

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

SMALL GROUPS THAT FUEL ACTIVE SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Manna Church prioritizes empowering and developing leaders as an imperative objective of the local church. Such development is fueled through various avenues, including small groups. This thesis project will survey the purpose of small groups within Manna Church and how newly designed groups can address the problem of low voluntary participation in weekly services. The need for more active serve team members problematically exists among six site locations in the Fayetteville-Fort Bragg region. Furthermore, each ministry leader seeks innovative strategies to initiate and maintain involvement during weekly services. However, numbers are at an unprecedented low point. The effects of these results require a scholastic analysis and evaluation of methodologies that fuel voluntary service within the local church.

Key Words: small groups, ministry, volunteer.

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Abbreviations

PCS *Permanent Change of Station.*

GT *Growth Track*

SG *Small Group*

SGL *Small-Group Leader*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Manna Church prioritizes developing leaders as its most imperative objective to the local church. Such development is fueled through various avenues, including free-marketed small groups. This thesis project will survey the purpose of small groups within Manna Church and how newly designed groups can address the problem of low participation in weekly services. The scarcity of active serve team members problematically exists among six sites in the Fayetteville/Fort Bragg region. Furthermore, each leader over each ministry lane is consistently seeking new implementations and strategies to initiate and maintain constant involvement in weekly services, yet numbers for those serving are at an unprecedented low point. The effects of these results require a scholastic analysis and evaluations of methodologies that fuel voluntary service within the local church. For a better understanding of Manna's demographic history, culture and systems, Chapter 1 will present the ministry context and outline the purpose, problem, and thesis of the research project.

Ministry Context

The core values of Manna Church are to love God, love each other, and love the world.¹ To cultivate such values, congregants are encouraged to join the Growth Track, a series of weekly sessions in multiple small groups that teach the core values of the church and how each person fits the ultimate plan to change their world. These sessions are titled First Step, Next Step, and Leader Step. The overall goal in First Step is to discover what the balanced, integrated, and healthy life of a disciple of Jesus looks like, specifically within the context of Manna Church. Next Step presents how Manna "does church," why the church exists, its passions, and where the church is headed. Leader Step helps one become more fully equipped to bring kingdom

¹ "Manna Church," 2022, accessed March 18, 2022, www.manna.church.

leadership and influence into one's family, workplace, community, and local church. Growth Track is instrumental to the development of leaders and culture at Manna Church. Through such life-giving small groups, Manna Church capitalizes on the idea that God has designed people to "do" life together. Such value is hinged reflectively through small groups.

These core values are based on Luke 10:27 (love God), Luke 10:27 (love each other), and Matthew 28:19-20 (love the world). Such values are implemented in how Manna Church serves the Fayetteville region and the military highway. In fact, outreach is the heartbeat of the church. Some of these outreach missions include serving daily and weekly food distributions and services through the Dream Center, community partnerships, missionary projects, and much more. To fulfill the commission of Christ, Manna Church has committed to reflecting the hands and feet of Jesus. Putting to practice these truths, historically, Manna Church conducts small-group events four times a year, enabling four cycles for people to join and connect with a group that enables life-togetherness. As the key facilitator of the worship lane, I am challenged to implement these same truths as a measure to address the problem of scarcity in weekly services.

Demographics

Manna Church is centrally located in Fayetteville, NC, as a multi-site organization serving as one church in many locations within the Fayetteville/Fort Bragg region. The mission is to glorify God by equipping His people to change their world by planting churches with the same world-changing vision. Manna Church has served military communities for more than forty years and is strategically planting expressions of Manna Church in every military base. While an expression of Manna Church is planted across the globe, the ministry context of this thesis project will focus specifically on the central sites of Fayetteville, NC.

Excelling as a nondenominational church in an urban community, Manna Church is both multicultural and multi-generational. Surrounded by a large military base, the membership across six Fayetteville/Fort Bragg sites totals 7,846.² The ethnicities consist of 35% African American, 2% Asian, 46% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, 2% Greek, and 1% Scandinavian. The relationship status of the families is 50% married, 40% single, and 10% single-parented. Among these houses is a varied generational composition that includes 3% generation Z, 34% millennials, 31% generation X, 24% baby boomers, and 2% silent. As for gender, 62% are female, and 38% are male. The length of time families reported their residency was 7% for 1 year, 19% 1-2 years, 16% 3-5 years, 16% 6-10 years, 42% at 11 years or more. The figures below reflect the presented data.

Ethnicity: Social category of people who identify with each other based on shared attributes that distinguish them from other groups such as a common set of traditions, ancestry, language, history, society, culture, nation, religion, or social treatment within their residing area.

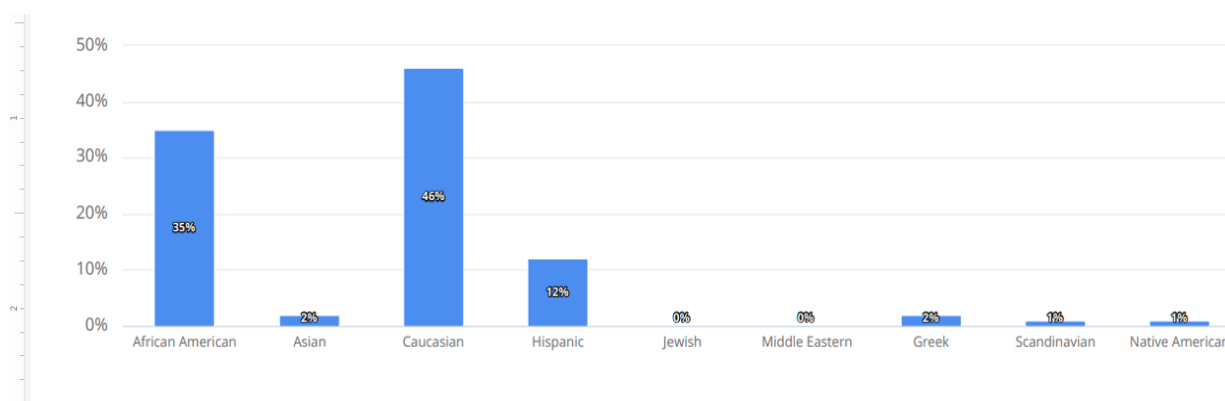


Figure 2.0 Demographics ³

² Demographics, *Understand the Individuals and Families in Your Community*, Created by Gloo, May 20, 2021.

³ Demographics, *Understand the Individuals*.

History

Manna Church has its origins in 1969 when Curry Vaughn and Fidel Jimenez returned from Vietnam and started a small-group Bible study on Fort Bragg military base in 1970. These meetings stirred the launching of a rehabilitation center called Manor House in 1972.⁴ During this period, Curry partnered with Faith Farms, which supported the mission of this faith and community-based organization. In spring 1974, Jerry Daley visited Manor House, where he met with a board of twenty-four primarily elderly charismatic women and cast a vision through his preaching of “God’s Divine Order.”⁵ The message set a motion to make Manor House a church. In late August, Jerry Daley arrived in Fayetteville, NC, to take over the ministry, both preaching and leading worship. Daley continued the prophetic mission to plant a central mother church that would plant other churches out of it. He changed the name to Manna Church in an effort to abandon the earlier reputation of the organization as a rehabilitation facility.

Three years later, after new journeys and revitalizations, Michael and Laura Fletcher attended Manna Church for the first time. They experienced exponential growth in the church as Daley began to train them and others for a leadership team to do the work of ministry. Some of the leaders included Joe Rodriguez, Ron Crews, Wayman Bullard, Bill Fulton, Fidel Jimenez, Jim Laffoon, and Woody Lum. Michael Fletcher, who was young and on the brink of leaving for North Carolina State University, received a revelation that he was supposed to be a pastor. After being mentored and persuaded, Fletcher went to Methodist University and stayed in a dormitory with a few other men aspiring to work in ministry full time. This was where Manna Church

⁴ Chris Fletcher and Anna Wiggins, *History of Manna Church*, interviewed by Stephen Love.

⁵ Fletcher and Wiggins, interview.

began raising leaders from within.⁶ At this point, the church had approximately one hundred members.

In the spring of 1977, the church moved to a new building. It launched a Christian academy in September 1977 for kindergarten through twelfth grade with 110 students enrolled.⁷ In November of the same year, Daley decided that a Bible college should be started next. Only a year later, Manna Christian Academy had grown, and so had the congregation, enabling the launch of Manna Christian College. As the ministry continued to multiply, Daley felt a call to full-time apostolic ministry and requested release, enabling Ron Crews to become Manna Church's new pastor. The move continued as churches began to plant throughout the region through Crews' influence.

After Crews returned to lead the Bible college, Michael Fletcher transitioned and became the senior pastor of Manna Church. This transition marks the opening of a new stage in the church's history. Fletcher called out approximately twenty-five younger men who felt called to full-time ministry and developed a different team of leaders. The aspiring leaders met every Sunday at 6 a.m. The schedule was very exhausting, and Fletcher fell into a cycle of filling in wherever necessary for an extended period. Fletcher began to preach passionately in the direction of leadership development instead. Leaders started developing, and Manna began taking off. The rise of such growth enabled a worship center to be built in 2000, with another Manna multi-site opening just eight years later at Executive Place. In 2014, the church grew to more than 8,500 members, with more than seventy churches planted through the leadership of Manna Church. As the church continues to support missions in forty-three countries, it continues to grow and will

⁶ Chris Fletcher and Anna Wiggins, *History of Manna Church*, interviewed by Stephen Love.

⁷ Fletcher and Wiggins, interview.

see astronomical growth both near and far. To replicate this vision, Pastor Michael Fletcher has committed to planting expressions of Manna Church along the military highway and around the world.

Five years later, Manna Church continues to see a peak in guest cards, salvation cards, baptisms, Growth Track participants, and small groups. The benefit of consistent outreach has increased average attendance across sites by 9.2 %.⁸ Some of these outreaches include, but are not limited to, meal distributions, community clean-up, disaster relief, neighborhood adoptions, and societal reconciliations. Today, Manna Church serves the community through outreach projects, missional partnerships, the Manna Dream Center, Manna University, and many other community services. Serving now as a community pillar, Manna Church has gained influence with local public leaders and secular organizations. Through the church's partnership with the Military Family Advisory Network, many families have come to experience Christ in a relatable and practical way. While COVID-19 has affected attendance and shifted how the church serves, it has been intentional about serving in a time of crisis. Outreach is the heartbeat of the church and will continue to be the vehicle that enhances the mission of Christ. Such characteristics are the DNA of the leaders and congregants of Manna Church. Unfortunately, the core of what keeps congregants connected and actively engaged is seemingly on a slippery decline over time and is revealed in various ministry lanes.

The mission to connect people to God and each other through life-giving small groups has somehow disseminated from the focus across various lanes. Connectivity is what makes the culture of Manna Church "sticky." Grasping the reality of such connectivity will bring clarity to the decline of voluntary service. While some attributes derived from the effects of COVID-19,

⁸ James Lewis, *Gloo*, v1.9.5, macOS, 2019.

recent observations have exposed a more profound concern, which poses a question to those leading department lanes: who is connecting with people? Who is taking another step closer to the call of Christ? How are people engaged? Hence, the responsibility of every leader goes beyond weekly tasks and ministry responsibilities, but rather to actively creating a relational environment where people can connect and grow. Perhaps then, if people are the point, voluntary activeness increases when people feel a sense of belonging and ownership. If Manna Church desires to see an increase in weekly engagement and connectivity, leaders must invest in the basic foundations of caring for volunteers through life-giving relationships.

Problem Presented

The work of talented and vigorous volunteers serving in ministry is a common commodity for many churches. Voluntary work sustains both mega-attractational churches and small missional churches. Comparatively, the leaders of Manna Church, as in many other churches, want to know how to develop and deploy more people effectively and efficiently. Manna Church is currently facing the challenge of voluntary coverage for six multi-sites within the Fayetteville/Fort Bragg region across several ministry teams. Such a challenge requires an evaluation of internal and external factors that may intuitively affect why people are not serving. Many factors both internally within the ministry and externally in an individual's environment have led to recent declines. The leaders of Manna Church seek to address this problem as it is a crucial dilemma for church growth and serve team engagement. Several team leaders of Manna Church are searching for innovative ways to connect and motivate congregants into using their gifts and talents in the local church. Based on the small-group culture of Manna Church, it is therefore assumed that the engagement of small groups will organically produce new urgencies and desires to serve during weekly services.

Additional research is needed to prove such assumptions. In the same vein, the researcher will thoroughly generate and examine an intervention plan to address the problem. It is imperative to consider how congregants are drawn, developed, and deployed to serve. While some systems have been effective, other models have failed. Failure at this time has not been determined to be the fault of specific individuals or circumstances. However, the responsibility to regain active service resides in the hands of each ministry team leader. Leaders must therefore lead with an ambition directed toward the advancement of God's commission in the church and the lives of His followers.⁹ To secure findings, the researcher will implicate scholarly works and theological principles found in both Old Testament and New Testament scriptures as primary sources for understanding how people are best equipped and motivated to serve the local church. The research process of the thesis will be based on small-group models and their capacity to evoke voluntary service. The problem is that all ministry teams at Manna Church in the Fayetteville/Fort Bragg region have a shortage of people volunteering during weekly services.

Purpose Statement

This action research aims to discover the impact that small groups have on volunteer service to the local church by implementing new small-group innovations tailored to inactive congregants. In efforts to retrieve qualitative data, small groups will be developed explicitly geared to the spiritual gifts and talents of the current members of each ministry team. The expected outcome is that small groups will evoke action toward consistent engagement. In addition, intentional implementations for developing significant small groups will enable the

⁹ Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principle of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 59.

researcher and those involved to discover and experience a significant increase in volunteers serving during weekly services.

The goal is to engage various ministry teams through action research and to implement theological principles through small groups to obtain successful results. Such initiatives are implemented in an effort of address the shortage of team members serving at weekly services. Additionally, this thesis project seeks to nullify any misconceptions regarding volunteer involvement and to validate methods and theories that align with the New Testament's model for creating community engagement and service. The researcher will include scholarly sources, including recognition of theoretical patterns and theological principles that can practically address the problem of scarcity within ministry teams at Manna Church. New small-group innovations will make use of the 3D (draw, develop, deploy) pattern generated from patterns found theologically and theoretically. Such a model will enhance the expected outcomes of the project.

Basic Assumptions

The common interest in the decline of active service in the local church gains high demand among churches both small and large. As a result, leaders assume that many factors could contribute to causing of such inactiveness. Recently, for Manna Church, the decline is attributed to the corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has caused low morale and a lack of interest in returning to "normal." Other ambitious leaders state that the culture of small groups has proven its capacity to reconnect and remotivate people to engage in their organizations. The researcher will solidify the cause of such recent decline through analysis drawn from the outline of the intervention plan in the project.

It is natural to gravitate to the outcomes of COVID-19 as the primary cause of the decline in volunteers serving at weekly services. However, as society reacclimates and the pandemic subsides over time, the problem is still prominent. Therefore, it is imperative to survey all external and internal factors potentially affecting engagement within the local church. The researcher will obtain clarity on such assumptions through personal surveys and interviews. Alongside scholarly studies on small groups and their effects on human behavior, social-emotional development, and community discipleship, such scholastic findings will enable the researcher to acquire a qualitative analysis of recent inactiveness.

It is assumed that small groups will help rectify the inactiveness within each ministry team. Many methodologies work, but the discovery of building more small groups that are oriented toward specified gifting is key to empowering people to serve. Therefore, this research will survey and address the need and expectations of small groups and the leader's role in connecting people to the local church. Manna Church has experienced testimonial outcomes for small-group benefits and its need for the body of Christ. However, collective data will prove these outcomes. Considering that there is no statistical evidence to support this thought, more research is needed to support such a claim.

Moreover, the assumption that small groups are the best approach to addressing a lack of service can be found in scripture. The results of both theological and theoretical rulings will produce more effective results. According to Ecclesiastes 4:12, one may be overpowered, but two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. While Jesus displays this methodology first, Paul later emphasizes connectivity as the foundational engagement of the church. It is assumed that if more of the existing leaders of Manna Church would lead following the model of Christ and the early church community, volunteer team members would gain a

stronger sense of belonging, ownership, service, and accountability. Fundamentally, it is assumed that in the space of a small group, equipping leaders based on theological and theoretical orthopraxy will increase personal desires, confidence, and high-performance outcomes.

Definitions

Growth Track

Growth Track is a unique series of small-group sessions that hold the core values of Manna Church. According to Cloud, the meaning and purpose of these small groups is to equip one to experience one's calling in God fully and one's part in impacting their world.¹⁰ It is a sixteen-week series of sessions divided into three small groups and is the foundational pipeline for Manna's culture of leadership development. The four weeks of First Step present the basic elements of Christian spiritual formation for the new believer, while Next Step takes a journey into the Church's identity and mission as well as how each person plays a key role in such advancement. The completion of these groups ignites spiritual maturity and enables one to walk out God's call for their lives fully. The results of Growth Track are expected to edify Manna Church both spiritually and numerically.

Small-Group Leader

Small-group leaders create space for others to develop and increase their faith through biblical community.¹¹ Moreover, leading others toward growth does not hinge only on learning

¹⁰ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 127.

¹¹ "242 Small Group Leader," accessed January 2022, <http://242community.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Small-Group-Leader-role-description.pdf>.

new skills or on working through the right plan; it depends on changing the team's morale and improving relationships through strategic leadership. Small-group leaders are driven toward guiding people closer to the body of Christ.

Serve Team

While commonly known as “volunteer,” the culture of Manna Church chooses to use the term “serve team” as it reflects the servitude character of Christ. Michael Fletcher defines these serve teams as “leaders who see and shape the future, engage and develop others, reinvent continually, value relationships and results and embody the values.”¹² In weekly services, this is a team of volunteers that creates a place where people can come into the presence of God and experience life change. Serve team volunteers give their time and talent during weekend experiences within ministry teams that will be evaluated during the intervention plan. They include teams for worship, students, children, Growth Track, and welcoming.

Small Group

The term *small group* is a ministry setting that evokes objectives of evangelism, assimilation, or leader/group multiplication.¹³ This project concerns itself with how small groups engage people outside of weekly services while simultaneously connecting them to serving weekly. According to George and Bird, a small group is a setting where the church (people) can come together to build relationships with one another and grow together in their faith; a setting for people to discover, develop, and deploy an individual's gifts and callings.¹⁴ Bales

¹² Michael Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership: How a Leadership Development Culture Builds Better Leaders Faster* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 27.

¹³ Jim Egli, “Factors That Fuel Small Group Growth,” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 137.

¹⁴ Carl F. George and Warren Bird, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership: How Lay Leaders Can Establish Dynamic and Healthy Cells, Classes, or Teams* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 123.

correspondingly describes a small group as any number of persons engaged in a face-to-face meeting or series of meetings. Moreover, a small group at its core is a space whereby leaders and followers have a genuine care and appreciation for themselves and others, thereby producing a sense of belonging, ownership, and ambition for kingdom service.¹⁵

Limitations

Manna Church serves a large military community, which results in a high turnover rate due to PCS, or permanent changes of station. A PCS is essentially a relocation to a new military duty station that typically lasts for two to four years until a soldier is again assigned to a new location. Unfortunately, a limited number of people may be able to participate in this study due to military responsibilities beyond the control of those who are in active duty. As a result, participants may not be accessible for the time needed to complete a survey or participate in an interview.

A limited number of participants may be available to meet in person due to COVID-19 restrictions. If this dilemma proves to be a limitation, conclusions regarding inactiveness may be a result solely of the effects of COVID-19. In this case, participants will be encouraged to engage virtually, and their responses will be used in the concluding analysis.

Methodology

I anticipate utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This will require that surveys are dispersed to specific control groups such as leaders for worship, Growth Track, and small groups, and various members of each serve team. The statistics could include inaccurate information as people may only share the response, they assume to be the right

¹⁵ R. F. Bales, *Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1950), 33.

answer. Some responses may not provide a genuine response to self-reports, thus limiting accurate, quality results. Participants might also leave the study or may be afraid of telling the truth regarding specific questions.

Integrity

Honesty throughout the intervention plan inevitably affects the qualitative analysis of the project's outcomes. The sensitivity and privacy of participants will be discussed in the questionnaires and interviews. While several small groups, including Growth Track, are designed to move individuals toward their calling, personal life experiences are often exposed. Because of the nature of the group, people are more exposed to a more vulnerable setting. These groups are designed for vulnerability and safe environments. Surveys and observations are sensitive and could affect the culture of safety that Manna Church has cultivated. Hence, the feedback received from the participants may be fabricated or not genuinely expressed. If the information asked is not protected through confidentiality, some participants may also decline.

Time

Limited time with a control group who may not have additional time to devote to the project and outside obligations could conflict with total commitment. Conducting a thesis project involving stakeholders within the ministry may be vacating and transitioning into a new routine that could limit how devoted a participant will be. Aside from day-to-day tasks, asking participants to add another task to their obligations could interfere with other prioritized responsibilities.

Time is also crucial to the small-group cycle dates in the comparison steps that lead to implementing the intervention plan. Newly created groups must register prior to the spring cycle and, in this case, have time to adequately advertise and recruit interested congregants. Moreover, the intervention plan is not permitted to operate until after IRB approval. The time span between

approval and the newly designed group could perhaps overlap and prevent groups from registering during regular cycle timespans, thus preventing access to resources and ultimately to an opportunity to develop one's gifting.

