18	1 Community	14 Years	Worship Team
Survey #19	1 Community	4 Years	Men's and Children's Ministry
Survey #20	3 Communities	10 Years	Men's Group Leader
Survey #21	2 Communities	1 Year	n/a

Church "D"			
Survey #22	3 Communities	20 Years	Discipleship Ministry
Survey #23	2 Communities	9 Years	Youth Ministry
Survey #24	1 Community	20 Years	n/a
Survey #25	2 Communities	3 Years	Life Groups
Survey #26	2 Communities	10 Years	Educational Ministry
Survey #27	2 Communities	10 Years	Outreach Ministry
Survey #28	2 Communities	6 Years	n/a
Survey #29	2 Communities	13 Years	Discipleship Ministry
Survey #30	3 Communities	25 Years	Connections and Women's Ministry
Survey #31	1 Community	3 Years	n/a
Survey #32	2 Communities	5 Years	n/a
Survey #33	2 Communities	20 Years	n/a
Survey #34	2 Communities	3 Years	Security and Safety Ministry
Survey #35	1 Community	25 Years	n/a
Survey #36	3 Communities	20 Years	Women's Ministry
Survey #37	3 Communities	9 Years	Worship Team
Survey #38	2 Communities	4 Years	n/a
Survey #39	1 Community	24 Years	Connections
Survey #40	1 Community	15 Years	n/a
Survey #41	1 Community	3 Years	n/a
Survey #42	1 Community	3 Years	n/a
Survey #43	2 Communities	35 Years	Connections
Survey #44	3 Communities	27 Years	Women's Ministry
Survey #45	2 Communities	45 Years	Elder Council, Outreach Ministry
Survey #46	3 Communities	10 Years	Prayer Team
Survey #47	3 Communities	6 Years	Children's and Outreach Ministry
Survey #48	3 Communities	64 Years	Children's and Mentoring
Survey #49	2 Communities	18 Years	Women's Ministry
Survey #50	1 Community	40 Years	Outreach Ministry
Survey #51	2 Communities	20 Years	n/a
Church "E"			
Survey #57	2 Communities	4 Years	Food Pantry/Small Group
Survey #58	2 Communities	5 Years	Women's Ministry
Survey #59	3 Communities	4 Years	Hispanic Worship Ministry
Survey #60	2 Communities	6 Years	Hospitality
Survey #61	2 Communities	16 Years	Facilities Ministry
Survey #62	2 Communities	7 Years	Food Pantry
Survey #63	3 Communities	38 Years	Small Groups Ministry/MOPS
Survey #64	2 Communities	4 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #65	3 Communities	8 Years	Food Pantry and Connections
Survey #66	3 Communities	8 Years	n/a

Survey #67	1 Community	1 Year	n/a
Survey #68	1 Community	1 Year	n/a
Survey #69	2 Communities	11 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #70	3 Communities	5 Years	Jail Ministry and Connections
Survey #71	2 Communities	4 Years	Worship Team/VBS
Survey #72	1 Community	15 Years	n/a
Survey #73	3 Communities	6 Years	Justice Team
Survey #74	2 Communities	32 Years	Rooted/Food Pantry
Survey #75	2 Communities	2 Years	Men's Ministry/Small Groups
Survey #76	3 Communities	20 Years	Small Group Ministry
Survey #77	2 Communities	17 Years	Women's Ministry
Survey #78	2 Communities	4 Years	n/a
Survey #79	3 Communities	7 Years	Men's Ministry
Survey #80	2 Communities	24 Years	Food Pantry
Survey #81	3 Communities	20 Years	Children's and Hospitality Ministry
Survey #82	2 Communities	30 Years	Worship Team
Survey #83	2 Communities	9 Years	Worship Team
Survey #84	1 Community	8 Years	Hospitality Ministry
Survey #85	2 Communities	9 Years	Youth Ministry
Survey #86	2 Communities	6 Years	Special Needs Ministry
Survey #87	2 Communities	2 Years	n/a
Survey #88	1 Community	10 Years	Children's Ministry
Church "F"			
Survey #89	3 Communities	10 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #90	2 Communities	14 Years	Leadership/Sound Ministry
Survey #91	2 Communities	40 Years	Food Ministry/Life Groups
Survey #92	3 Communities	13 Years	Music/AWANA/Leadership
Survey #93	3 Communities	4 Years	Food/Small Group Ministry
Survey #94	1 Community	12 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #95	2 Communities	3 Years	Leadership/Youth/Worship
Survey #96	3 Communities	12 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #97	Incomplete Survey		
Survey #98	1 Community	38 Years	Food Ministry
Survey #99	1 Community	13 Years	n/a
Survey #100	2 Communities	3 Years	Worship/Hospitality Ministry
Survey #101	1 Community	2 Years	n/a
Survey #102	1 Community	13 Years	Outreach/Eldership Ministry
Survey #103	3 Communities	12 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #104	1 Community	12 Years	n/a
Survey #105	1 Community	10 Years	Audio/Visual
Survey #106	2 Communities	12 Years	Children's Ministry
Survey #107	3 Communities	5 Years	Prison Ministry

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