Delimitations

Manna Church serves a large congregation of more than 7,800 people across six multi-sites in the Fayetteville region. Among these numbers are multigenerational families who have been a part of Manna Church serve teams and leadership for several years. Several of the families included are active in small groups and are serving in some capacity. These participants are therefore able to provide an accurate response toward what has kept them consistently engaged. Creating an avenue for participants to speak to the benefits of small groups and how they have impacted their connections and prompting to serve will surround key ministry lanes. The study will include the following delimitations:

1. Worship teams at six sites to include a maximum of thirty serve team members who have served for at least two years and six worship leaders.
2. Six serve team site leaders and a maximum of thirty serve team members who have served for at least two years.
3. Ten small-group leaders who have led for a minimum of four small-group cycles, including the individuals who are a part of their group.
Six Growth Track leaders of First Step, Next Step, and Leaders' Step who have served for a minimum of two years.

Participation

Only those who have led their lanes for two to six years will be recruited within these groups. Serve team members will only be allowed to participate if they have been part of the team for a minimum of two years. This enables a more qualitative analysis of what has shifted and what additional intervention steps need to be addressed in the future.

Having relational leverage and access to each ministry team will enhance generous feedback and involvement in the study. Several of the leaders have spent years in their ministries and will offer a historical and current shift of involvement while also suggesting the best method of distributing information regarding the study. Each group is experiencing the effects of low activeness and shares the burden of scarcity within their teams. Therefore, current leaders will willingly cooperate with the study in the hopes of an impactful outcome.

Methodology

Participation across a diverse spectrum of volunteer service allows for a non-biased response to survey and interview questionnaires. Provided that all participants embody different intentions, challenges, and desires, a comprehensive analysis enables final findings for the intervention plan to be implemented along with theories and principles previously written. Therefore, the researcher receives valuable data from each ministry team to conclude firm and qualitative results.

Thesis Statement

The desire to get people actively engaged within the local church is not new. Demands for such motivation require an in-depth investigation into the history of the church. It requires exploring the church's efforts in establishing small groups for the benefit of teaching, discipleship, pastoral care, and evangelism. Such examination will induce leaders to create avenues to connect with the church and empower people to discover, develop, and serve with their gifts. It is therefore imperative that the church models Christ's example as the primary source of implementation. Other theories are imperative and complementary to the theological foundations found in scripture.

Serving is often seen as a reflection of humility and sacrifice. Both characteristics reflect the image of Christ. Jesus provides the example of what it looks like to disciple others and commands that believers share the good news among all nations. Jesus' method for accomplishing His plan transpired through small-group discipleship. The mission of Christ is carried out in His commission to make disciples among all the nations.¹⁶ Following such a model enables more people to be connected, developed, and empowered to use their gifts in the local church. If creating tailored small groups becomes the primary course of action for the leaders of each ministry team, then the organization will engage and motivate more people to serve the local church. The researcher's intervention plan will create a new small group crafted around skills that exist within each ministry team. Like Jesus' model, the rubric of each small group will embody the steps of drawing people, developing each individual, and then deploying them for the mission of the church.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all scriptures are New International Version. Matthew 28:19-20.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Drawing Disciples

Making disciples is the commission of Christ.¹⁷ A significant part of advancing the commission derives from service to the local church. Those who serve the local church both historically and today are predominantly voluntary. The depth and motivation that precede such commitment deserve a qualitative analysis. To solidify a qualitative analysis, research must primarily focus on understanding the needs and motivations of volunteers to identify what drives individuals to spend their free time on voluntary activities. In terms of this thesis, much of the research will embody methodologies toward reaching volunteers through small community groups to increase engagement with the local church. Therefore, it is appropriate to include sources that speak to the strategies that connect people to an organization, or in this case, the church. A reoccurring theme frequently exists among sources that will be evaluated. They include the virtuosity of recruitment, the process of equipping and developing, and the need for deployment.

The process of connectivity begins with a drawing of people. One must ask, what are people drawn to? What attracts their curiosity? People are generally magnetically tugged to what they best identify. The connection generates an organic space for relatable associations with an organization. Huynh's idea of connectivity attains the perspective that organizational connectedness results from an individual's strong sense of belonging with other people.¹⁸ Huynh

¹⁷ Matt. 28:18-20 NIV.

¹⁸ Jasmine Y. Huynh, Despoina Xanthopoulou, and Anthony H. Winefield, "The Job Demands-Resources Model in Emergency Service Volunteers: Examining the Mediating Roles of Exhaustion, Work Engagement and Organizational Connectedness," *Journal of Work & Stress* (2014), 312.

advances that such a drawing of community is manifested as a human striving for interpersonal attachments, as well as the need to relate to one's work and to the values of an organization.¹⁹ It is therefore essential for every small group leader to establish a culture that creates a sense of belonging and receptivity. As a result, the commitment and sustainability of the small group will continue to produce positive atmospheres and communities.

Other researchers such as Dougherty have examined mega-churches in Texas and found that the extent of small-group involvement positively relates to commitment and participation.²⁰ The effects of small-group involvement is not contingent on congregational size, however. His work parallels that of Huynh in that small groups generate a strong sense of belonging. The premise of his study is that persons who are involved in small groups that are devoted to prayer, relatable discussions, or Bible study report a greater sense of belonging, more frequent attendance, and higher rates of giving.²¹ Small groups may not wholly resolve problems associated with multisite coverage, but pivoting from Dougherty's writings, audiences can assume that small groups initiate involvement. Hence, cultivating small groups that target specified giftings will inevitably promote belonging, discipleship, and empowerment to exercise one's talent. Groups that are designed for specific giftings within Manna Church are expected to encourage members of new small groups to begin serving during weekly services.

The Disciple-making Church is written for the audience seeking grounds for deploying believers. This work supports the reoccurring theme of small-group engagement. Hull urges the audience to see the process of disciple-making from the lens of the early church. His work

¹⁹ Huynh, Xanthopoulou, and Winefield, "Job Demands-Resources Model," 312.

²⁰ Kevin D. Dougherty and Andrew L. Whitehead, "A Place to Belong: Small Group Involvement in Religious Congregations," *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 1 (2011), 104.

²¹ Dougherty and Whitehead, "A Place to Belong," 104.

reveals that subgroups are designed to engage people in the gospel and spread its truth through spiritual giftings. As an effort to renegotiate misrepresented ideologies associated with discipleship, he encourages his audience to embrace the commission of the church through scripture.²² To support these claims, Hull reflects on the early church practices and priorities of putting discipleship at the heart of the church.²³ His objective is to highlight the key principle that every believer is called to be a disciple and that every disciple is called to make more disciples. He explains that believers have the same responsibility and ability as the original disciples found in Acts 2:42. Discipleship therefore inlets introducing people to Christ, building faith, and sending them out into the harvest. This source provides a founding framework for small groups that are attempting to make more disciples. The results of such principles will inevitably increase serve team equipping and engagement.

Breen would agree with Hull's perspective on Acts 2:42 as he too explains that outward relational dimensional discipleship is the primary source to releasing a missional movement to making followers of Christ.²⁴ Building a disciple culture is not a new problem. However, the method by which disciples are produced exposes a gap in research. Manna Church culturally embodies a combination of attractional and missional methods for drawing, developing, and deploying believers. Based on Breen's writings, several methods for such engagement lean toward one end or the other of the spectrum. One could conclude that perhaps these differences are not missional or attractional problems, but rather a discipleship problem. Comparatively, Breen's approach differs slightly from the perspective of Hull in that he urges his readers to

²² Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1990), 62.

²³ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 78.

²⁴ Mike Breen, *building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2009), 81.

follows Jesus' model of small-group discipleship. According to Breen, the Western church model produces weekly reoccurrences but does not reproduce true reflections found in scripture.²⁵ The author explains that building a culture of discipleship is the only way that one will produce the kind of community that Jesus and the New Testament writers would recognize as the church.²⁶ This type of discipleship requires one to focus on the lives of those one is actively shepherding by equipping and empowering leaders to be developed and deployed outward using their giftings. He further explains that fundamentally, effective leadership is based on an invitation to relationships and a challenge to change. Sharing his personal experience, he mentions that in less than three years, he was able to disciple a group of men and taught them to do and be like him in such a way that, when released, they would change their world around them.

Additionally, his work highlights that through the gospels, the reader finds that Jesus invites His followers into an intimate relationship with Him while also initiating a direct challenge to shift their behaviors and commitment to deploy.²⁷ Unexpectedly, Breen's conclusions frame the idea that discipleship is not about attending a worship service, joining a small group, or even tithing, but rather striving to live like Jesus. A community of believers striving to be Christ-like is therefore the breeding ground for a heart of voluntary service. During the process that each small group has implemented, members will grow in Christ-like character through scripture and purpose identification. Leading people to identify with Christ's character and His purpose for humanity and the church may promote steps toward actioning such faith.

²⁵ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 41-42.

²⁶ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 28.

²⁷ Also see, Richard I. Pervo and Harold W. Attridge, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 129.

Cloud presents a contradicting case against Breen's Jesus model. Although he provides a secular approach to organizational leadership, his work can be found to be empowering and considerably relevant to disciple deployment. Cloud focuses in his writings on leading his audience to shift to a place of taking ownership for the outcomes of one's team. He explains in his theory that leaders should be able to set the conditions that make people's brains perform at their highest levels.²⁸ Based on his strategic plan, leaders through boundaries can create the tone and culture for the results they desire. Such call-to-action borders two main points. First, the leaders of groups must create organizational thought patterns that limit negativity and helplessness. Next, leaders must help people focus on what matters, while also identifying the people that take control and drive results.²⁹ Cloud's approach for group development is not enclosed by people, but rather results. While results are the primary approach to Cloud's perspective on leadership, he notes that improving performance does not hinge only on learning new technical skills or on working the right plan. Instead, it depends on changing the team's mood and improving relationships outside and inside work.³⁰ Such a perspective leads one to the question, are leaders really interested in results or in engaging people?

Equipping and Deploying Leaders

The hustle to produce more leaders efficiently and faster is not a new concern or desire for the local church. Fletcher recognizes such a crisis within the church, and with strategic measures, he seeks to answer the question, "Is it possible to train better leaders faster?" He

²⁸ Henry Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders: Results, Relationships and Being Ridiculously in Charge* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 127.

²⁹ Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 133.

³⁰ Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 86.

provides a three-step model to organically address the urgent need to deploy leaders. They include inspiring worship services, life-giving small groups, and world-changing outreach. These steps support the vision of the Great Commission of equipping and deploying into the world.³¹ His work includes key ingredients that develop the holistic person, focusing on character over talent and people over programs. *Empowering Leadership* set the foundation for leaders to develop groups where failure is not fatal, but excellence is the standard. Fletcher's model embraces a balance of Cloud's result-driven model and Huynh's relational model. The reader can discover through Fletcher's work that the health of a church is most visible when growth is tangibly seen within the actions of lay members. Such growth is the byproduct of equipping. Moreover, growth reproduces more growth through the equipping of individuals who are connected to specific groups. Fletcher specifies that leaders who desire to reproduce and deploy more leaders must follow biblical principles. He writes that “The biblical leader is one who views ‘the people’ as God's people, as they are the pivotal point of what we (the church) do.”³² Avoiding “my” approach and emphasizing “*His*” approach enables God to build the people for His glory. This fortifies the idea that people are the point. Aubrey Malphurs would concur with Fletcher’s drive toward the people in that he believes every leader is essentially a servant with the credibility and capability to influence people.³³ Moreover, leadership is not possible without followers—hence the need to emphasize that people must be the focal point of every group. Fletcher continues to explain that the primary goal of disciple equipping, and

³¹ Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 98.

³² Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 11.

³³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Publishing Company, 2003), 119.

deployment should be to build the people and allow God to build His church.”³⁴ After reviewing Fletcher's work, the researcher finds that the drawing, equipping, and deployment of more disciples are more efficient through small subgroups.

Researchers Hartwig and Bird make strides to answer the questions of what the “top” church teams are doing to thrive together. Their conclusions take rest in the idea that teams thrive best when leadership goals are shared.³⁵ The authors seek to fill the gap of what claim is the “missing ingredient.” The analysis of these results also concluded that shared responsibilities are good for both the organizations and the individuals. Additionally, when the mission of subgroups is clearly communicated, the burden of the overall team is shared. Based on Hartwig and Bird's perspective, the researcher finds that sharing vision and responsibilities stimulates visional and voluntary action. Fletcher would agree with Hartwig that shared responsibility is a collective mission best carried and actioned through life-giving small groups. In support of this claim, Fletcher explains that “Everyone is called and called to live a life worthy of it, playing an important part in the orchestra.”³⁶ Paul charges in Ephesians 4:1 “to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” For this reason, there is a biblical charge to make more leaders, to equip them to do ministry and empower them to use what God gave them.³⁷

Equipping and “sending” happens most effectively through authentic friendships and discipleship. The ultimate result of such a model leads to a relationship. Penno would agree more with Fletcher's writings in saying that theological examples found in scripture reveal that

³⁴ Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 20.

³⁵ Ryan Hartwig and Warren Bird, *Teams that Thrive: Five Disciplines of Collaborative and Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Publishing, 2001), 103.

³⁶ Hartwig and Bird, *Teams that Thrive*, 24.

³⁷ Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 25.

friendships are the pathway that Jesus used to reach lost people.³⁸ Penno's writings create an urgency for believers, leaders in particular, to follow Jesus' example by moving into the community at large through friendships designed to connect people with God and use their giftings to advance His commission.³⁹ He concludes his thoughts in explaining that the development of friendships with those both inside and outside the church is the key to both quantitative and qualitative growth for the church today, particularly in Western cultures.⁴⁰ If friendship and discipleship are the keys to church growth and active service, these characteristics must intentionally be included in the fabric of every ministry department and leader.

Developing Small-Group Leaders

Henry Cloud describes a small-group leader as one who facilitates connections, vision, and growth in a small-group setting, enabling people to move closer to Jesus.⁴¹ These groups are designed to enhance personal and collective development, demanding a higher leadership performance and accountability. Therefore, developing leaders who understand and value connectivity with others will inevitably increase engagement within the church. Fry's perspective on leadership aligns closely with Cloud's. He expands his thoughts regarding leadership in explaining that leaders create space where members can experience vision and a sense of calling for their lives.⁴² As small-group leaders innovatively connect people to vision and calling,

³⁸ David K. Penno, "Making Friends, Making Disciples: Growing Your Church through Authentic Relationships," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 85.

³⁹ Also see, Grant R. Osborne, *Acts Verse by Verse* (Bellingham WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 17.

⁴⁰ Penno, "Making Friends, Making Disciples," 85.

⁴¹ Penno, "Making Friends, Making Disciples," 153.

⁴² L. W. Fry, "Toward a Theory of Spiritual Leadership," *The Leadership Quarterly* 14 (2003): 98.

ministry teams within Manna Church can experience an increase in advancement as an organization.

Becoming a leader requires an understanding of community and the value that each volunteer offers to the team. A crucial aspect of building leaders begins with recognizing the value of each volunteer. People are the point. They must be valued for what they do. Moreover, beyond physical characteristics, motives, and mental capacities, those who serve the church give time, energy, and talent without monetary reward. While there are times when intentions may be obscure, such efforts sustain the functioning of the church and are often the key to advancing forward. The existence of the church is impossible without volunteering. Despite the frustrations and challenges that are attached, volunteers are the most important resource to the local church. Johnson writes to provide a practical guide for leaders with specific measures on how to effectively reach and grow volunteers. He mentions, “An organization dependent on volunteers learns that it must encourage and motivate volunteers even though this takes time and energy.”⁴³ Johnson is in essence displaying an emphasis on what makes volunteers want to work for nonmonetary satisfaction. It is therefore crucial that the leaders of each ministry give intentional effort to care for those serving in their lane. The result of caring for and developing people produces a wealth of healthy leaders in the local church. Building on Johnson’s perspective, leaders of small groups at Manna Church will focus on motivating group members on a weekly and consistent basis. The researcher agrees that such relational leverage requires time and energy to build healthy members and leaders.

⁴³ Douglas E. Johnson, *The Care and Feeding of Volunteers: Creative Leadership Series* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 198.

While the task of building a community of leaders can be complex, it is one of the bases for becoming a leader. Moreover, healthy communities build healthy leaders. Groups are most effective when cohesiveness and harmony dwell in each space. Likewise, a congregation is healthy when it promotes significant belonging and helps people grow into their leadership. The reoccurring themes of belonging and empowerment are evident in Myers' writings. His audience is led to seek innovative ways of helping volunteers find their place of fulfillment and belonging. His overall framework provides a practical guide for building a culture that values belonging over participation. As with other writers listed above, his approach suggests that engagement goes beyond Sunday morning worship and periodic programming and ministries. His approach recaptures the nature of small groups as an avenue providing space for people to feel a sense of belonging and empowerment to use their gifts for the local church. Based on personal interviews and research, Myers' discoveries confidently fortify his claim that religious needs cannot be considered apart from the need for community.⁴⁴ His explanations contradict the "American religious lifestyle." According to Myers, recent studies from social scientists have framed concerns about the changing character of American society in terms of the concept of "social capital."⁴⁵ Studies show that considering the social capital theory, social networks hold high value and lead to productivity within individuals and groups. To cultivate a solution in a twenty-first century world, leaders are urged through Myers' work to see membership as a connection, not a contract. The researcher finds that the effects of belonging will organically shift an internal desire to share the vision of the community.

⁴⁴ Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 93.

⁴⁵ Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 48.

George and Bird present a new case for leadership development that suggests that becoming a leader is best reflected in one's capacity to build and release. The authors provide insight regarding the role of the leader and specify the steps that one can implement to reach leadership growth. Their steps encourage leaders to release and empower people to maximize their faith through action.⁴⁶ Their work concludes that the need for raising up leaders will solve numerical expectations while also fulfilling the mission of the church. According to George, "Such people have an awesome calling to use the gifts and fruits of the spirit to do the work of ministry as Christ's representatives here on earth."⁴⁷ It can therefore be concluded that to bring more people into service, a leader must first commit him or herself to producing other group leaders. One must view him or herself as a leader "maker," and as a result the group will see greater expansion. Parallel to this, the initial and concluding phase of the intervention's plan will move in the direction of disciple making with a specific intent to deploy others. Leaders will approach new groups with the intent to develop and deploy the talents of each team member.

Volunteers can be developed as leaders in some form. Likewise, the making of a leader is a shared responsibility. Kenn Gangel explains that a leader is more than a person who can take control or occupy a role, but rather one who empowers others to break their co-dependencies and allows them to apply their human spirit to their work.⁴⁸ This process is considered a collective approach to learning, developing, and deploying. The collective learning process is at its best in groups that are smaller in number, and service driven. Gangel's objective is to present his audience with a new perspective of kingdom participation rather than the common personal

⁴⁶ George and Bird, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Groups*, 127.

⁴⁷ George and Bird, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Groups*, 22.

⁴⁸ Kenn Gangel, *Coaching Ministry Teams: Leadership and Management in Christian Organizations* (Nashville: Word Publishing Thomas Nelson, 2000), 9.

kingdom that is often practiced in different organizations. Exploring the character and attributes of successful biblical characters, Gangel reveals that the qualities of humility, patience, and dignity are the authentic representations of what leaders today must practice. The practicality of how such leadership is reflected is found when leaders dwell among those they are leading. Lynn Anderson supports the development of a leader like Gangel, but from the perspective of shepherding. The general framework of his text focuses on shepherding, mentoring, and equipping. Both Gangel and Anderson stand firm in suggesting that the process of developing leaders should be a responsibility shared by many persons. In a metaphorical sense, leaders must share the burden of serving as the sheep. Becoming a leader requires one to get into the trench with the sheep in order to serve and develop the sheep. Anderson wants his audience to know that a true shepherd is one who “smells” like their sheep.⁴⁹ His objective aligns closely with Gangel’s, in that his desire is to transform the way leaders see their roles. Leaders are urged to lead from the posture of a servant caring for sheep. To small leaders, one must weave in the character of servitude. He stresses that the time calls for spiritually discerning elders who clearly understand the difference between shepherding and administration. Holding true to this principle will produce more people engaged in personal growth and service in the local church.

While one is not disqualified, a crucial element for becoming an effective small-group leader is evident in one's ability to communicate well. Michael uses Spurgeon’s ideology as grounds for his explanation of effective communication. Michael writes that, “If you can't communicate it to your followers, you will fail to accomplish your goals.”⁵⁰ Leaders who

⁴⁹ Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep: Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 1997), 179.

⁵⁰ Larry Michael, *Spurgeon on Leadership: Key Insights for Christian Leaders from the Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 25.

anticipate guiding others must anticipate developing communication skills. Increasing communication effectiveness vicariously increases engagement. Communication is also a key principle for winning people and gaining influence. In addition to communication, Michael describes different styles of leadership and suggests that each affects the performance of the group.⁵¹ The four styles of leadership include directing, problem solving, developing, and delegating. Directing in a negative form is dominating and produces low support. Problem solving involves collective decision making. Developing offers support, but in a negative form it is overaccommodating. Lastly, delegating limits influence and is a detached approach to leadership. In smaller groups mastering these styles is critical for group dynamics and empowerment. Building from Michael's model, the researcher and primary stakeholders involved must evaluate one's leadership style for an effective outcome within a small group's dynamics. Leadership style is a fundamental characteristic for small-group leaders who desire to influence and impact those they lead.

Becoming a small-group leader also mandates that one understand the difference between manipulation and influence. Dale Carnegie paves the way for guidance on influencing people. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Carnegie develops several principles for captivating people. One principle includes talking in terms of a person's interest. He suggests that talking in terms of the other person's interest pays off for both parties.⁵² By drawing on the interest of the other person, the receptivity of both parties is mutual. Likewise, small groups that are designed to meet the interests of individuals are more likely to draw in and influence one's

⁵¹ Michael, *Spurgeon on Leadership*, 212.

⁵² Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 19.

characteristics and giftings in the local church. Carnegie suggests that these truths are critical to the improvement and development of meaningful expectations and overall team goals.⁵³ In essence, whether in a secular setting or local church, relationships are the basis of connection and service.

Neighbour also seeks to provide a road map for developing leaders through cell groups, also known as small groups, that are a place for shared community and, according to Neighbour, should be the top priority for aspiring leaders.⁵⁴ His passion for such groups in church life requires deeper evaluations of their core impact. Prioritizing cell groups ignites passion and connects to the vision and mission of the church. Meanwhile, though groups do not provide a quick fix for sagging attendance or serve as an optional feature, they must be recognized as the primary vehicle for developing basic Christian communities. Other writers such as Anderson and Gangel have suggested a balance of both small groups and public service; however, Neighbour suggests that community can only occur almost completely in small groups of less than fifteen people.⁵⁶ Based on Neighbour's perspective, essential elements of community include interpersonal commitments and a sense of belonging. It is a place where life is shared, allowing common goals and commitments to develop between members. He sternly capitalizes on the need to meet regularly (multiple days a week) to adequately engage and deploy people into the body of Christ.⁵⁵ Meeting consistently develops character. Each newly developed small group is expected to meet once a week in an effort to produce mature character and empowerment.

⁵³ Carnegie, *How to Win Friends*, 222.

⁵⁴ Carnegie, *How to Win Friends*, 94.

⁵⁶ Ralph W. Neighbour, *Where Do We Go from Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 94-95.

⁵⁵ Neighbour, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 95.

Issler's writings on the formation of Christian character parallel Neighbour's. Issler's work embraces the idea that following and knowing Jesus often transpire through close friendships in community. He poses the question, "How do we go about developing a positive sense of relational community that provides a nurturing context for forgiveness and meditation?"⁵⁶ The reader gains a deeper understanding through Issler's perspective on community. The notion of intimate community suggests that community cultivates leadership development. Issler adds emphasis to say that even participating in group activities is not sustainable, but rather one must harmonize in proximity.⁵⁷ The parallel between Issler and others is relational community connects people to God and the local church. These writers agree that healthy communities have at their core close friendships that add value and induce motion to live out one's spiritual gifting for the local church.

Petit supports the premise that relationships are God's idea. Hence, Christians are not called to live alone. He further explains that God does not bring people into fellowship with him and make a part of his people to function in isolation.⁵⁸ Evidence from the very beginning of time when God created man and woman in his image indicates that fellowship is a key purpose for creation. That involves both fellowship with God and fellowship with each other.⁵⁹ Spiritual formation means that God forms people in his likeness so that everyone can have a deeper

⁵⁶ Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 176.

⁵⁷ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 176.

⁵⁸ Paul Petit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 103.

⁵⁹ Genesis 2:18

fellowship with Him and reflect the virtues of His righteousness in one's personal life.⁶⁰ The researcher, through Petit's writings, finds that God has formed men for fellowship and His mission. Foundations of spiritual formation, therefore, serve as a guide to becoming like Christ and building His church through life-giving relationships.⁶¹ Small groups enable people to encounter environments where horizontal and vertical relations are developed and deployed.

Theological Foundations

Small groups have made a lasting impression throughout church history. Throughout the years, small groups have been powerfully used by local churches to promote spiritual growth and congregational connections. That influence derives from the foundations of the life of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, and John Wesley (addressed later). Provided that many movements ignited believers to engage in the local church due to small groups, these examples will be surveyed on theological grounds. Religious organizations have historically used small groups as a mechanism for spiritual formation and evangelical deployment. Christian communities must therefore intentionally comprise life-changing environments where people grow in faith and service to the local church. It is therefore necessary to search scripture more deeply to see how small communities and subgroups within the church community existed.

Genesis 1:26 notates that man is created in "our image."⁶² God's design of such creation means that humans share, though imperfectly and finitely, in God's nature, all for spiritual

⁶⁰ Genesis 1:26 (NIV).

⁶¹ Paul Petit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 109.

⁶² Gen. 1:26 (NIV).

fellowship with Him.⁶³ Patterns of such relational connection continues in Genesis 2:18. It notes that “it is not good for man to be alone.”⁶⁴ What is “not good” about man’s condition is not having another like himself as a helper.⁶⁵ God creates Eve from Adam’s rib. Together in community, they shared the responsibility to care for His creation and multiply the earth. Fundamentally, this passage reflects the need for mankind to be in relationships with others.⁶⁶ Relationships, therefore, are rooted in God’s design for humanity. This passage does not suggest that man had become lonely, but rather, man in his aloneness or solitude is not good. Without community, man has no one like himself to help him either in worship or any of the other joys afforded in the garden.⁶⁷ The principle of community exists as foundational grounds for God’s divine plan of relational fruitfulness and harmonious worship. Based on His divine nature, God desires that His people experience community and that they experience community with their Creator.⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer’s declaration correlates with that truth: “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Christian community is only this. . . We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁹

⁶³ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1984), 29.

⁶⁴ Gen. 2:18 (NIV).

⁶⁵ Howard F. Vos, *Genesis- Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 536.

⁶⁶ Frank E. Gaebelstein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 104.

⁶⁷ Tremper Longman, III and David Garland, *Genesis-Leviticus: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2008), 101.

⁶⁸ Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: IVP, 2019), 49.

⁶⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, tran. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperCollins, 1954), 21.

More examples of God's divine plan for relationships are visible in Jesus's ministry. Jesus demonstrates the structure of drawing, developing, and deploying in what he calls the twelve disciples. They included Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew, James, and John (sons of Zebedee), Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew (tax collector), James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the Zealot), and Judas Iscariot (betrayor). He selected a small group who he then trained to one day advance His ministry throughout the world.⁷⁰ The twelve became his apostles. The word apostle essentially means to send out. This term was used to designate and distinguish the original twelve men Jesus chose.⁷¹ Walking with the apostles for three years, teaching, mentoring, and sharing life together prepared them to eventually disciple others in the same manner. Following Jewish traditions, the apostles were sent out in small groups of two, as seen in Mark 6:7.⁷² Going out two by two provided fellowship, support, encouragement, and accountability.⁷³ Additionally, it can be historically and theologically concluded that Jesus provides the best example for the methodologies of development and deployment.

Future implementation could potentially reach its fullest effect by purely following the life of Jesus. Jesus formed and led a small group of disciples: He chose them, trained them during His earthly ministry, and commissioned them prior to His ascension to God. White said,

⁷⁰ Also see, Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 1019.

⁷¹ Nelsons, Ed. Ronald Earl and Wayne House, *New Illustrated Bible Commentary: Spreading the Light of God's Word into Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1218.

⁷² Mark 6:7 (NIV).

⁷³ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Expository Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 159.

The disciples were to go forth as Christ's witnesses, to declare to the world what they had seen and heard of Him. . .they were to be workers together with God for the saving of men. . .representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles stand as representatives of the gospel church.⁷⁴

Jesus, therefore, was the perfect role model for a small-group leader. From the gospels, one can draw from His life a biblical basis for small-group ministry. Additionally, Jesus's involvement in small-group discipleship is the most credible rationale for why local churches must consider including small groups as an integral part of their congregational and personal engagement. From the very beginning, Jesus elected to establish and minister within a framework of interpersonal relationships. He devoted Himself primarily to the task of developing a select group of twelve men. His goal was to equip this small group of disciples to then carry on the work of the gospel. Jesus selected men who were untrained and unenlightened by worldly standards.⁷⁵ In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus entrusted His small group to go and make disciples of all nations and promised to be with them at all times through the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ Burrill asserts, "With these words Jesus established His church. It was not to be a babysitting operation. It was to be a mission agency. The reason for the existence of the church was to go forth and make disciples among all people groups. This message comes to us in the authority of the risen Lord."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Also see, Steinmann, *Genesis*, 59.

⁷⁵ McBride Neal, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 53.

⁷⁶ Curtis Mitch and Edward P. Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1023.

⁷⁷ Russell Burrill, *Waking the Dead: Returning Plateaued and Declining Churches to Vibrancy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 22.

In Acts 4:13, Peter and John display a mastery of biblical augmentation that could have only come from the rabbi (Jesus).⁷⁸ The significance of their augmented confidence derives from the intimate community and interpersonal training received from their time with Jesus.⁷⁹ Interpersonal time with Jesus enabled knowledge and boldness to declare His truth. Gaebelein specifies that the early Christians were not seeking relief from oppression or judgment on their oppressors but for the enablement to speak God's word with boldness and to see God's power at work.⁸⁰ In the same manner today, those who participate in small groups will be equipped and empowered to spread the gospel with boldness through their gifts and talents. Jesus's devotion to leadership development was frequently presented within the context of interpersonal relationships.

Jesus' model of community also provided the framework for leadership and character that is still necessary today. Oswald explains that while leadership qualities are natural given talents from God, their effectiveness begins with character and passion. He explains that leadership development is both temporal and spiritual, but the need for spiritual formation is most crucial.⁸¹ In essence, Oswald seeks to empower one's desire to produce leaders through a spiritual and intimate lens. This scholastic work supports the need for spiritual formation through small-group implementations in the local church. Such spiritual cultivation will inevitably produce mature believers and enhance one's understanding and passion to serve the church.

⁷⁸ Acts 4:13 (NIV).

⁷⁹ Also see, James Dunn and John W. Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible Acts* (Chicago: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 519.

⁸⁰ Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 106.

⁸¹ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 71.

Geiger's perspective of growth and reproduction debunks Oswald's theory. His methods for church discipleship models suggest that the growth of an individual is the work of the Holy Spirit. Geiger's approach toward transformational development is illustrated primarily from the theological foundations found in Jeremiah 17:7-8. These verses metaphorically describe a man who trusts in the Lord as a tree planted by water does not worry but instead produces fruit. The key here is that trust is solely reliant upon God. The voice of this text also paints a framework of discipleship that exists without a magic formula, but rather by the power of the Word. Growth, development, and connection, according to Geiger, are not developed through human initiative, but like the disciples, transformation happens through the call to follow Christ.⁸² Based on Geiger's perspective, if churches desire engagement with their congregants serving in weekly services, they must engage in the mission of the gospel first.

Whittington reveals that Luke writes with an interest in explaining the true purpose of church communities. He writes that though the good news was for the poor, the oppressed, possessed, imprisoned, and every tongue and nation, it was for the Jews first.⁸³ He further explains that Luke provides an intensified demand to "take up you cross daily," found in Luke 9:23, never look back in 9:62, and give up everything in 14:26.⁸⁴ According to his theological perspective, these themes intertwine with the Holy Spirit's workings in liberation and discipleship.⁸⁵ The results were that daily experience with God added to those being saved in that

⁸² Eric Geiger, Kelley Michael, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishing Group, 2012), 89.

⁸³ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social Rhetorical Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Michigan Publishing Group, 1998), 54.

⁸⁴ Luke 9:23, 9:62, 14:26 (NIV).

⁸⁵ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 98.

community. Having community increased the number of believers who believed and faithfully served within their community.

According to Lea and Black, Christians during the early church movement demonstrated unity and generosity. They also demonstrated their love for God, their unity, and their love for one another by generous sharing. Christians continued to own their goods until they thought that it was necessary to sell them for the benefit of the community sharing goods was voluntarily, perhaps occasioned either by a sudden influx of poverty or a widespread economic downturn.⁸⁶ Eventually, the church grew rapidly and was increasingly unable to meet all the physical needs of its members. Moreover, believers met regularly in the temple precincts for public worship and public witness, while they took their fellowship meals in one another's homes and broke bread in accordance with their master's precedent.⁸⁷

The part of the temple precincts where they seem to have gathered habitually was Solomon's colonnade, which ran along the east side of the outer court.⁸⁸ The common meal could not conveniently be eaten in the temple precincts, so the members ate by household. Such fellowship enabled a spirit of unity, service, and generosity. As a result of community needs and growth, designated men (which later became "deacons") were assigned to oversee the distribution of food and goods. The principle of leadership over groups of people was prevalent and necessary for the functioning church.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Thomas Lea and David Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 293.

⁸⁷ Thomas and Black, *The New Testament*, 295.

⁸⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Publishing Group William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 438.

⁸⁹ Karen Krymski, "Small Christian Communities Recognized as Biblically Authorized Root of the Church." *Sisters Today* 72, no. 2, 132.

The early Christian movement had its center in Jerusalem where it took shape not as a new religion but as a sector grouping within the parent body of Judaism. According to Walker, this original community was composed of Palestinian Jews who, on the basis of Jesus's resurrection, proclaimed his imminent return as the fulfiller of God's kingdom.⁹⁰ This group of believers were of one mind and one heart. Such characteristic served as a basis of their shared possessions. Polhill explains that this could refer to shared ownership but in conjunction with the first expression of "no one claimed that any possession was his own." It also refers to a practice of freely sharing one's goods with another.⁹¹ The early church movement is much like the house church and small-group communities that exist today.

To fully understand the importance of community, one must evaluate the term *oikos*. Translated into English as house or household, *oikos* is a biblical term that describes the basic foundation of society and appears throughout the Bible, referring to personal community.⁹² Such community comprises primary groups of relatives, friends, or neighbors. In terms of the local church, it included congregants who share connections for the sake of developing spiritual gifts. According to Neighbour, if people are accepted into intimate fellowship, they feel security that does not exist in unfamiliar environments.⁹³ Still today, small groups are designed to share one's faith among others and develop personal giftings for the edification of the church.

⁹⁰ Williston Walker, Richard A. Norris, David Lotz, and Robert Handy, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: McMillian Publishing Company, 1991), 67.

⁹¹ John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 654.

⁹² Neighbour, *Where Do We Go from here*, 114.

⁹³ Neighbour, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 115.

Lessons from the early Christian church movement inevitably answer the questions scholars seek to answer. As early as the reign of Constantine, the Christian movement fluctuated in momentum. Atkinson and Comiskey present an interesting theory behind the development of the church during the reign of Constantine. The momentum and motivation of the early house church model serve as a guide for small-group meetings today and how these gatherings are applicable now. The authors insist that what motivated the ongoing life of the early church transpired by engaging in the community.⁹⁴ Fortunately, despite external forces and political influence, the church experienced a massive spread of Christianity through subgroups, also known as house churches. To understand practically how small groups engage people to the local church, one must survey the writings of Luke. Scholars reveal notes in Acts 4:32-35, several elements of small groups include the sharing of faith and goods.⁹⁵ According to Hamm, Luke describes a community as being of one heart and mind and holding everything in common.⁹⁶ All the works and sharing of personal property was on a voluntary basis. They cultivated a sense of belonging and cohesiveness among each other. Those who were a part of the group were excited to be caught up in the mission of the church and be recipients of all God had poured out on them, which made them willing to part with anything they had in order to advance the kingdom.⁹⁷ They sold their homes and lands and gave the proceeds to help the poor. They understood the community was a part of God's plan for the Christian community. It is, therefore, valid to

⁹⁴ Atkinson, Harley, and Joel Comiskey. "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups." *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 79.

⁹⁵ Also see, Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 314.

⁹⁶ Dennis Hamm, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *New Collegeville Bible Commentary*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 1287.

⁹⁷ R. C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 2864.

suggest that the biblical community begins and resides in intentional relationships with other believers. Relational systems such as small groups are therefore an integral part of fulfilling the commission of Christ.

In the book of Romans, one finds that the letter Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome was written to believers who met in peoples' homes. In Paul's letter, he specifies in 16:3-5 that one of the small groups met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila. Saying "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house."

⁹⁸In verse 10, Paul also speaks of Aristobulus's household, in which believers gathered for fellowship and discipleship. Paul also writes to his friend Philemon, specifically greeting the church in his home. Small house churches were the basis and vehicle for the early church's spiritual formation and deployment. Centuries passed for the early church, yet many prolific biblical advocates continued this pattern of advancing the kingdom.⁹⁹

The house church became the definitive expression of church in the early Christian movement, apart from the core element of spiritual sustainability and growth. During the time of Apostle Paul's missionary journeys, numerous churches sprang up, and virtually all the New Testament churches mentioned in the letters of Paul were in private homes.¹⁰⁰ Paul's method of expansion provides a firm model for equipping believers through a small group. Additional examples occur in the gospels. As the apostles proceeded to carry out the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20), they utilized a two-fold approach of meeting in the temple courts for large-

⁹⁸ R. C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary*, 1093.

⁹⁹ Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no.1 (2014): 69.

¹⁰⁰ Atkinson and Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups, 80.

group meetings and in the homes for more intimate small-group encounters.¹⁰¹ Church during the New Testament era were often small gatherings that met in private homes. Moreover, Christians used the temple and their houses for prayer meetings.¹⁰² Additionally, Paul repeatedly mentions house church meetings. The results of the house church movement remain the most critical context for early church worship, fellowship, and Christian education.¹⁰³ Could the solution to the problem of address reside in theological principles found in the New Testament?

Martin Luther was among the pillars in church history and was known for rediscovering key doctrines, such as salvation by faith. His works and beliefs placed tremendous emphasis on scripture and the priesthood of all believers. Doctrines such as the universal priesthood paved the way for the continued development of small groups.¹⁰⁴ One of the central goals of the Reformation was to bring the Scriptures to the common person, the priesthood of believers. According to Bunton, faith to Luther was to be nourished and strengthened through reflection and meditation on God's word.¹⁰⁵ Small groups were therefore formed to help people integrate their beliefs, behaviors, faith, and work. Luther's idea was that ministry was no longer the sole responsibility of the ordained minister but rather for all professed Christ. He recognized that small groups were the best way to activate the priesthood of all believers in a local church. As a result, in the German Mass of 1526, Luther stresses that those who are eager to be Christians in earnest and are ready to profess the gospel with hand and mouth should register their names and

¹⁰¹ Also see, Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 219.

¹⁰² Acts 2:41, 5:42 (NIV).

¹⁰³ Rom. 16:3-5, Col. 4:15, Acts 2:46, 12:12, Phil. 2 (NIV).

¹⁰⁴ Peter Bunton, "300 Years of Small Groups: The European Church from Luther to Wesley," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (April): 87.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Bunton "300 Years of Small Groups", 90.

assemble by themselves in some house to pray, read, baptize, receive sacrament, and practice other Christian works.¹⁰⁶ Luther enforced faith in action, which was followed by equipping the power in the local priesthood of believers to meet in small groups throughout the week.

Equipping and deploying the saints with one another has always been the best means of true growth and transformation in a local church. Christians would therefore then be deployed to carry out their spiritual gifting for the advancement of the kingdom.

Resurrected to imitate the apostolic church, John Wesley led an evangelical movement that eventually became the strategic plan for spiritual growth. Its beginnings, according to Hunsicker, was initiated after he and his brother formed a small group to aid one another in their studies, to read helpful books, and to participate in frequent communion.¹⁰⁷ At the heart of Wesley's discipleship and renewal system were class meetings. These small-group settings enabled transformation and empowerment to activate faith and spiritual giftings. As a result, English society was impacted. During the great English revival, Wesley saw the benefits of small groups and had his converts placed in groups of no more than twelve in order that they might be truly disciplined. When the number exceeded twelve, the group was to divide and begin another one. This approach proved to be very successful and was implemented across the Atlantic Ocean where its influence was felt in the United States.¹⁰⁸ The Wesley model was later known as the Methodist society. Hunsicker notes that Wesley built the structure of Methodism around the

¹⁰⁶ Roger Walton, "Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 8, no. 2 (2011): 104.

¹⁰⁷ David Hunsicker Buckelew, "John Wesley: Father of Today's Small Group Concept?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 196.

¹⁰⁸ Barry A. Gane, *Building Youth Ministry: A Foundational Guide* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center, 1997), 79.

class leader.¹⁰⁹ The Wesley method of small-group discipleship builds the framework for drawing, developing, and deploying believers to use their gifting for the advancement of Christ's commission. Such advancement can occur effectively in the sphere of Christian communities gathering in the name of the Lord. A small group that meets because of their common faith in Christ has His promise that they have formed a place for His presence and will experience community with Him. God clearly defines in Matthew 18:20 that wherever two or three people are gathered together in His name, there He is in their midst.¹¹⁰ Therefore, small groups are a part of God's divine and redemptive plan.

Theoretical Foundations

Over decades, small groups continued to exist as the vehicle that draws, develops, and deploys believers to change their world. Moreover, the researcher finds that based on the early church history and transitions during the reformation period, small groups have sustained and increased the development and advancement of the local church. Coupling these ideologies alongside biblical principles, one can see that Manna Church should continue developing its small-group system and reevaluating the best practices for volunteer identification, equipping processes, and methods for empowerment. The results of these implementations consistently will increase the potential to reach both spiritual and numerical goals.

Many theories exist to explain what factors attach people to small groups and their effects on volunteers' commitment to the body of Christ. Findings have varied and left gaps for additional research, but the goals remain the same. Leaders want to know how to increase consistent involvement of team members in weekly services. While a broad array of

¹⁰⁹ David Hunsicker Buckelew, "John Wesley: Father of Today's Small Group Concept?", 198.

¹¹⁰ Matthew 18:20 (NIV).

methodologies are presented, small-group methods will be analyzed in this thesis. According to Walton's research, those who join and attend worship more often feel a stronger connection to the church and give more time and money to the enterprise than those who do not belong to a small group.¹¹¹ At first glance, Walton's assumptions present a valid case. However, his ideology does not address or justify the believers who attend church but are not consistent in their time, talent, and resources. Such a gap gives way to considering other factors that motivate involvement. Because small groups have become prominent in the global church, this research focuses both the context and strategy for Christian formation and congregational involvement. Therefore, the implementation of small groups may potentially address the scarcity of volunteers serving during weekly services.

Congregations of all sizes depend on committed volunteers to operate weekly services. Volunteers who have high rates of commitment and participation are in some cases driven by a personal desire to serve God and others. However, over time, the number of participants decline due to internal and external factors. Many theories exist within religious writings regarding factors that lead to inactiveness within the local church. Some models lean into either an attractive or missional organizational intervention. The goal in both cases is to capture and transform people into mature spiritual formation through attachment to the local church.

Knabb and Pelletier suggest that small-group leaders should utilize the attachment theory to cultivate securely attached small groups within the Christian Church.¹¹² The authors explore the relationship between adult attachment, church-based small-group attachment, psychological

¹¹¹ Walton, "Disciples Together," 100.

¹¹² Joshua J. Knabb and Joseph Pelletier, "A Cord of Three Strands Is Not Easily Broken: An Empirical Investigation of Attachment-Based Small Group Functioning in the Christian Church," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 42, no. 4 (2014): 347.

functioning, and faith maturity in this study. The strength of the attachment theory resides in its holistic examination of external factors, such as depression and anxiety, that often affect a person's engagement with the church. Such an environment enables leaders to assist people in their progress toward complete devotion to Christ by intentionally providing an environment for connection, community, and spiritual formation. Drawing from the Acts and Ecclesiastes 4:12, Christians are to fellowship, disciple, evangelize, and worship with one another.¹¹³ The concluding results of their attachment analysis display that one primary vehicle by which community-based Christian principles can be implemented is through church-affiliated small groups.

The researcher assumes that there is no quick-fix small-group model that resolves the suppressing issue of engagement with serving teams. However, choosing a model demands reflective research and thoughtful consideration and evaluation. Boren provides an overview of the key models that are prominent among current churches and encourages his audience to discover what model best works for one's congregation.¹¹⁴ Boren's overview provides multiple models, to include: cell church model, meta church model, group of twelve model and semester model.

The Cell Church Model

The model emphasized by Cho exists for the dual purposes of edification and evangelism by which groups engage in consistent Bible study with an emphasis on relational evangelism.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Knabb and Pelletier, "A Cord of Three Strands," 347.

¹¹⁴ Scott M. Boren and Jim Egli, "Small Group Models: Navigating the Commonalities and the Differences," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 152-65.

¹¹⁵ Scott M. Boren and Jim Egli, "Small Group Models, 158.

Atkinson believes that the small-group movement has been a catalyst for a quiet revolution that has slowly built from the ground for centuries. In efforts to support his claim, Atkinson surveys Cho's method for church growth. He points out that the church movement found its roots in Cho's Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea. The movement set a worldwide record of over 150,000 believers added to the church weekly.¹¹⁶ Much of the success of the numerical growth is credited to the cell-group system. Cho's system, like other models, pattern after the small-group strategy, that is, to grow and strengthen the body of Christ. Such patterns suggest that there is perhaps an inverse relationship between congregation size and the average level of member commitment.

Meta Church Model

Like the cell church model, George presents a theory that a community who participates in relational engagement creates an actual culture that organically breeds and promotes small groups. His theory emphasizes the need for churches to become a church of small groups instead of a church with small groups. The separation between the cell church model and meta church is the wide variety of small-group types based on spiritual intensity, rather than a "one-type-fits-all" model.

Group of Twelve Model

Developed by the International Charismatic Mission, the Group of Twelve model is also known as the G12 Model by which new believers are quickly transformed and then empowered to produce more followers of Christ. The process typically involves a weekend retreat that entails spiritual breakthroughs and an encounter filled with the Holy Spirit, followed by leadership

¹¹⁶ Harley T. Atkinson, "Guest Editorial Small Groups: Context and Strategy for Christian Formation and Evangelization," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 73.

development.¹¹⁷ Within the first year of coming to Christ, these new believers are equipped to begin leading their own small group geared toward specific populations. Some of the targeted groups include, but are not limited to, students, women, couples, and businessmen. The G12 model concludes with a revolving leadership development for leaders leading other groups.

Geographical Model

The geographical model meets weekly during the traditional Sunday school hour. These mid-size groups connect groups with other groups and provide an avenue for gifted teachers to equip people and alleviate the stress of home group multiplication. Randy Frazee, who popularizes such model, found that using school zones is one of the most effective ways to organize congregations because it provided for natural connections and spontaneous interaction for both building community and reaching out to neighbors.¹¹⁸

The Semester Model

Derived from the Meta model, this method of small implementation requires all staff members to be in a small group. Most of them lead groups on their own initiative¹¹⁹. In addition, most staff have small-group administrative responsibilities that require them to help form small groups each semester and give staff oversight and support to those groups. All groups are semester-based and are programmed from the central office, organized into three semesters per year. All groups have a distinct launch point, and the launch dates are scheduled and promoted on the Sundays leading up to the launch. Three points separate the semester model from others listed:

¹¹⁷ Atkinson, "Guest Editorial Small Groups," 156.

¹¹⁸ Atkinson, "Guest Editorial Small Groups," 157.

¹¹⁹ Atkinson, "Guest Editorial Small Groups," 159.

- Groups are organized around common interests rather than geographical proximity, to draw both church members and the unchurched into relationships.
- Groups have a clear start and stop with three small-group semesters or cycles a year so that people can easily join and leave groups.
- Discipleship is by choice, meaning that people will join groups or take classes that they need when they need them.¹²⁰

This model thrives like flourishing secular businesses in a free market economy. Hence, the need to encourage a diverse group type, allowing things to naturally thrive and connect.

Connor flushes out the gaps that exist in research about church engagement across multi-generations. The conclusion of his ideology suggests that outside influences affect personal spirituality and the commitment to the local church. His research presents a new perspective of other influential environments that survey 206 young adults who grew up in middle-class churches in three denominations (Baptist, Catholic, and Methodist). According to Connor, the determinants surrounding experiences in schools and church life and with spouses inevitably changed their feelings about church and caused their involvement to decline.¹²¹ The results of inactiveness in the church occurred either after high school, switching denominations, or having children. The findings of these outcomes were analyzed based on the social learning theory. This theory asks what external factors affect Christian adults. Moreover, how do they affect active spirituality and engagement? Connor suggests that additional research is needed to answer the following prominent questions:

- What kind of adult experiences have the most long-lasting spiritual effect?
- What causes some young adults to remain involved in church and others to depart?
- Do adult experiences supersede or build on youthful influences in determining adult spirituality and church behavior?

¹²⁰ Atkinson, "Guest Editorial Small Groups," 160.

¹²¹ Thomas Connor, Dean R. Hoge, and Estrella Alexander, "The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church Involvement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no.1 (2002): 730.

- Do structural influences, such as denomination or gender, interact with individual factors to produce greater or lesser involvement in religious practice?

Brunton's work examines how the reformation and post-reformation church leaders employed small groups enabling believers' involvement within the church context. Brunton adamantly expresses that cell group movements and churches today would do well to build group strength by clearly articulating the dissonance with the surrounding environment and the aspiration of change.¹²² Theories such as Brunton's writings alter Western American society's perspective by challenging its community understanding and redefining spiritual formation and deployment based on small-group involvement.

Stetzer and Geiger explain church transformation based on Apostle Paul's example. The authors strengthen their theory by surveying multiple denominations and generations to gather conclusions on what transforms a church. After surveying organizations, they found an increase of activeness when congregants are engaged in church-based small groups. Based on their inclusion of the first Corinthians' model on church growth, one can surmise that God has designed such transformation to happen in small-group collaborations, which is further cultivated in serving within the local church. The premise of their model surrounds both scriptural context and practical steps of discovering the right leaders, developing group practices, and connecting with disconnected people. The authors challenge readers to consider one's value. Stetzer and Geiger explain that organizations must measure what they value.¹²³ If volunteers are a valuable part of the church, leaders must intentionally track how well the organization serves and resources its members. Concluding their writings, the authors provide a transformational

¹²² Peter Bunton, "300 Years of Small Groups," 97.

¹²³ Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 207.

discipleship assessment (TDA) that provides a qualitative report on small groups within a church and measurable outcome on one's health and growth. The TDA measures seven categories, including small-group involvement, service, and personal discipleship. This assessment assists in framing a basis for the researcher's intervention plan. This plan will inevitably help Manna Church gauge its effectiveness across all ministry teams.¹²⁴

Organizational Identification

Organizations that embody nonbiased and intentional recruitment strategies in helping others move toward personal fulfillment and kingdom impact can easily identify strong volunteers. A healthy organization clearly identifies volunteers and recognizes volunteers for their work, gives feedback on volunteer performance, and involves them in decision-making. Organizations that draw volunteers through personal invitation and offer development opportunities typically achieve high-performance results.¹²⁵ Based on Traeger's studies, volunteers who recognize high-performance practices in their organization respond by increasing their identification with the organization. Likewise, small groups created for specified giftings inevitably enable the volunteer to identify with the organization. Creating space where people can identify suggests that the organization cares about them and their wellbeing. Traeger concludes that volunteers identifying with organizations establishes a relationship between perceived high-performance practices and volunteer engagement.¹²⁶ Moreover, the sense of belonging and ownership coupled with a high level of identification will stimulate volunteers to

¹²⁴ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 239.

¹²⁵ Charlotte Traeger and Kerstin Alfes, "High-Performance Human Resource Practices and Volunteer Engagement: The Role of Empowerment and Organizational Identification," *International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations* 30, no. 10 (2019): 1028.

¹²⁶ Charlotte Traeger, "High-Performance Human Resource Practices and Volunteer Engagement", 1028.

adopt actions that contribute to the organization's goals. In essence, volunteers who are cultivated and equipped through identifiable groups demonstrate dedication and devotion to the organization's vision. Implementing specific measures of equipping and empowering will also generate lasting results.

Psychological Empowerment

Organizational identification actions psychological empowerment. The concept of such empowerment vicariously increases each individual and team's mental, physical, and spiritual capacity within a workspace. The same is true for Church organizations. Spreitzer initially defined the origin of psychological empowerment as a mechanism whereby volunteers develop proficiency and gain confidence in their roles and responsibilities.¹²⁷ Spreitzer's theory defines psychological empowerment as a process in which individuals gain a greater sense of control over work. As a result, they possess the necessary skills and abilities to carry out their tasks.¹²⁸

Vicariously, the continuous implementation of strategic processes and practices can foster positive outcomes and consistent engagement. According to Spreitzer, psychological empowerment can be assessed as a function of four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.¹²⁹ Such cognitions are the basis of the recurring themes of drawing, developing, and deploying. Further, meaning is the sense of importance that volunteers see, feel, and experience. Competence, however, refers to one's belief in having the necessary skills and ability to perform common tasks. Self-determination describes the extent of taking a personal initiative to carry out voluntary work freely. Finally, impact confirms how volunteers are

¹²⁷ Gretchen M. Spreitzer, "Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement, and Validation" *Academy of management Journal*, Vol 38, No. 5, (1995): 1448.

¹²⁸ Gretchen Spreitzer "Psychological Empowerment", 1456.

¹²⁹ Gretchen Spreitzer "Psychological Empowerment", 1461.

influenced and how everyday responsibilities control one's environment. When these cognitions are at maximum capacity, the psychological empowerment of each team member becomes compelling and infectious. Volunteers who see meaning in their groups will likely increase their efforts and dedicate energy to the activity. Engagement is an essential motivational construct for volunteering. Engagement motivates through frequent and intentional social exchange. In the local church, this mechanism is experienced through small groups.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There are numerous methodologies to increase voluntary involvement within Manna Church. The intervention plan described below provides an avenue of practical applications that endorse the purpose and impact small groups have on people and their decision to serve recurrently. The researcher will execute an intervention plan based on theological and theoretical findings and will evaluate individuals in the focus groups accordingly. Two hypotheses that drive the researcher's investigation are as follows: (1) Small-group involvement will positively affect individuals' commitment and participation. (2) Involvement in a small group will diminish the external factors that negatively impact consistent voluntary actions. Volunteers, through such an intervention plan, will increase their level of commitment and participation as they remain connected to small Christian communities.

The goal of this research project is to determine if encouraging FirstStep or another small-group format for members and attendees will increase their desire to serve on a consistent basis. The outcome of this study will support the objectives and questions included in the surveys and methodologies during the implementation stage of the thesis project. Taking the proper steps toward executing the intervention plan will be critical to the outcome of the thesis project. While the intervention plan does not guarantee a solution to the problem, all results must be evaluated for future considerations and adjustments. The methodology for these considerations requires a strategic design with innovation, revisions, and collective participation. Therefore, it is imperative for the researcher to generate a model congruent to those outlined in research. Based on the review of literature and theological theories, the intervention plan will execute a 3D model that includes drawing, developing, and deploying. The breakdown will be thoroughly outlined in the implementation of the intervention design section.

The intervention plan aims to incorporate three intentionally small groups that surround the mission and vision of Manna Church, as well as groups that align with current and potential team member's giftings. They include the FirstStep small group, a music small group, and an Experiencing God small group. Such efforts are implemented to discover direct evidence for the impact small groups have on individuals' personal and spiritual formation and the effect on volunteer engagement.

The small groups will focus on building relationships, developing one's gifts and callings that align with Manna core values, and deploying each participant into using their gifts for the local church. According to Bresse, utilizing one's gift for others, including the church, is a true reflection of servant leadership. He explains that servanthood is not servitude but voluntary action; it chooses to be of service to others.¹³⁰ Conversely, the researcher may find that small groups do not evoke or sustain volunteer activeness. However, if participants are consistent, the researcher may witness increased volunteers serving in weekly services across all six sites. In this case, the intervention plan will inevitably display high impact and measurable success. In essence, implementing new small groups can get more members to connect to teams and serve the local church. The section below describes the timeframe, process, and people involved in the thesis project.

Intervention Design

This section provides details as to how the project will be carried out in a step-by-step guide. The intervention design directly addresses the ministry context problem and purpose posed in chapter 1. The design additionally directs the researcher choices in chapter 2.

¹³⁰ Floyd. Bresse, "Leadership vs. Lordship," *International journal for pastors Ministry* (May 1992): 10-11.

Additionally, the intervention section of this chapter also brings the focus to how the steps from the intervention design are applied. In summary the intervention plan schedule is outlined below:

Implementation	Date, Time & Location	Participants	Objective
Proposal	March 22, 2022 10:00 A.M. Virtually	Lead Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Present Thesis Project to lead team after IRB approval
Pre-Evaluation Consent Meeting	May 12, 2022 8:30 A.M. August 4, 2022 Room 215 2nd Floor Ed. Building	Ministry Department leaders & Small-Group Leaders	Discussion of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intervention plan ▪ Consent for participation ▪ Distribution of questionnaires and interview format and resources ▪ Launching of new small groups
Follow-up Meeting	September 4, 2022 7:00 P.M. Virtually	Participants of focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching of new small groups resources review and follow up • Progress findings presented
Closeout (Post-Evaluation)	November 20, 2022 Room 215, 2nd Floor, Ed. Building	Ministry Lane Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of outcomes • Data review and collections • Report results

Table 1.1: Intervention Plan

Incorporating new intervention measures will first require an approval from IRB. Upon receiving approval by IRB, the project will begin early in the fall cycle, which concludes the summer cycle and transitions into the fall small-group cycle. The tentative date is the best starting point, as families have reacclimated to school closures, summer schedules transitions, and time off for vacation. It is also a critical period for the next small-group cycle at Manna Church. This time frame will pave the way for two meetings with the leaders selected for the intervention plan. Moreover, the intervention plan aligns directly with the small-group cycle's timeline and enables leaders of each ministry department to take action during the project's initial momentum.

The intervention plan will include several participants and methods to achieve successful measured results. It will require the collaboration of the Manna Church administration, leadership team, ministry lane leaders, and congregants. The initial correspondence with the leadership team and church administration will be virtually on March 22, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. The meeting will proceed with a discussion of the intervention purpose and the process each participant will experience. To implement the methods of the intervention effectively, a few steps are necessary, including individual consent, implementation of small groups, and post-evaluations. Additional measures may be reevaluated and taken as the project develops. This information will permit and produce a qualitative researching within Manna Church.

Operating this project will require approval from Manna Church's leadership team, which consists of lead, teaching, executive(s), creative and site pastors. An initial meeting will discuss the logistics of the project and all parties involved. More continual and intimate involvement with the small group's director will follow this discussion as this will be the interventional method for the project. In both instances, the goal is to retrieve consent to conduct the ministry

context. Consent would comprise both written and verbal consent from the leadership team and the participants in the research. The process of this initial consent is crucial as there are times that the information communicated to potential subjects could be complex and may require additional explanation or perhaps time to execute.

In these instances, allowing time to pass between communicating the information and requesting official consent is essential. Time ultimately enables buy-in and collective support across all administrative lanes. Supportive resources will be provided as individuals participating in the project will receive consent letters and forms to inform them of their expectations and rights. Included in the appendix are the following resources to secure such support: a consent form for leaders, a consent waiver for parents to permit their children to participate in the project, a survey, and a questionnaire for those participating in the focus group. These resources will provide a qualitative means for information to analyze and can be found in Appendices A-C.

The consent of all participants will be attained through thorough communication. First, the researcher will explain the study to the potential subjects verbally and in writing. These contracts will provide all pertinent information and allow the participants ample opportunity to ask questions. The communication of such requests includes the purpose, benefits, risk process, and other methods to participate. Both written and verbal consent for participation in research must involve an informed consent process, comprising an education and information exchange between the researcher and the potential participants. The verbal consent process will require that all parties acknowledge their involvement. Next, participants will sign a consent form, found in Appendix D. Finally, the control group participants will provide their signature as a binding agreement to the project. Such documentation, however, will not negate or serve as a replacement for a thorough discussion. The process will involve giving control groups adequate

information and time concerning the study. It will last approximately two weeks to give ample opportunity for the facilitator and those involved to exchange information and ask questions. Such questions will enable opportunities to explain the study in detail and share its benefits, risks, and purpose. Following the initial meeting for discussions of the study, participants will obtain a written document that supports the study's purpose and how each participant's involvement will successfully enhance project results.

The next step of the intervention design is the pre-evaluation. This includes hosting a meeting with each ministry department leader, including the worship coordinator, serve team director, students' director, Growth Track director, and children's director and will occur on August 4, 2022. The goal is to evaluate current involvement and what factors contribute to lack of involvement. Information evaluated will be based on 2020-21 ministry data found in Rock RMS. During the pre-evaluation, leaders will seek to respond to the questions: What members currently serving are connected to at least one small group? Have members completed FirstStep? What motivates people to join small groups? What are the expected outcomes of joining small groups? What participants are eligible?

This initial selection of participants included thirty-one in FirstStep, NextStep, and Leaderstep, eighteen participants in the music small group (Open Mic) and twelve in experiencing God. To narrow the focus and ensure high qualitative and quantitative results, the researcher will only include data results for participants who joined FirstStep or another small group for the first time. Selecting these individuals will yield a more concise and robust result analysis.

After selecting the individuals who will participate in the project, another scheduled meeting will be held with each ministry team member to explain what is requested. All

participants involved will receive proper notice and explanations regarding what the thesis project embodies and everyone's expectations. The key focus for such meetings is to share the project's purpose, retrieve their consent, and provide expectations for all surveys and interviews within the project. During this time, leaders will also be challenged to empower others to join or start a new group, creating additional opportunities for people to connect and grow together.

Communicating expectations in advance helped eliminate individuals not interested or unable to participate due to personal demands. If the researcher were to find that a participant dropped out throughout the research, the researcher would then be obliged to use the individual's available data. If this were the case, the project facilitator would also notify the mentor and or other required supervisors as necessary. However, the thesis project would not discontinue but may prove other assumptions and outcomes in the closing observations. Likewise, participants need to be informed that the project still required their information despite their withdrawal. Finally, the researcher would reassure participants that their data would remain anonymous, protected, and only used for research purposes in both verbal and written communication. Executing such processes will hopefully produce buy in from both leader and participants.

Implementations of the Intervention Design

The thesis project measures the effectiveness of small groups within Manna Church and how newly designed groups can address the problem of low-serving participation in weekly services. Leaders over each ministry lane are consistently seeking new implementations and strategies to initiate and maintain constant involvement in weekly services. Nevertheless, numbers for those serving are at unprecedented minimums. The effects of these results require a scholastic analysis and evaluation of methodologies and systems that will in turn fuel voluntary

service within the Manna Church. Leaders of worship, growth track, outreach, and serve team, along with students, will gather on November 20, 2023, in room 215 after the intervention plan to discuss the results implemented. The conclusion of these results is outlined in Chapter 4 of the project.

After journaling and thorough observation, the researcher remained consistent with the triangulation implementation approach but made modifications to accommodate and reflect a narrower alignment. The initial leaders included ministry lanes of growth track, worship, production, serve team, outreach, students, and missions. While these lane leaders joined the onset of the initial collaborations, only selected groups within the growth track and worship were selected for participation in the thesis project. The project will focus only on participants who have joined growth track or a specified small group for the first time.

To generate a more effective data analysis, the researcher reconstructed how the implementation design would be initiated and executed within the ministry. To initiate the implementations, the researcher met with leaders who oversee each ministry department within Manna Church. Following the meeting, new groups were established to measure outcomes based on the data collected. The process remained focused on creating new small groups that fuel active service but narrowed its focus to only three groups. They include: FirstStep, Open Mic and Experience God small groups.

The project 's outcomes will focus only on participants who have joined a small group for the first time. The success of this intervention design centers on discovering if small-group connections is the best action-step towards increasing voluntary engagement. Essentially, the project hinges on the researcher's notion that small groups are avenues that fuel voluntary

engagement in the local church. Whether FirstStep or another small group, people are motivated connect through such groups.

Three key leaders were recruited to lead newly formed small groups. The three leaders separately led FirstStep, the music small group called “Open Mic,” and experiencing God. Each leader walked through a three-step process that included the following:

- Drawing: The researcher recruits leaders who build more leaders.
- Developing: Based on small-group resource found in Appendix A, the project incorporates elements in Chapter 5 and 7 of *Empowering Leadership*.
- Deploying: The church launches multiple small groups that connect gifting with their mission.

Following the intervention, the researcher and the department leaders will design an evaluation to configure qualitatively and quantitatively how effective the deployment impacts their teams. Henceforth, a collaborative effort will be necessary for the progress and development of the project. Understanding that the common need of all ministry teams is to engage more people actively, the three group leaders will be challenged with connecting current and potential members to participate in one small group in the next cycle.

Drawing

The intervention plan aims to address the scarcity across multiple lanes within Manna Church. Therefore, a personal invitation is an effective means of recruiting volunteer leaders. Each department leader assisted in deciding what areas of interest and skillset exist among their team. Similarly, connecting is the foundation for building relationships and creating a sense of belonging. The small-group leader courteously received a personal invitational from the researcher in person shortly after the pre-evaluation meeting on August 4, 2022. Subsequently, the small-group leaders are recruited in efforts to build more leaders who will inevitably use their gifts to build more leaders. Groups therefore serve as a farming system for reproduce active

leaders. Manna church believes that everyone can be a leader, whether natural born or developed. The anticipated outcome is that such groups will share the objective of helping people discover their gifts and callings, creating an environment where skills are developed and deployed in serving the local church. This anticipation is based on Freud's response to the reason people are attracted to small groups. He explains that people join groups because membership satisfies basic biological and psychological needs that would otherwise remain unfulfilled.¹³¹

The researcher assumes that capitalizing on existing giftings will foster interest and connection to the new small groups established in the study. Matthew 6:20 and Acts 2:42-47 are presented as a primary source for the initial recruitment of participants. these scriptures served as a theological foundation for each participant's perspective regarding earthly stewardship of gifts, talent, and resources as an investment in God's plan on earth and His kingdom in heaven.

On August 4, 2022, the researcher met with the leaders of FirstStep, Open Mic, and Experiencing God for one hour to introduce the project's premise, enable leaders to sign a consent form, and solidify their involvement and commitment to the implementation of the project. After the three leaders who would begin and lead a new group were selected, the researcher informed each leader one on one about the thesis project and its expectations. They also had to sign a consent form to indicate their willingness to participate. As mentioned in the startup to the intervention plan, the selected small-group leaders were provided resources to help them lead an effective small group. Appendix A lists the resources utilized to support small-group leaders. The researcher discussed the resources found in appendix A one on one virtually with each leader over four weeks, between August 7 and August 28, 2022. For four weeks, leaders would continue reading and studying the small-group resource at their leisure.

¹³¹ Donelson R. Forsyth, *An Introduction to Group Dynamics* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1983), 49.

As a result, leaders saw the intervention plan as an opportunity to increase the number of people serving faithfully during weekly services. The meeting began with a discussion of how and why current team members serve during weekend experiences. The discussion questions included the following:

- **How do you know you that you have found the right person for your team? What is this deciding factor based on?**
- **What is it about your lane that makes people “stick”?**
- **What does it mean to be a carrier of the culture? How does shoulder tapping play a role in leadership development?**
- **Does serving help people connect to the local church?**

The questions above helped shape the understanding of why the intervention plan was essential and helped the researcher find a solution to such challenges. Additionally, during the meeting, each leader responded to a set of interview questions found in Appendix C. As a result, these questions opportunely led to extraordinary interest and collective buy-in from each department.

Last, the small-group leaders had a chance to recruit participants during the small-group Sunday event, held on August 28, 2022. Tables and trifold with information regarding each group’s location, time, and consent forms were made available for each person of interest. Attending the Manna connections night served as a preliminary time to inform potential participants of the project. The researcher recognized quickly if the person of interest fit the criteria for the project. Three questions that directed each interaction included the following:

1. Have you completed growth track?
2. In the season of your life, what/how do you desire to grow in Christ?
3. Do you have any musical or creative a talent?

Each question established ground in aligning participants closer to the project's three groups. Based on these question participants could voluntarily join FirstStep, Open Mic or the Experience God small group in the fall cycle.

The FirstStep small group began its cycle on September 4, 2022, at 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on the second floor, room 213 at the Cliffdale location. FirstStep consisted of ten participants and was designed to equip people to experience God's calling and identify their next steps in advancing His kingdom in the world. The music small group Open Mic held its first meeting on September 10, 2022, 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the café of building B. Open Mic involved eighteen participants. This small group created new opportunities for creative individuals to exercise their gifting in a low-risk environment while also enabling a deeper understanding of how and where to use their gifts to advance God's kingdom. The Experiencing God small group first met September 12, 2022, 6:00-7:30 p.m. in room 211 of building A. Experiencing God encompassed twelve participants and focused primarily on how to respond to use of God-given gifts and call for one's life in the context of family and the local church. Each small group met over eight weeks during the fall small-group cycle.

Developing

On August 4, 2022, the resources were provided to the three small group leaders as a framework and strategy for engaging and developing people in a small group setting. If small groups are central to the congregation's connection and growth, it is pivotal to understand the factors that fuel healthy growth in the groups and the church. Each team leader participating in the project received training on the small-group guide. The small-group development guide's success can be measured by several outcomes, not limited to voluntary service. According to Towns, Stetzer and Bird, "... The definition of 'success' in the typical American church is to

lead a new believer to come to church, give a tithe and take on a job assisting somehow in the church's ministry.... Most of our discipleship processes are intended to produce those three things.”¹³² The researcher assumed that equipping leaders to develop others in a small-group setting will increase confidence and high-performance outcomes and interests.

Development is the next stage of the researcher's 3D model. The development stage of the project model is based on the small-group resource found in Appendix A. The small-group leader's guide will be presented to provide practical steps leaders can take to achieve the goals of meeting, mentoring, and multiplying, all of which align with the researcher's 3D model (drawing, developing, and deploying). The more familiar leaders are with the researcher's 3D model, the more equipped they can become and help others grow. Several concepts will be covered to enhance leadership growth. They include:

- **Cultivating and deepening a personal relationship with Christ.**
- **Empowering disciples to do the ministry's work through devotion to Christ.**
- **Discovering God's plan for one's life.**
- **Developing talents and other God-given giftings for the local church.**

The guide, found in appendix A, also briefly describes each concept, and ends with reflection questions to help leaders process the ideas laid out in each section. This guide is intended to help develop small-group leaders and, in effect, their groups.

Also, elements in Chapter 5 of “Empowering Leadership” were incorporated into each small-group leader's development prior to the launch of their small group. During this stage, all three leaders walked through confronting what motivates volunteers to serve. The researcher assumes that volunteers' satisfaction lies in values, motives, and the recognition of being

¹³² Elmer L. Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 45.

properly cared for. Rainer's explanation of volunteer empowerment centers on the idea that disciples are believers but not believers who just fill a church pew on Sundays. On the contrary, disciples are believers who take care of other believers.¹³³ Therefore, each team leader participating in the project received training and development on the small group guide.

The text *Empowering Leadership* by Michael Fletcher was an additional resource used to provide leaders a practical guide for building leadership in people and deploying their gifts and callings. Five pivotal points are highlighted for each leader:

1. The role the church is to create an environment in which God's people can discover and mature in their calling, so they are equipped to change *their* world.
2. Believe more for others than they believe for themselves.
3. Build the majority of their leaders within the house.
4. Value character over anointing and gifting.
5. Do not build people to build the house. Build people, and the house gets built.

Michael Fletcher further explains, "A church that begins with the philosophical proposition that all believers were made to count and to change *their* world, and the roles of the church is to help them figure out how to do that, has the right mind-set to build a true leadership-development culture."¹³⁴ These truths center on what Fletcher calls empowering leaders, which begins with the notion that to fulfill the Great Commission, the church must build people.

In addition, authors Dennis Myer, Terry Wolfer, and Diana Garland conducted a study to survey 946 volunteers and leaders from congregations who were involved in community service as well as 3,959 other congregational attenders who were not involved in volunteer service to understand the relationship between service learning and faith development. Their findings

¹³³ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 42.

¹³⁴ Michael Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership: How a Leadership Development Culture Builds Better Leaders Faster* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 63.

indicated that service learning is powerfully related to a mature faith and to other faith practices, such as prayer, Bible study, and worship, all of which exist in the context of small groups. They explain that volunteer service can transform volunteers personally and intellectually.¹³⁵ Having such understanding would enable small group leaders to intentionally incorporate such faith practices with an anticipation to see and experience life change. Volunteers who participate in the project are then challenged to engage and receive openly during the group meeting. As a result, participants may potentially debunk subjective perspectives and practices that have potentially hindered opportunities or decisions to engage in the local church.

More intricately, Myers, Wolfer, and Garland assert that volunteers initially have presuppositions, values, and beliefs based on their life experiences. As they experience volunteer service, particularly through developing relationships with people in radically different life circumstances from their own, they experience dissonance with their initial presuppositions, values, and beliefs. These differences, according to the researchers, prompt one either to confirm or alter previous ideas and behaviors. These revised beliefs and values then become part of the basis for interpreting future experiences as the hermeneutical cycle of learning continues.¹³⁶ This study was shared lastly with each small-group leader as a foundational review of existing scholarly research and findings.

Next, the researcher urged each leader to ask reflective questions throughout their sessions that fostered and increased group interest and development. A few questions below will be included for the evaluation of group awareness. The researcher assumes that if leaders can identify potential barriers, they can overcome them. Questions will include “What do I need to

¹³⁵ Dennis R. Myers, Terry A. Wolfer, and Diana R. Garland, “Congregational Service-Learning Characteristics and Volunteer Faith Development.” *Religious Education* 103, no. 3 (May 2008): 376.

¹³⁶ Myers, Wolfer, and Garland, “Congregational Service-Learning Characteristics,” 371.

do to connect deeper?” “Have we strayed too far from the point/topic?” and, “How can I empower them further?”

Last, each small-group leader was provided an opportunity for additional training designed to practically encourage effectiveness in leading small groups. The discussion derived from one primary question. That is, “what are small groups for?” Small groups exist as a part of the disciple-making process. They are a place where believers strive to know God’s Word, are called to bring their lives into conformity with it, and from which they are sent back into the world as Christ’s ambassadors. So, again, what are small groups for? Ultimately, small groups exist to make disciples who will grow in maturity and go and make disciples.¹³⁷ Leaders of the group are led to the Apostle Paul’s method of developing and discipling others. The researcher explains Paul’s ministry vision aligns perfectly with Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”¹³⁸

In support of Paul’s method, the researcher includes four suggestions for small group leaders that can help you lead your group effectively:

1. Establish clear expectations.

One suggestion for small group leaders is to establish clear expectations for the goal of their group. Francisco explains that it is incredibly helpful to come in with a plan and then to communicate your expectations from the beginning. People need to know what is expected of

¹³⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949.

¹³⁸ Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

them before they arrive and what they will do while they are with you, and they need to be able to trust that you will start and end on time.¹³⁹

When asking someone to join a small group, it is important for the leader to set the bar high but give people an out. Francisco recommends that the leader mentions “If this is something you can’t do right now, that’s great, but this group is going to be committed to these things. In my experience, a group is only as beneficial as everyone is committed to the group’s goals. I’d love for you to take some time to pray about it before you commit.”¹⁴⁰

2. Let God’s Word do God’s work.

Leaders are encouraged to create space for participants to prioritize and based their live on the bible. It is essentially the primary tasks of a small group leader is to help those in our small groups learn to feed themselves from the Bible. If you first focus on helping your members learn how and why they should study God’s Word for themselves, then they will be equipped to learn for a lifetime and they will develop discernment.

Francisco encourages leader to help the members of one’s small group look at a passage and ask, “What does this teach me about God? What does this teach me about myself or sin? How does this point me to the gospel and Jesus? What can we all take and apply to our lives?”¹⁴¹ The researcher therefore makes it clear that it shouldn’t be the aim as small group leaders to blow someone away with what we know but rather to help them understand God’s Word for themselves, and to let God’s Word do God’s work.

3. Make prayer a priority.

¹³⁹ Matt Fransico, *Group Leaders*, accessed March 18, 2022, www.radical.net.

¹⁴⁰ Matt Fansico, *Group Leader*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Matt Fransico *Group Leader*, 5.

Another suggestion for small group leaders is emphasizing the importance of prayer. It is the call of every leader to help each participant grow towards maturity in prayer. Henceforth, leaders were encouraged to develop thoughtfully plan time for pray within their small group. Francisco urges leaders to change the small group schedule one week and simply have an extended time of prayer together, understanding that people in your group are learning how to pray from hearing others pray, and they are learning how important prayer is in a believer's life from seeing how important prayer is to your small group.¹⁴²

4. To accomplish the goals of your small group, you can't just "do small group."

Francisco provides a practical guidance that the small group leaders could implement based on example found in scripture. He explains that when Jesus called his disciples, He did not simply invite them to study the Bible once a week. The disciples ate with Jesus. They traveled with Him, and they saw Him interact with His family. They saw Him interact with strangers and they saw Him serve the poor, rebuke the self-righteous, and share the gospel. As Mark 3:14 says, "Jesus appointed twelve so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach". Charging them to follow Him, Jesus invited them into His whole life.

According to Francisco, most of the Christian life is spent in "informal settings," where the truths we learn from Scripture are truly lived out and applied.

He writes that "If you want to truly disciple those in your small group, you will have to be willing to say like Paul...Model for them what it looks like to be a Christian husband or wife, or how to honor the Lord with your singleness....how to parent your kids...Invite them along as you hang out with your neighbors or serve at the homeless shelter, take them shopping with you so that they can see what you value."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Matt Fransico, *Group Leader*, 6.

¹⁴³ Matt Fransico, *Group Leader*, 9.

The idea here, is that, when leaders invite other believers into their lives one can lead you into deeper holiness. The project, however, does not enable the depth of such truth. It is however the anticipation of the researcher that the new implemented groups will fuel personal and spiritual transformations. Having provided such training and discussions, the researcher hoped to see positive effects of continuous development and enhancement in the organization.

Deploying

Launching multiple small groups across lanes was the next step of the intervention plan. The solution to the problem was the development and the implementation of a small-group program that would help recruit, equip, and then mobilize church attendees or ministry. FirstStep, Open Mic, and Experiencing God began gathering between September 4, 2022, and December 17, 2022, and included a total of twenty-eight participants. These small groups served as the foundation for getting current and new serve team members to engage first and then connect to Manna Church. During the deploying process, the researcher journaled for the first four weeks of the small-group cycle and began observing how small groups were fueling new interest in ministry engagement. The initial evaluation included eight weeks of observation to investigate adequately and reflect on the journal writings obtained throughout the research. Such observations required that the researcher attend each of the groups for eight weeks to listen and engage in group dialogue regarding their passions and desire to take steps in exercising and developing in those areas.

Launching multiple small groups that connect one's calling to the church's mission was the next step of the intervention plan. It served as the impetus for serving, specifically for those who joined a small group for the first time. The group's desired outcome was to see if group attendees would consequently commit to serving voluntarily at Manna Church. These small

groups are designed to walk through life together in such a way that people develop a strong sense of belong and ownership in the church. The small-group initiative was launched at the beginning of the fall small-group cycle. Such small-group interventions are expected to change the problem of inactiveness immensely.

The primary focus of change will be increasing an individual's sense of belonging and changing "doers" into "family members." According to Donahue and Robinson, small groups should be considered more than just a function in a department but rather a way of doing life and ministry.¹⁴⁴ It is therefore assumed that attendees will then lead from a place of responsibility and take the initiative to use their gifts in the local church. Small groups will intrinsically exist as an avenue for leadership development. The church is built on people, which makes people the focus. Subsequently, Garland, Myers, and Wolfer studied the motivations and challenges of Protestant Christian volunteers in community social service programs and found that the most common motivations were response to God, response to human need, beneficial relationships, and personal benefits.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, the researcher assumes that empowering more small groups will increase participation in weekly services across all ministry lanes involved in the project.

In this project, three groups were newly implemented and observed. Maintaining the same drawing, developing, and deploying method, the three small groups included FirstStep, Open Mic, and Experiencing God. The groups met for four consecutive weeks, focusing on equipping people to experience God's calling, and advancing His kingdom in the world. FirstStep sought to help participants discover what a balanced, integrated, and healthy life of a

¹⁴⁴ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 13.

¹⁴⁵ Diana R. Garland, Dennis R. Myers, and T. A. Wolfer, "Protestant Christian Volunteers in Community Social Service Programs: What Motivates, Challenges, and Sustains Their Service," *Administration in Social Work* 33, no. 1 (2009): 23.

disciple of Jesus looks like, specifically in the context of Manna Church. After developing the values that define one's walk with God, participants explored six specific applications that expressed those values and examined key healthy habits (reading the Bible, praying, worship [including tithing], fellowship, accountability, and forgiveness) that form a sound spiritual foundation. The four consecutive weeks also answered several questions: Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going? What is my part? Such questions enable an aggregate alignment with the church's mission and vision. Participants were taught that God has placed gifts and talents in each person's life and that the church's priority is to equip and empower them to do what God calls them to do.

Open Mic provided opportunities for singers, musicians, and creatives to showcase original works, covers, spoken word, etc. and concluded with time for collective prayer and worship. Participants experienced life-giving relationships in a low-risk environment. The small group desired to provide exciting and challenging opportunities in which people could deploy their gifts, talents, and abilities and serve alongside other team members with similar interests.

Experiencing God was a 12-week Bible study that taught believers how to recognize and respond to God's activity in their lives. This study included five at-home studies each week and a small-group discussion during weekly meetings. Session topics included God's will for your life, looking to God, God pursues a love relationship, love and God's invitation, God speaks (Parts 1 and 2), the crisis of belief, adjusting your life to God, experiencing God through obedience, God's will and the church, kingdom people, and experiencing God in your daily life.

Concluding the last small-group session, on November 20, 2022, the researcher met with the small-group leaders and began gathering information from distributed surveys and questionnaires. During the meeting, the researcher conducted a follow-up discussion with

Ministry Department leaders at Manna Church to see how or whether the intervention plan impacted their department. The researcher's objective was to determine whether leaders observed more attenders/members becoming active in their departments. The leaders came from the Worship, Growth, and Service Departments.

Moreover, after two weeks of reviewing the survey responses, the researcher began scheduling closing interviews with each participant in the project. The researcher conducted interviews with fifty-eight participants. Although the total number of participants was sixty-one, due to the holiday season, a few of the participants were not able to meet for a final interview. Interviews were conducted from November 20 to December 17, 2022, via phone call and virtually. In efforts to track project outcomes, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with all participants. During the interviews, the researcher's objective was to emphasize one primary question: Did attenders/members become active? Why or Why Not? The responses determined the results of such data collected.

Data Collected

During the interviews, the small-group participants answered a series of predetermined questions to discover their genuine thoughts and feelings about serving during weekly services and the benefit of small groups. These open-ended questions encouraged a free-flowing discussion that would then be used to help determine the methods' effectiveness. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B. After reviewing the data, the researcher had a final meeting with lane leaders for a review of outcomes. During the meeting, additional tools were used to gather information outside of surveying and interviews, including platforms such as Gloo and Rock Relationship Management System (RMS), which provided the researcher factual data to assess the thesis project's progress and outcomes. Both platforms provided the quantity and

demographics of attendees of Manna Church. It also included the number of attendees and members who were engaged in small groups prior to the project over a span of five years (from 2018 to 2022). This data will be used to determine whether and how the intervention plan affected the Ministry Department at Manna Church in the Fayetteville/Ft Bragg region. Based on the statistics found in Rock RMS, the researcher compared past and present engagement data, then determined what external factors may have contributed to the increase or decrease in active engagement found in the software platforms. Chapter 4 unveils results that suggest additional research findings and intervention.

Collected data will either affirm or refute such a theory. Additionally, data gathering methods will include surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. These documents are located in appendices B and C. A decision regarding the content of each of these triangularizations will be decided upon as the study progresses allowing for input from all other parties to become more involved in the invention plan's outcomes. Surveys will help measure the representativeness of each participant's perspective and experiences. They will also provide numerical data on people's opinions and behaviors, which can be utilized later to evaluate old and new approaches.

Likewise, using questionnaires, data can be obtained more rapidly and efficiently through digital and in-person platforms. Although questionnaires are resources, they are at times perceived as interpersonal. Interviews, however, provide a more intimate and profound opportunity to glean genuine responses. Interview questions are usually open-ended, so in-depth information is gathered for future evaluations and implementations. A copy of the interview questions is found in appendix B. Using this method for gathering data enables each leader to gain qualitative and deeper insights into the problem they hope to address. This data is collected

through questions that reveal each participant's genuine opinion. During the focus group, each participant will answer a series of predetermined questions to discover their genuine thoughts and feelings about serving during weekly services and the benefit of small groups. These open-ended questions will ignite a free-flowing discussion that will then be used to help determine the methods' effectiveness.

Gloo tracks Manna Church's efficiency. Specifically, it can track new attendees' progress and connections through dashboards, statistics, and analytics. This church management system also helps the church attendees who are also involved online. More important, the software can differentiate online from in-person attendees. Such implementation enables Manna Church's leaders to reach and engage with guests in an intentional and meaningful way. Using algorithms to analyze giving and new attendees will tremendously help measure the project interventions' effectiveness. These tools will ultimately help the researcher discover that a lack of involvement may result from personal hardship stemming from job loss, chronic illness, or bereavement.

Manna Church also administers several components through Rock RMS (Relationship Management System) that generate weekly attendance, leader amenities, and numerical data on the growth track. Rock RMS is a tool that will be crucial to quantitative and qualitative research. This system is a church management platform that is compatible with churches of any size. Manna Church currently uses this tool to track family dynamics, individual progress in the growth track, and small groups. The researcher will need additional rights to access and navigate Manna Church's current small-group resources and leadership connections. Access to these organizational assets will enable a more effective intervention for the problem and purpose of the thesis project. The basic building blocks of Rock RMS are individuals and their relationships. This data allowed the church to offer support and assist members by connecting them to

appropriate resources to facilitate personal growth and help solve their problems. Such data will be utilized to engage serve team members and connect them to small groups that will empower and develop their spiritual growth and activeness in the local church. This data will be crucial during the initial evaluation and drawing phase of the intervention plan.

Evaluation

The evaluation process will take approximately four weeks in an effort to investigate and reflect on the journal writings obtained throughout the study. In addition, this period will allow the researcher to gather information from the surveys, interviews, and questionnaires. During this timeframe, additional follow-up discussions will be held with participants and Manna Church leaders to determine the intervention plan's effectiveness. The follow-up meeting will take place virtually on November 20, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. Although the small-group cycle will not have ended, the research data collection will close to meet the course deadline.

The intervention plan's success will be evaluated and measured based on the increase in individuals serving weekly and consistently as a result of engaging in life-giving small groups. The purpose is to help people take their next steps of faith by using their gifts in the local church. These outcomes will be derived from data collected during the study. Outcomes will be generated and analyzed based on graphical data from the intervention plan. After the researcher surveyed the problem at hand, a few truths became evident. First, for reasons that may differ between individuals, people are disengaged. Although not verified, external occurrences and life changes are assumed to be factors. Because this is a common problem in many churches, perhaps there is a recurring behavior pattern that can easily be seen and addressed. Many leaders are searching for new models and strategies to address such scarcity. Based on recent research and theological principles of the New Testament church, what is needed to address the problem

exists within. Successively, Kenny supports the small group model, saying if God's purposes continue throughout time and small groups fit into those purposes, they will naturally continue when God's eternal purposes are examined and followed.¹⁴⁶

The outcomes of this small-group implementation will validate its truth after a refocusing on life-giving small groups that connect, build, and engage people in the local church.

Keeping a journal throughout the thesis project will be crucial to recognizing objective and subjective points that must be categorized appropriately. Journaling provides an avenue to sort out one's thoughts. Thoughts recorded during the research journey will allow others to track the researcher's thought process. Based on notes taken in the journal, the researcher can then determine what is invaluable information. Journaling may also show that further research is necessary.

Additionally, an after-action review enables each leader to meet and discuss any bias of objectivity that may have arisen throughout each interview and focus group meeting. Many of the observations and evaluations will show that there are patterns in why people disengage. Focus groups will provide much information to be included in the journaling process and will help subdivide responses that may be biased. Journaling makes the categorization process more efficient. The researcher will consider the numerical difference between current results and previous outcomes from the information gathered, serving as a substantial and quantitative resource for comparison. Their observations will provide direct support for paralleling both approaches. The evaluation enabled the researcher to see the gaps in what is necessary to sustain and expand the growth they hope to see in the future. Closing the gap will help rebuild the foundation of each system in each ministry lane and inevitably produce lasting results.

¹⁴⁶ Darin Kennedy, "A Theology of Small Groups," *Restoration Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1996): 176.

Ultimately, the data will be utilized to see how the intervention plan will evoke change. Data will validate volunteers' engagement and behavior. The following chapter will provide statistical data and analysis to determine the effect of the implementation of small groups on Manna Church's Ministry Department.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The researcher will answer the following questions based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis in this chapter. Are small groups necessary for growth in each ministry lane? Do the participants recognize the necessity for a succinct small-group ministry? What outcomes have occurred over twelve weeks that were nonexistent prior to the intervention plan? What factors, internal and external, contribute to the lack of serving opportunities for church members? This project is intended to stimulate twenty-six church participants of Manna Church to join newly implemented small groups, possibly subsequently increasing active service during weekend services. The results presented are derived from participants who have joined a small group for the first time. Three newly formed small groups were started in the fall cycle as a means to increase active service during weekend services.

Results of Implementation

Group 1: FirstStep

The first participating small group is Growth Track, referred to as Group A. FirstStep met on the second floor of building A at the Cliffdale site at 9:30 a.m. and involved ten participants. For the purpose of anonymous insertions regarding each participant, following each group is the participant number. For example, A1:4 represents participant 4 of Group A1. The first group represents the Growth Track small group with FirstStep (A1). Henceforth, all participants in Group A will be referenced with letters and numbers. Again, such efforts are to ensure anonymity for each participant involved. The table below outlines how each participant was identified, the date they began attending Manna Church, and whether they served prior to the project intervention.

Table 1.2 First Step Participants

First Step: Group 1A	Date Participant first Attended Manna Church	Actively Serving prior to project?
Participant 1A:1	7/18/2016	NO
Participant 1A:2	11/20/2016	NO
Participant 1A:3	9/16/2018	NO
Participant 1A:4	1/23/2022	NO
Participant 1A:5	6/5/2022	NO
Participant 1A:6	2/20/2022	NO
Participant 1A:7	2/20/2022	NO
Participant 1A:8	6/21/2018	NO
Participant 1A:9	8/19/2001	NO
Participant 1A:10	6/5/2022	NO

Each week focused on biblical principles that outlined the vision of Manna Church and how each participant could find and align his or her life's purpose according to God's design for the Church. The small groups emphasized the knowledge that they were created for a purpose.

Week 1

During FirstStep's week 1 session, the primary focus was three core values: loving God, loving each other, and loving the world. In addition, week 1 integrated each participant's life

story into the Great Commission and provided a framework for purposeful living. The leader emphasized loving God by attending church while using one's time, talent, and resources; loving each other in life-giving small groups; and loving the world through outreach opportunities. In addition to attending a worship experience, participants are encouraged to serve in some way during a worship experience. Concluding-week participants were encouraged to consider how one's life story connects to the church's mission while exploring where this journey fits this life's purpose.

Week 2

Week 2 began with the discovery of what a well-balanced, integrated, and healthy life of a disciple of Jesus looks like, specifically in Manna Church. Such existence involves the three values mentioned in week 1, six life applications, and nine healthy habits, all with the intent of spiritual transformation. The idea is that when these truths are put into practice, a firm foundation of effectively following Jesus is established. According to Manna Church, a balanced life begins with initial healthy habits: Bible reading and prayer. Secondarily but equally imperative, the quality of our relationships often depends on the quality of our communication with God through prayer. The leader asserts that communicating is fundamental to one's everyday life. Concluding this session, the small group learned that God's word will teach, equip, and transform them while participating in the group.

Week 3

Week 3 focuses on the second value. loving each other. The application of such togetherness happens in a life-given small group. At Manna Church, we grow as Christians in small groups. Participants are encouraged to find a small group that shares personal interests or fits one's season of life. Moreover, the encouragement to join a different small group surrounds

the benefit of fellowship through quality relationships and accountability for a healthier and balanced life.

Week 4

Week 4 focuses on loving the world through outreach. Outreach Manna Church reflects God's heart for the lost. Participants were challenged to see Manna Church as a force that visibly expresses God's practical love and kindness. After FirstStep, the expected outcome was that each participant would discover what a balanced, integrated, and healthy life of a disciple of Jesus resembles. Inevitably, this would encourage participants to attend regularly and frequently serve at Manna Church.

Participant Interview Responses

Concluding the four weeks of FirstStep, participants were encouraged to explore their next steps toward connecting to Manna Church. The researcher expected various outcomes, but the shared commonality among each project participant is that regardless of the time every individual attended Manna Church, each one joined the FirstStep small group for the first time during this study. Responses to the experience of the small group show the impact FirstStep made on each individual. Interviews were conducted by phone and in person, contingent on the participant's and the researcher's availability. The interview responses below correspond to the level of qualitative measurements displayed in the concluding results.

Participant 1A:1 first attended Manna Church in 2016 with his previous wife. After a hard separation, he pulled away from attending church regularly and focused primarily on building his business. He stated, "After a period of two years, I decided it was time to move forward in my relationship with God and others."¹⁴⁷ After making this decision, he met a friend

¹⁴⁷ Interviewed by Stephen Love November 18, 2022.

who invited him to come back to church, but he pursued no other relationships. Until the invitation to join the project, he had no life-giving relationships beyond that with his friend. After participating in FirstStep, he committed to serving as a host for the early morning services once a month at the Cliffdale site along with his friend. Participant 1A:2 is the friend of Participant 1A:1 and encouraged Participant 1A:1 to join the small-group project. She is a single mom who moved from New York to find a place that was a good fit for her and her daughter. Due to her recent divorce, she was not emotionally ready to become connected in serving in ministry as she was in her previous church. Participant 1A:2 stated, “I was very apprehensive about joining this group ... but I know I needed to come out of my shell and obey God tugging at my heart.... I’m thankful that I came.” Since joining the small group and considering all she has learned, participant 1A:2 also joined her friend in serving as a host during weekend services at Manna Church.

Joining the small group allowed her to experience healing from her previous relationship and ministry challenges. She said, “There’s something different here.... I didn’t think a group or even a study could make way for me to experience what I have experienced.... While I have the momentum, I think I should do something.... I don’t know what right now, but I know there is something I must do to continue this journey.” Participant 1A:2 had a community that encouraged her to use her bilingual skillset to serve as part of the production team for Spanish language services weekly.

Survey question #9 asked if participants’ connection with God and other occurred with church engagement. Participant 1A:3 clearly explained that his time in FirstStep helped him find his story in God’s along with other believers who had similar life stories. Participant 1A:3 had been working in a café part time while finishing his master’s program in clinical counseling. His

academic workload and family responsibilities did not leave him much time to connect with others. After shifting to part-time work, participant 1A:3 decided to join the small group he learned about during small-group Sunday (also known as Manna Connection Night). In his interview, he stated, “Honestly, I didn’t really know what I was getting myself in, but God sure did.... God knew I needed family ... people I could connect with.... It’s like I truly belong here.” Work, school, and family responsibilities currently do not allow participant 1A:3 to serve in a particular ministry department, but he intends to find a way to serve and connect with others more upon graduation.

Participant 1A:4, on the other hand, experienced divorce, financial hardship, and negative outcomes in her personal life and did not initially know Jesus. In a state of desperation for deeper connection, the participant decided to begin walking with the Lord and is now in a time of restoration with a new family and church community. During the small group, participant 1A:4 felt a strong connection with Manna’s culture and experience of sharing her personal story with other believers. During this time, she became passionate about the truth that we are all created on purpose, for a purpose. Participant 1A:4 realized that the ugliest parts of one’s stories produce the best parts of a person’s testimony. Through this small group, she found more profound joy and purpose in walking alongside others as they discover who God called them to be. To fulfill this purpose, she has committed to completing her next steps through membership, serving, and leading her own FirstStep group in the fall small-group cycle after completing NextStep and LeaderStep because of this group’s impact.

Participant 1A:5 recently moved to Fayetteville after basic training, desiring more closeness with God. Looking for ways to help advance God’s kingdom, he joined FirstStep. Understanding that in joining the group project there would be some dynamics that would be

measured, observed, and analyzed, he was not very open in dialogue with the group. In his interview, he stated, “It wasn’t until I learned that my story matters and it was a part of God’s purpose for my life that I started to get a bit more comfortable.... I’m glad I did because God was at work in my life.” According to Freud’s theory of group formation, participant 1A:5 experienced what it means to discover intimate family connections. Freud mentions that group membership is an unconscious means of regaining the security of the family.¹⁴⁸ Connecting with God and newfound family, participant 1A:5 took steps toward serving in a tangible way. At the study’s conclusion, participant 1A:5 pursued interest in serving as a guardian and is now serving on the parking team several weeks throughout the month.

Although all participants agreed that the small group brought about a closer relationship with God and with others, other factors contributed to their lack of involvement. Participants 1A:6 and 1A:7 desired to serve at Manna Church but were not able to because their health did not allow them to do so. The husband explained in the opening of his interview, “You know, I can’t do what you young folks can, but this group has really changed the way I view church.” Participant 1A:7 has health challenges that prohibit serving opportunities. This couple’s participation in church is limited to mostly attending. Their circumstances are beyond their control and inevitably affect their ability to serve.

Participant 1A:8 stated that connection to God and others over the past few years has been nonexistent. Participant 1A:8 was stationed in Fayetteville, NC. In 2018, he began coming to Manna on and off in person and watching online. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he became accustomed to watching online and in doing so never felt the need to serve. He said, “This small group reminded me who I am and how I fit into the bigger picture of advancing God’s kingdom

¹⁴⁸ I. L. Janis, “Group Identification under Conditions of External Danger,” *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 36 (1963): 227.

with my talents. Since then, participant 1A:8 has served on the First Impressions serve team weekly for 8:15 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. services weekly at the CD site.

Participant 1A:9 is the husband of participant 1A:10. His family has been part of Manna Church for over twenty years and served in many outreach opportunities but never consistently on a team. He and his wife moved away for many years to find themselves back among family in North Carolina. He energetically explained, “My life’s purpose is a part of a bigger purpose.... This group has helped me see that ... and it’s my heart’s desire.... I’ve just been waiting for someone to ask me.... I’m ready.” He recently joined the worship team and began singing regularly at all sites at Fayetteville Fort Bragg. He mentioned that FirstStep brought him and his wife closer together and closer to God. Participant 1A:10 is a military veteran who was recently medically discharged and was seeking the next steps and finding new ways to serve. She was invited to attend Manna and jump directly into a small group called the Volt. She stated in the beginning of the interview, “While this small group was good for my sense of belonging, I desired more ownership for my part in the church, which required to know more about who we are. So, this FirstStep group gave me that and charged me to go outward.” Participant 1A:10 has committed to serving as a weekly host during Thursday night services.

Not only did participants display a variety of outcomes, but several participants began serving in departments prior to the conclusion of the study. FirstStep inevitably motivated those participants to identify their part in the church’s mission quickly. Keeping in mind the study’s purpose, which is to address the scarcity of volunteers serving at Manna Church, Figure 2.1 provides insight into the period in which participants were a part of Manna Church before becoming connected in serving. The figure below reveals that active involvement prior to the beginning of the study for everyone was nonexistent for the duration of their attendance. Of the

ten participants, five attended between one month to a year, two between two and five years, two five to ten years, and one attended Manna Church for over ten years but never completed FirstStep. Such data provoke two questions: “What took so long for certain participants to join and so soon for others?” “What makes this group attractive?”

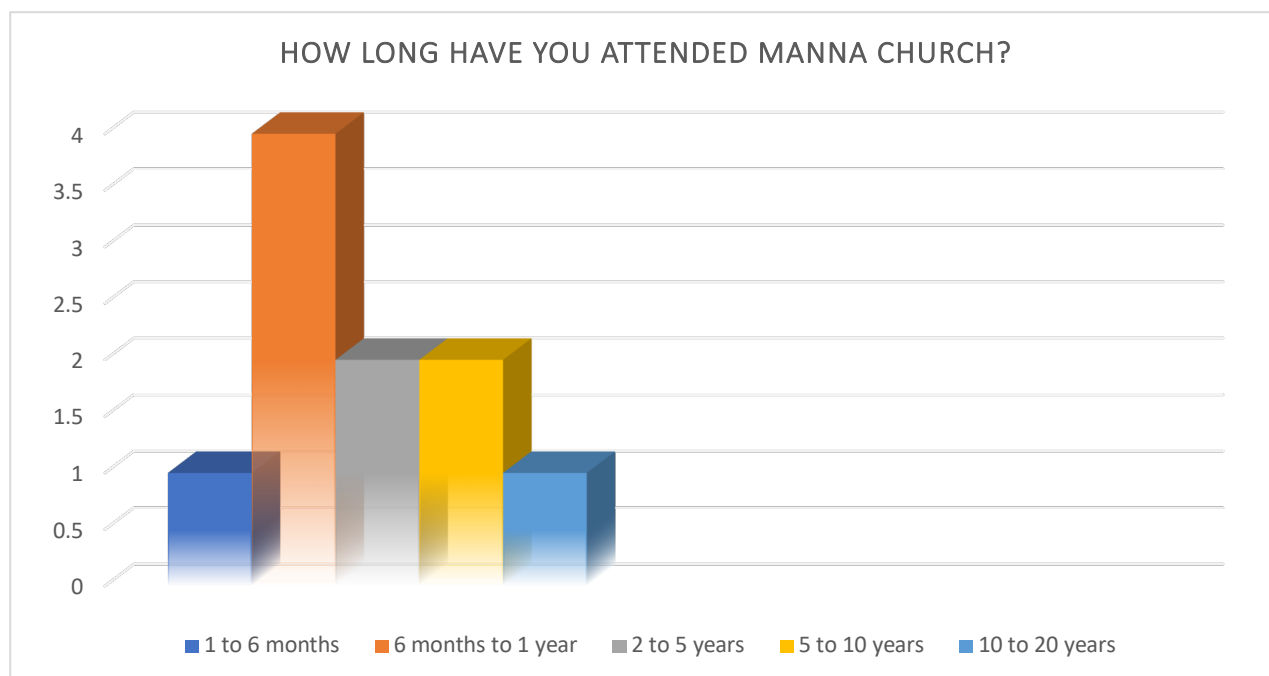


Figure 2.1 Survey Question #1

Figure 2.1 provides a clear comparison of and deeper insight into external factors that contributed to the decision to engage in service during weekend services. Participant 1A:3 explained in her interview that it was his intent to join sooner, but after starting graduate school, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, joining FirstStep was not a priority. Comparatively, participant 1A:10 wanted to become connected by serving, but her military responsibilities were high priority and required her to be away for long periods. Upon returning, she was able to serve for two months until she obtained an additional order involving a permanent change of station. Since the conclusion of the study, these external factors could continue to contribute to her

inability to serve on a consistent basis or at the same level as other participants. Similarly, neither participant 1A:3 nor 1A:10 had been an active part of a small group until the intervention plan.

Group 2: Open Mic

For eight consecutive weeks, Open Mic comprised twelve participants who expressed an interest in displaying their creative gifts among other musicians. This low-risk environment provided an open floor for original work, whether a poem, spoken word, or song, and after sharing individual creations, the group met for karaoke. The group met in the Manna Café on Saturday nights from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. To conclude each night, the leader provided a time for collective worship. One might find it trivial to think that karaoke could stimulate passion and active engagement. However, simply singing a song encouraged people to sing and create more and based on recent observations, led people to want to join in other areas. Such interest was a result of their involvement in a small group that fueled and ignited a personal passion for using their gift during weekend services.

For this project, this small group will be referred to as Group 2. Following each group is the participant's number. For example, 2:11 represents participant 11 in Group 2. Open Mic comprised eighteen participants, but only twelve had joined a small group for the first time.

Table 1.3 Music Small Group

Group 2: Music Small Group	Date Participant first Attended Manna Church	Actively Serving prior to project?
Participant 2:1	6/10/2010	NO
Participant 2:2	9/12/2021	NO

Participant 2:3	9/13/2009	NO
Participant 2:4	6/29/2022	NO
Participant 2:5	10/16/2011	NO
Participant 2:6	2/19/2017	NO
Participant 2:7	2/10/2022	NO
Participant 2:8	4/6/2008	NO
Participant 2:9	3/19/2017	NO
Participant 2:10	1/6/2019	NO
Participant 2:11	5/27/2018	NO
Participant 2:12	11/25/2018	NO

Participant Interview Responses

To conclude the eight weeks of the music small group, participants were encouraged to discover how and where to utilize their gifts best. The researcher expected various outcomes following the project's intervention plan. Moreover, the researcher recognized that all the participants had attended Manna Church for over thirteen years but until the recent study did not take steps to use their giftings in the local church. Noland appeals to humble servanthood and encourages worship leaders to return to the biblical mode that occurs in the local church.¹⁴⁹ In doing so, one experiences spiritual growth, accountability, fellowship, and opportunities to serve.

¹⁴⁹ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist: A Character-Building Guide for You and Your Ministry Team* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 61-62, iBooks.

The interview responses reveal the participants' specified apprehensions, which clarify why participants did not serve prior to joining such a low-risk small group. Responses also indicate that the music small group allowed individuals to express their gifts and fueled future involvement in various worship settings. Interestingly, the participants' responses to survey question #8. "Does Manna Church have enough space for everyone to belong?" centered on one consistent need, a sense of belonging.

Participant 2:1 is a mom of three. Her husband is currently serving on the host team, but she was apprehensive to begin serving because did not think her style and tone of voice would fit. She mentioned during her interview, "This small group made me feel a sense of belonging and identity." She now serves three Sundays each month at three locations in the Fayetteville/Fort Bragg region. Participant 2:2 is also a single mom with a special needs child who presented serving limitations because of the immense responsibilities and care required. Having such responsibility made it difficult to find a place in small groups, serve, and at times even attend church. Now with assistance, she can start serving again. She has begun serving in live kids' worship and starting new groups to develop teams for each site across the Fayetteville for Bragg region.

Participant 2:3 is a new follower of Christ who previously played in a local rock band and occasionally with a few friends from Manna Church. He was initially invited to Manna Church and attended for a few months without connecting to anyone beyond his immediate circle of friends. Then, during a small-group event, he was invited to be a part of the project and small group by the leader of Open Mic to share his talents with others. Immediately, he found what he called "family." Throughout the several weeks, he decided to share his gift with a friend and use it to serve the local church. Currently, he is only available for plays once a month at the Cliffdale

site, but after a few transitions, he is interested in serving several times a month across all site locations. In a similar case, participant 2:4 is a recent graduate with a certificate in worship studies. In her interview, she stated, “I join with the intention of connecting with others and seeing how the group actually help me come out of my comfort zone.... I study worship academically, but I still needed motivation and experience before I really step out.” After joining the small group, participant 2:4 began serving once a week at different campuses in the Fayetteville Fort Bragg region.

Participant 2:5 shared a similar response to this question. He’s a twenty-year-old active military soldier who came to visit Manna Church right out of basic training. Adapting quickly, he said, “I came to my Manna connection night and joined this project hoping this group would find new friends and community who liked to jam... and I did.... This was a lot of fun.... Now I just need to use my gifts for God.” Participant 2:5 has committed to serving during special music opportunities, including Christmas, Easter, and other special services. Also, he has begun serving weekly during infuse, coaching vocalist for weekend services.

Belonging continues to drive the direction of the music small group. Participant 2:6 has been following Christ for over twenty years and has been a part of Manna Church for approximately two years. She has written over three hundred worship songs in her personal devotional and studio space but has yet to share them publicly. Recently, after joining Open Mic, she worked up the courage to share a finished project with others in the group. The response and support she received prompted her to continue writing and share another. Over eight weeks, participant 2:6 scheduled an audition and interview to join the worship team at Manna Church. This decision fueled by her small group has thrust her into joining and serving two Sundays and one Monday at multiple sites with Manna Church Fayetteville/Fort Bragg. Maxwell would

consider this notion a reflection of a maximized team contribution. In his *17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player*, he explains that for a team to work well, it needs to have good team players who can maximize their contribution and push the team toward fulfilling its mission.¹⁵⁰

Participant 2:7 waited to express any interest for her passion in worship and continued to work in the Manna café as she searched for the right “fit.” Meanwhile, her husband currently serves on the worship team. Interestingly, although she has several years of experience, she said, “I wanted to wait for just a bit before I got my feet wet be I jumped right in.” This small-group project was an opportunity to jump in the mix of other creative people in an environment that did not require the same level of expectation for worship team members. Cranton and Wright suggest that creating a safe environment and building trust enhance transformative learning and opportunities.¹⁵¹ This ideal is reflected in the decision participant 2:7 made at the conclusion of the project.

Participant 2:7 auditioned for the team and is seeking to serve two times a month along with her husband. She stated that this has been a place for honest reflections and deeper accountability for using her gifts for the Lord’s glory. Arnold would notate those participants’ feelings about a healthy small group. He says in his writings, “To be a caring community, a small group needs three ingredients: humility, honesty, and self- examination.”¹⁵²

Participant 2:8 is a fifty-five-year-old gentleman who played guitar at his leisure and periodically at a local vendor as a soloist. He cheerfully stated, “Groups like these are good for old guys like me who need an outlet.... I’ve been playing guitar my entire life but never with fun

¹⁵⁰ John Maxwell, *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 63

¹⁵¹ Patricia. Cranton & Wright, B. “The Transformative Educator as Learning Companion,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 6, no. 1 (2008): 37.

¹⁵² Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Books on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 90-91.

people like this ... it challenged me and showed me that I am much better than what I thought... Now I'm excited to play with an entire band here at Manna.... Although I still don't think I'm the best, I want to praise God with what He has given me." Participant 2:8 is now playing multiple times a week at the Anderson Creek site.

All the participants except participant 2:9 believed there was a need for a variety of musical activities. Participant 2:9 sang more traditional music and has attended Manna for three years. She enjoys singing choral music. After participating in the small-group project, she felt compelled to use her gifts in the local church after a long rest period. Participant 2:9 now serves once a month at multiple sites in the Fort Bragg region. Participant 2:9 did, however, suggest having separate times for a deeper dive into scripture and a more traditional hymnal as an effort to create an environment in which people from different musical backgrounds feel comfortable singing along with the others. According to Harvill, diving deeper into scripture creates a space for the worship lifestyle to become more evident. Harvill writes, "The notion of discipling volunteers serving in the worship ministry is shepherding ministry volunteer personnel in the attitudes, teachings, and lifestyle worship evident in the life of Jesus Christ situated in the faith community."¹⁵³ Parts of Block's *for the Glory of God* align with this truth. He explains that ethical conduct in daily life in line with God's will is true worship—humble submission and reverence to God, "an action, a response; it is something we do."¹⁵⁴

Participant 2:9 is extremely passionate about music but has never had any formal training: "I really enjoy just being around other people who are creative and passionate about

¹⁵³ Jamie Harvill, *Worship Foundry: Shaping a New Generation of Worship Leaders* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow, 2013), 55.

¹⁵⁴ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 107.

music. I realize more, however, that getting on a stage performing takes more than passion.... You must have skillsets that I don't currently have." Participant 2:9 decided that she would pursue vocal training one on one and in the meantime serve on Thursday nights as a host. Participant 2:10 also has limited formal musical training and was therefore apprehensive about joining the group. She is currently a part-time paralegal and student at Berkley University. She joined the small group to exercise a talent she had buried for quite some time. During her interview, she stated, "This group has really challenged me to use *all* of my gifts for the glory of God and not myself." She is now serving weekly as the assistant live service producer for the Spanish language service at the Cliffdale site.

Like participant 2:9, participant 2:11 was apprehensive about joining the small-group project. Her experience in singing was primarily classical. She mentioned hesitantly, "I am still a bit cautious to sing with our team here simply because I am unsure if my voice would be a good fit for the team." After prayer and careful consideration of her experience in the group, she has committed to serving during special music opportunities, such as Easter, Christmas, and special events. She has also begun serving weekly as a coaching vocalist for weekend services.

Additionally, participant 2:12 is an elementary music teacher whose primary instrument is piano. She has been actively pursuing new opportunities to advance her leadership and involvement. She said, "Participating in this project allowed me to develop relationships with other potential musicians and singers beyond the classroom.... Being a part of this group made me feel like I had a family, and honestly, it makes me want to more with those that I love to be around." Participant 2:12 now assists with the Keys for Kids worship once a month at the Ramsey site.

Figure 2.2 displays a nearly exclusive response for the music small-group participants. Each participant shared new beginnings in discovering the byproduct of cultivating gifts and talents in small groups.

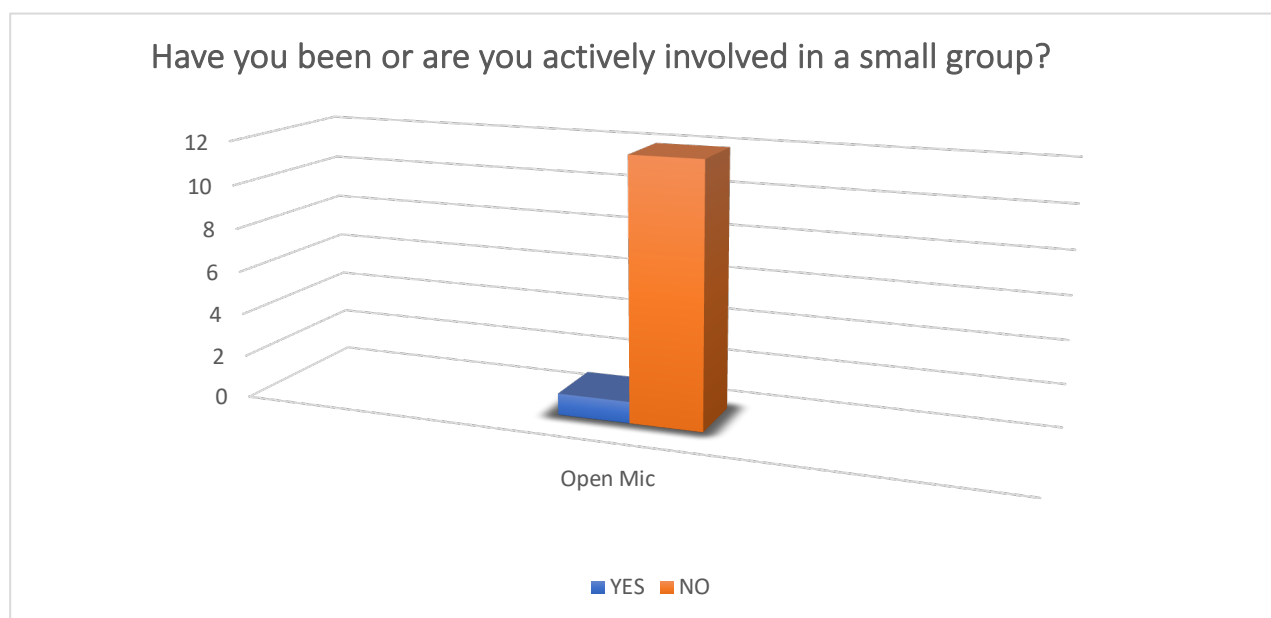


Figure 2.2 Survey Question #3

Participant 2:6 is a single parent who travels with her daughter's dance company and her recreational sports team. Much of the travel requires overnight stays and long-distance travel on multiple Sundays. These seasons of activity generally last most of the year. Although she desires to serve on numerous teams, her availability is limited. Until recently receiving assistance with childcare, Participant 2:6 was not able to join a group. She said, "Until recently, there were no groups available that opened the door for me to perform the many songs I have written." Based on Figure 2.2, could it be that participants would have joined small groups prior to the study if there were ones aligned with their specified giftings? The outcomes of the music small group indicate that environments that enable opportunities for individual's gifts to be developed will

create a place of belonging and fuel more involvement of some form. Although many of the participants did not join FirstStep, the music small group significantly affected participants' involvement during weekend services at Manna Church.

Experiencing God Small Group

Experiencing God was a newly formed group of twelve participants who met for eight weeks on the second floor of Building A of Manna Church. I only focus on five participants because they meet the study criteria. Those participants will be referred to as Group 3. Following each group is a number that represents the participant's number. For example, 3:7 represents participant 7 of Group 3. During the core of the meeting time, the group transitions its attention to the statements on the unit posters displayed; after reading each statement and asking participants to comment on what it means to them, the group transitions to a deep experience through scripture memorization. During scripture memory discussions, participants are urged to share what God may have said to them through this week's memory verse. Finally, the three wrap-up questions are the following:

- a. What have you come to know about God, His purposes, or His ways this week?
- b. What do you sense God wants you to do in response to this knowledge of Him?
- c. What is the most encouraging description of God or statement about His ways you heard in this session?

Table 1.4 Experience God Participants

Group 3: Experiencing God Small Group	Date Participant first Attended Manna Church	Actively Serving prior to project?
Participant 3:1	6/29/2016	NO
Participant 3:2	4/15/2012	NO
Participant 3:3	9/17/2017	YES

Participant 3:4	6/22/2022	NO
Participant 3:5	1/6/2019	NO

Participant Interview Response

Each participant was asked if small groups were important to their connection with God and the local church. Leading into the question, the researcher considered, if participants answer yes to the question posed, why has the participant not joined a small group until this point? Unanimously, the researcher found that each participant strongly agreed that small groups were indeed important to their connection with God and others. Differently about this small group, however, many of the participants were not new to faith and desired deeper study in the Bible and an interest in ministry leadership. A variety of outcomes are revealed in the interview responses narrated below. Moreover, the responses indicate that the small group encouraged individuals to serve in very practical and high-capacity opportunities.

Participant 3:1 expressed that he has always felt an inkling to get involved in ministry somehow and has done so to varying degrees over the years. That inkling has recently been introduced over the last year or so. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he mainly withdrew from the local body for various reasons and pursued his study of the Word. His personal study produced mixed results given the importance of doing this with others. All along, he felt the need to plug in somewhere. Taking a step toward community, he joined the Experiencing God small group. This initial shift resulted in quitting drinking and an immediately reinforced notion of deeper involvement with ministry. Now, participant 3:1 was drawn toward some additional study in divinity programs and serving with the dream center on Saturdays, in addition to potentially

joining the Growth Track to serve in the capacity of leading a Growth Track group in the fall cycle.

In a similar experience, participant 3:2 opened his closing interview by saying, “It was through this group I recognized my role in God’s story, and I’d really like to help the next generation discover the same.” Participant 3:2 is a twenty-three-year-old who moved to Fayetteville back in 2012 from Cameroon. He attends Manna University and has a passion of intercultural studies and ministry. Participant mentioned, “Back at home, I was very active in students’ ministries and would love to see what it looks like to get connected here at Manna Church.” After the project intervention, participant 3:2 is serving as site leader at the Raeford Students Ministry every week.

It was an inspiration to find that participants agreed that the connection with others was the missing piece that motivated them to embark on their next steps in the kingdom. Participant 3:3 made mention of the Manna philosophy of a church that does not just “do” small groups but rather become a small-group church. He further explained that during the Experiencing God small group, he found more intimate time with others and God that propelled him forward and caused wide barriers to come down. Participant 3:3 is a fifty-five-year-old husband of a Manna Church staff, retired from the military, and looking to lead in other aspects. He explained, “This was it...I am a leader...I know that...Now I want to lead how God intends, and I think this group has help me do just that...”

After a period of serving consistently, he has been asked to consider stepping into a leadership role of serving as Manna kid’s director for the 8:30 and 9:30 a.m. services. Seeing such impactful outcome displays the core values of participant 3:3. Dempsey would expound and suggest that this kind of leadership requires influence. In fact, he explained that “A Christian

leader is a person of influence. He or she follows God's will for their lives and influences others to follow God's plan for their lives."¹⁵⁵

Additionally, participant 3:3 and the others in the group were asked if they question #7 of the survey: that every believer is called to serve the local church. Figure 2.6 displays that all participants in the small groups agreed that, in some manner, every believer is called to serve the local church.

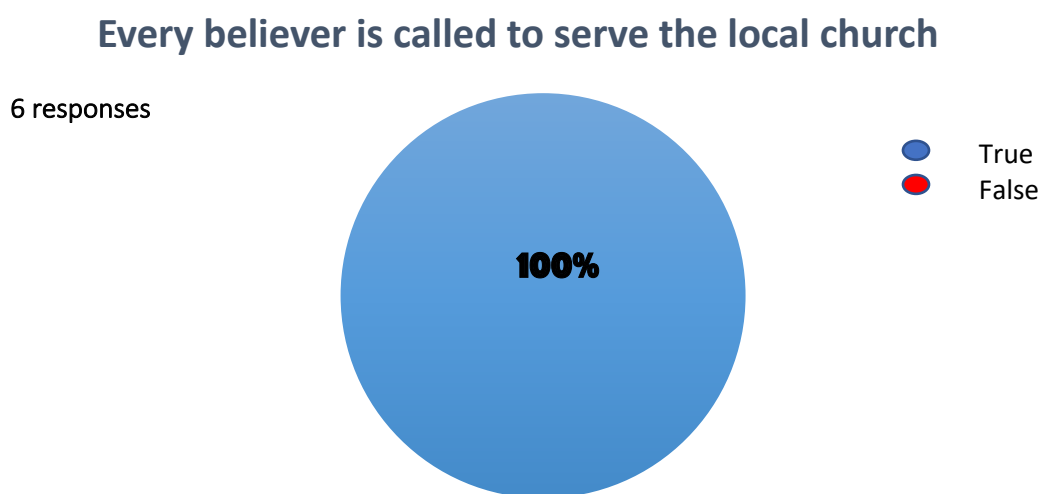


Figure 2.3 Survey Question #7

Participant 3:3 was raised in Fayetteville North Carolina and was very family with the culture of Manna Church. Participant 3:3 joined the small-group project with an expectation that he would discover something that would spark his interest in growing closer to God and others. He said, "I really got a chance to verbalize among other times in my life where I experienced God in a real, personal, and practical way." In the same manner, participant 3:3 did not commit to serving in a specific ministry department for weekend services but sought to find a way to

¹⁵⁵ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . . : How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 17.

help others experience God in a personal way soon. After experiencing this, the small-group project desires to help others experience God in a personal way. The participant is now volunteering at the dream center and helping support feeding the homeless and Saturday afternoon worship services.

In parallel with participant 3:3, participant 3:4 concluded that the measurement of active service would best serve as the dream center. She is not able to commit consistently due to the season of extracurricular activities her children are involved in. However, she has committed to serving through leading an outreach team during serve day. Participant 3:4 verbalized that “partnering with Grocery Giveaway gives me life and also allows me to use my leadership abilities within the time I have.”

Participants were also asked if they believed that only the staff of Manna Church should serve during weekend services. All participants agreed that not only was this a false assumption but that volunteers served the same if not a more critical role in caring about the needs of the local church. However, participants 3:5 and 3:6 shared their apprehension to the level of involvement they were willing to endure again. The couple moved from Florida in 2019 during the rise of COVID-19. They were previously active in their former ministry’s student, worship, and teaching departments. No strangers to church life, both participants 3:5 and 3:6 jumped right in. Serving every weekend and during the week in various capacities, in addition to family responsibilities, they again reached a point of burn out! Having experienced burn out before, they pulled away from serving completely. Participant 3:5 said, “I know God requires that I am faithful with the gifts He has given me and my wife.” Participant 3:6 closed with, “We know we are high-capacity leaders, but we have to learn to set boundaries.” They both made a healthy decision to get active again but once a month serving only in one department.

The responses from the project's participants indicated that in comparison to their prior active status, the Experiencing God small group played a significant role in involvement within worship services for each project participant. Concluding the eight weeks of the Experiencing God small group, participants were enthused about taking the encounter outward in ways that were tangible and practical for others. The researcher expected a richer outcome from the participants of this group due to the nature of the content used during this small group. Following the project's intervention plan, the researcher recognized that all the participants paralleled the other small groups and displayed natural leadership that required nourishment and opportunity to exercise their gifts and talents.

Summary of Results

Concluding the small-group intervention plan, all participants were provided a survey in response to joining serving opportunities at Manna Church and joining small groups. The twenty-six participants completed their closing survey on November 20, 2022, through an online form along with an in-person follow-up interview. The survey and interview questions completed are found in Appendix B. The data below highlight pivotal questions that outline attendees' involvement in small groups as well as their perspective regarding actively serving during weekend services.

The final question of the survey opened a discussion of the small groups' effectiveness. Participant 2:3 stated that the only time he had attended church before the research project was during special events with his friends and a few additional times outside of that. He further noted, however, that joining the research project created a strong sense of accountability and a heart to serve others. The researcher journaled a reoccurring notation that all participants expressed a strong desired to continue with the groups beyond the project. Such a finding

reaffirmed the outcomes of the research to be of much success. Having a desire for continuous connections in the small group mended an increase in serving across various ministry departments.

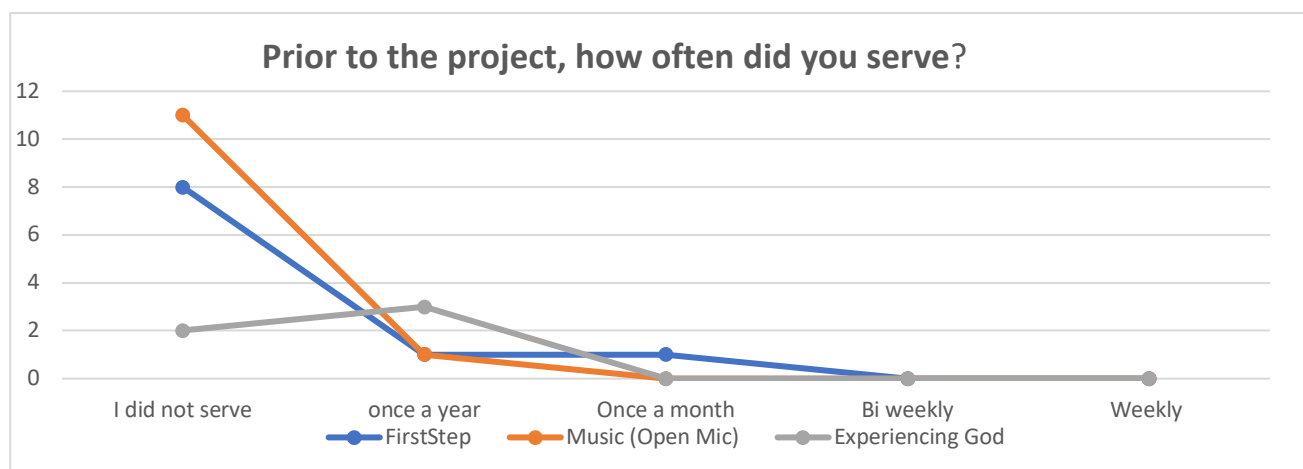


Figure 2.4 Survey Question #2

When asked how often the participants served prior to the project intervention, a majority noted they did not serve in any capacity prior to the study. Figure 2.7 reveals that only four out of the twenty-six participants served once a year over the span of their time at Manna Church. During the interview follow-up, participants who did serve on a once-a-year occasion noted that the outreaches included feeding military families and a special event. In essence, these data collectively demonstrate that although some participants sporadically served in outside opportunities, none of them served during weekend services.

After a quantitative analysis of participants involved in the small-group implementation plan, the following results were discovered. The researcher found there was a substantial increase of activeness following engagement in small groups. In the first step, nine out of the ten participants joined a team and began serving on a consistent basis. In the music small group (Open Mic), ten of the twelve participants either joined a serve team or increased their serving opportunities on a regular basis. Also, in the Experiencing God small group, all six of the

participants began serving in multiple serve team opportunities within various ministry teams.

Figure 2.8 below displays the percentages outlined.

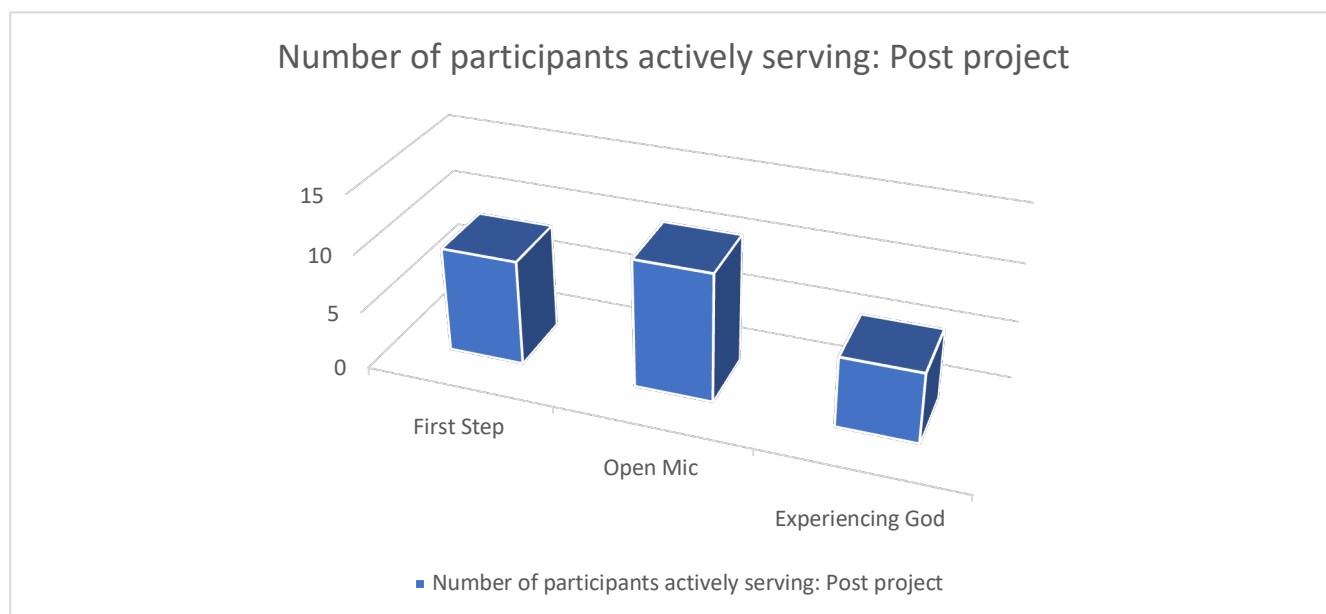


Figure 2.5 Active Participants

Figure 2.8 reveals the increase of participants serving after the intervention plan. Furthermore, the results have been provided regarding the research project. Utilizing the observational notes from the small-group meetings, the surveys, and the interviews, the researcher found that the intervention plan did yield the expected results. The result produced remains in alignment with Tucker's research conclusions, which was based on the early church as an example as to how small groups were effective in missions. He writes that "Research indicates a large majority of small group members perceived that their spiritual growth in understanding and discipleship has increased since they joined their small group because of the opportunity to ask questions, receive personal help, and model themselves on the more

experienced in the group.”¹⁵⁶ Likewise, the researcher understands that further research and implementations are necessary to reach a more effective increase in active volunteer and will discuss such efforts in Chapter 5. The results from this study proved the small group does in fact aid in volunteers’ activeness in the local church.

Measurements of outcomes from the intervention plan were based on the utilization of observational notes, surveys, interviews, and the open-ended discussion from the last meeting of the research project. In essence, the researcher discovered the intervention plan did yield the expected results.

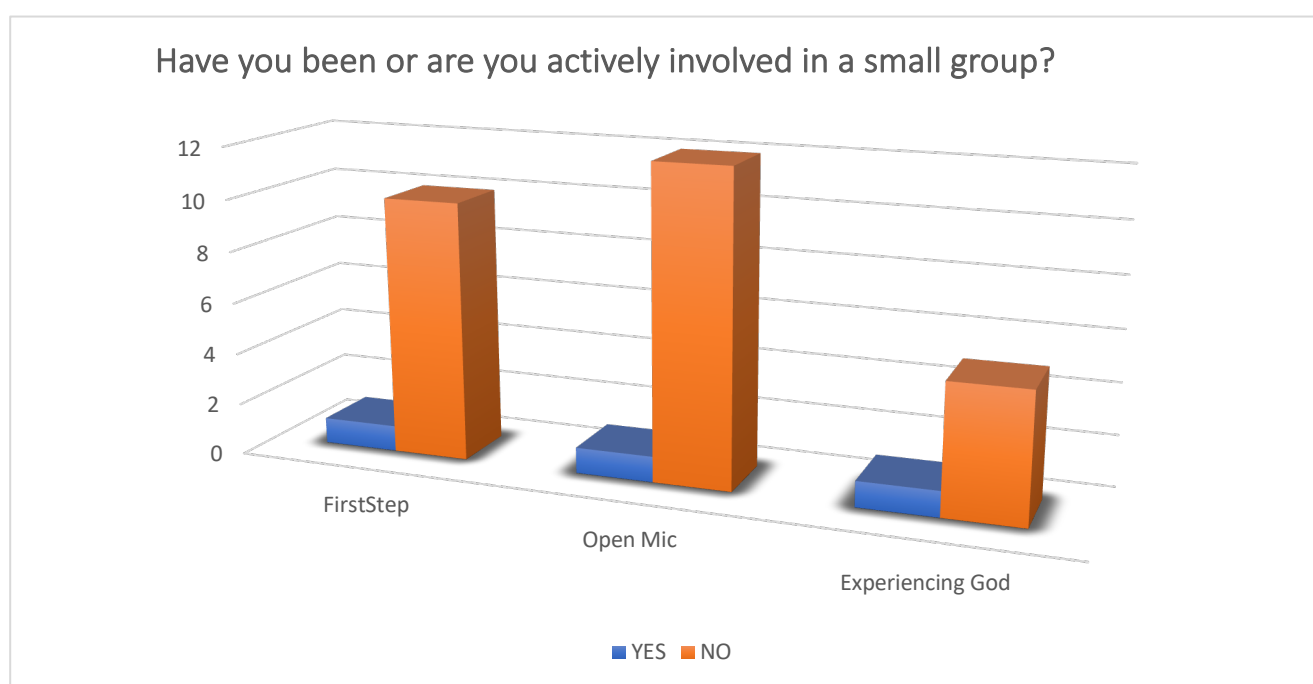


Figure 2.6 Survey Question #3

¹⁵⁶ Arthur R. Tucker, “Improving the Lack of Missional Effectiveness of Congregations with Small Satellite Meetings from an Interdisciplinary Practical Theological Perspective,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (2016): 2.

The researcher aimed to implement a strategic intervention that would address the lack of volunteer service during weekend experiences through the application of small groups. The application of the small group at its core generated intrinsic motivation to actively use their gift for God within the local church. Johnson would suggest that these concluded outcomes were the byproduct of volunteers who were motivated intrinsically by their desire to impact the lives of others, to build meaningful relationships with others, and for personal enjoyment. He explains that when volunteers make the decision to serve, it is primarily because they value their volunteered service as obedient to God, an opportunity to grow spiritually, and a platform to use their abilities to serve the church and God.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, Figure 2.9 displays a unanimous finding for all three small-group participants and novices to the small-group experience. Simultaneously, they share new beginnings in discovering the byproduct of cultivating gifts and talents within small groups.

¹⁵⁷ J. A. Johnson, "Getting and Staying Involved: What Motivates Volunteers in a Non-Profit Organization. (PhD diss., Capella University, Minnesota, 2007).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

As churches continue to grow from small to large communities, they struggle to meet the need for volunteers in ministry departments, which has been a pressing concern for the local church. Henceforth is a need to involve more church volunteers in the ministries of the church. Increasing demands are placed upon church leaders to meet the challenge. For the purposes of this thesis project, small groups were utilized as the avenue to discover how such an intervention could potentially grow participant involvement. The thesis project surveyed the impact of small groups within Manna Church and how newly designed groups can address the problem of low participation in weekly services. The effects of these results included a robust evaluation of twenty-six participants regarding how their involvement with FirstStep and other small groups for the first time fueled voluntary service within the local church. In Chapter 5, the researcher will answer the following questions:

- What did the researcher learn in implementing the project?
- How do the results of the research project compare to the information gleaned from previous studies or the published work analyzed in the literature review?
- How might the results apply in other settings? Did anything emerge during the study that merits future analysis?
- Where should research regarding this problem go from here?"

What Was Learned?

It is essential that the researcher reflected on the outcomes and learning of the project to establish a cohesive and vigorous long-term recommendation for the solution to the lack of voluntary service in the local church. Moreover, the research conclusions revealed that the intervention plan was necessary to foster activeness among ministry departments. On the contrary, the conclusions found, based on the research and analysis, should not be rendered as the sole intervention to resolve such scarcity. Although this is not an exhaustive list, many

elements should be considered regarding this specific examination pathway. These include the following: External factors affect active engagement, the percentage of attendees who have joined FirstStep impacts the percentage of attendees actively serving, and the Christian community breeds belonging and ownership.

External Factors

After journaling, overserving, and numerous interviews, the researcher realized that external factors contributed to the data described in this chapter. Moreover, the circumstances in participants' lives contributed to the lack of involvement and active service during weekend services. Such factors also suggest additional research and supplementary interventions that appropriately address the problem of scarcity across sites and ministry lanes.

Participants A1:6 and 7 responded in a closing interview that they desired to serve at Manna Church but were unable because both he and his wife's health did not allow them to do so. There were unfortunate conditions that limited the physical capacity to serve consistently. Health challenges prohibit which serving opportunities this couple can join. Such circumstances are out of their control but inevitably affect their serving ability.

The researcher assumed that COVID-19 was the primary contributing factor that externally impacted active engagement. However, the researcher learned that although, for some church attendees, this may have been proven true, participants of the study responded inversely. For example, participant 2:6 began serving after two months of attending Manna Church in 2019, but within a matter of two weeks, he was sent out for field training for several months. His military responsibility takes high priority and requires him to be away for long periods. Upon returning, he could serve for two months until he received an order to receive a permanent

change of station. These external factors (not COVID-19 related) contributed to his lack of availability to serve consistently.

Such responses revealed a direct impact on voluntary service and concrete evidence for the effectiveness of small groups and their effect on volunteer engagement. In Larry Crabb's *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships*, he writes, "The surest route to overcoming problems and becoming the people we were meant to be is reconnecting with God and with our community."¹⁵⁸ It can be concluded that this intervention plan, despite external factors, enabled opportunities for connection with others and, as a result, increased members' involvement in serving during weekly services. The results from this study indicated to the researcher that small groups fuel active service.

Need for Christian Community

The researcher incorporated intentional small groups that focused on building relationships, developing one's giftings, and deploying each participant to use their gifts for the local church. The Christian community is a foundational component by which groups can generate long-term relationships and practical notions toward personal and spiritual development.¹⁵⁹ According to Paul Senz, small groups bring the Sunday experience home, establishing a close participation. Also, as the faith of the participant is stimulated and grows, so too does their involvement.¹⁶⁰ Such a notion is imparted within Christian communities. Mezirow supports this idea in saying that "Transformative learning does not take place in isolation, but

¹⁵⁸ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1997), 21.

¹⁵⁹ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Tarrytown, NY: Revell, 1991.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Senz, "Small but Mighty: How Small Group Ministry Can Transform Your Parish," *Priest* 75, no. 2 (2019): 28, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rlh&AN=135911500&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

one needs a supportive group and a supportive environment in this journey.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, having such communal influence depreciates the feeling of disconnection, discouragement, and disengagement. Instead, the small-group environment ignites a sense of belonging, accountability, and motivation to engage, ultimately foundational to building and emerging believers.

In Chapter 2, the reoccurring theme, among many of the studies, included the literature reviews surrounding the need for belonging, which clearly indicates the Gospel. Krymski solidifies this truth by suggesting that small Christian communities are to be recognized as the biblical, authorized root of the church as they involve prayer and living out the Word of God. Based on Krymski’s ideology, Christian communities derive from a transition of individuals’ recognition of their part in fulfilling God’s plan for the church. Christian communities, therefore, support the ideology of increased participation due to life-giving small groups.

In addition, small groups also decrease the influences that outside circumstances have on church members’ involvement. Gathering to meditate on the Bible and share thoughts, aspirations and gifts enable individuals to receive support, empowerment, and guidance as they embark on life’s journeys: “The church is a group of redeemed people that live and serve together in such a way that their lives and communities are transformed.”¹⁶² Small groups practically make way for such transformation. Scripture reveals that people were not designed to do life alone. In fact, in Genesis 2:18, God affirms that Adam needed someone in addition to himself. Contributors from the Moody Bible Institute support the idea that God knew in advance

¹⁶¹ J. Mezirow and E. W. Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, eds. J. Mezirow and E. W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 5.

¹⁶² Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2012), 52.

that it was not good for Adam to be alone. The authors assert that “God waited to meet that need and in so doing to bring His creative work to completion by showing Adam the animal kingdom so that he would realize he had a need that only God, in His love and wisdom, could meet.”¹⁶³

The researcher expected that the participants would connect personally and shift their focus outward based on the preexisting research. These initial research findings influenced the approach for the intervention plan designated for this project, while providing qualitative conclusions. Results discussed in Chapter 4 prove that the researchers’ expectations for the implement groups were achieved.

Limited Time

The project embarked on limitations surrounded by assessable time. Based on content design and time allotment, participants could not spend adequate time in an area that required a greater dive. Time restraints for the research project were implemented to accommodate the locations designated for the study. The groups were allotted one hour of meeting time for FirstStep and Experiencing God and an hour and a half for the music small group (Open Mic). Participants and leaders of the group expressed that more time was devoted to executing the content than to the connection component of the small-group environment.

The researcher learned that additional time would allow a more balanced opportunity for content and relational connections. For example, several weeks of discussions could have lasted longer throughout the project for deeper understanding and application. However, due to the time restraint, the dialogue had to subside. Several of the participants were new believers and required more time and emphasis on certain biblical principles. Limited time became a challenge. Richard

¹⁶³ “Genesis,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 42.

Peace would argue that small groups may be the most suited for new believers and should be given generous time to adequately care and that they should be equipped. He mentions that small groups are immensely the “means to reach the post-Christian generation for Christ.”¹⁶⁴ The researcher found these instants prohibited and strained a lasting impact on the participants. Moreover, research over a longer period would indicate whether more time during the instructional period would increase spiritual growth. Henceforth the researcher must consider if one hour sufficiently serves the need of each small group. If not, what deems necessary and reasonable?

Further research should prod the question, “Would offering two separate meetings during the week, one for instruction content and the other focused on relational connections, actually promote the participants’ growth and motivation?”. Further research is needed to determine whether holding an additional meeting separately would be more beneficial. Comparing literature and recent findings, the researcher can determine suggestive measure toward a reevaluated consensus.

Comparing Literature

The research project results, compared to the information gleaned from previously published studies listed in the Chapter 2 literature review, set a foundational affirmation in the concluding results of the project. The findings discussed in Chapter 4 confirm several existing theories and assumptions. The recognized pattern among existing research involves connections and relationships. Theoretical and Theological findings pave the way to concise and unanimous understanding that consistent and deep relations couple with truth, generate forward motions.

¹⁶⁴ Richard V. Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program for Reaching Out with the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 12.

Joseph Payeur explains that, over time, the Word of God becomes incarnate in one's surroundings.¹⁶⁵ Payeur further explains that because Christianity addresses itself to the socioeconomic and political realities that Christians must live in, weekly meetings enable consolation and empathy among the small-group communities. As a result, the meetings (held in homes and other settings) establish a relationship between the message and daily life challenges. Christians are therefore able to shift from a worldview to a biblical view of life. Thus, there is a greater chance that the Bible will influence their lives more and more. Payeur's theory of personal connection surrounded by biblical environments suggests a direct notion and association between relationships and the local church.

Comparatively, Barr references Ralph Neighbour's approach toward methodology by saying, "Theology breeds methodology." This methodology suggests there should be a scriptural basis for what church interventions must display and do. Barr's approach for small-group implementations is based on Matthew 18:20, which reads, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."¹⁶⁶ According to Barr, this verse is often used to support small-group systems in the church. However, it not only defines the numbers that can make up a church or a small group (at least two people) but also reminds us of Jesus's promise that He is in its midst.¹⁶⁷ In addition, Matthew 28:19-20 states, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with

¹⁶⁵ Joseph A. Payeur, "Inculturation through Small Christian Communities," *AFER* 35 (1): 40.

¹⁶⁶ Matt. 18:20.

¹⁶⁷ Shawn M. Barr, "Biblical Principles of Small Group Ministry" (DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, 2021), 22.

you always, *even* to the end of the age.”¹⁶⁸ Barr Further mentions that this passage provides the command of Jesus to make disciples, which begins with evangelism and continues with those new converts being in a discipleship relationship.

Easterling would agree that theology produces methodology in his approach to examine small-group dynamics within the spiritual awakening periods, including the First Great Awakening (1726-91); the Second Great Awakening (1780-1850); the Layman, Welsh, and Korean Revivals (1857-1910); and the Mid-Century Revival (1949-79). The essence of his methodology surrounds the analyzation of how small groups contributed to the rise and longevity of each awakening, including discerning when, where, and how often these groups met, who participated in these gatherings, and what activities the gatherings usually consisted of. The findings of his study concluded that the sustainability and enhancement of each group centered around Bible study, prayer, worship, discipleship, and personal holiness.¹⁶⁹

Other researchers, such as Schadrack Nsengimana, have used a Gantt chart to organize and strategize the implementation plan, and they have discovered the following: Existing groups only met once a week; church members did not study the Bible often enough and did not use their spiritual gifts; and members did not witness, encourage one another, or share experiences and meals.¹⁷⁰ As a result, these missing activities were found to be obstacles to the spiritual and numerical church growth. In effort to address and ascertain the objective of the

¹⁶⁸ Matt. 28:19-20.

¹⁶⁹ Joe M. Easterling, “Big Things Start Small: A Survey of the Role of Small Groups in Christianity’s Major Spiritual Awakening” (DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg 2021), 35, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁷⁰ Schadrack Nsengimana, “Using a Small Group Approach to Increase Church Growth in the Gikondo: Seventh-Day Adventist Church” (PhD diss., Andrews University, Michigan, 2014), 100 Digital Library of Dissertations and Theses.

project, the researchers contextualized training materials to develop seventy small-group leaders while also identifying and grouping members together based on their spiritual giftings.

The researcher's assumptions additionally align with Davis's impression that "volunteers continue to serve when they interact with others in the organizations and when they believe their works are recognized." He further emphasizes that organizations utilizing volunteers must be equipped to recruit and retain volunteers that will benefit the organization's mission, objectives, and population served.¹⁷¹ Davis's assumption reveals that organizations who value and drive environments that are people focused will as a result increase a sense of belonging and ownership and motivate volunteers to become actively engaged.

Several researchers have alluded to the idea that leaders are not focused on belonging and ownership but rather quantitative results only, which begs the question, what happens when churches' main goals of increasing attendance and meeting met the needs of its customers through small groups. Michael Mack observes that "The danger of serving 'people' and their desires is that instead of making true, fully devoted, obedient and active disciples of Christ, what is produced are unhealthy, passive church attendees."¹⁷² Additionally, a question to consider is, with an emphasis on numbers and attendance, and meeting the needs and expectations of the volunteer instead of true discipleship, what sort of impact has this had on the church? As a default, it is much easier to count people as a means of determining impact. Attendance numbers alone, however, do not provide evidence that that church activities are really helping people

¹⁷¹ Kyle R. Davis, *Factors Influencing the Recruiting and Retaining of Volunteers in Community Organizations* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 29, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷² Michael C. Mack, *Leading from the Heart: A Group Leader's Guide to Passionate Ministry* (Houston: Cell Group Resources, 2001), 43.

grow.¹⁷³ This is crucial to consider for the researcher's development of recommendations, future research, and practical applications.

Practical Applications

The practice of small groups has been apparent in the history of the church for over 2,000 years. Over the past two decades, the research contributed to small groups, including the historical periods of the early church and reformation to modern-day practices. After Christianity had become the Roman Empire's national religion, small groups continued through every era and existed primarily as a haven for Christians from the persecution of Roman rule. The church, through small-group communities, expanded to various parts of the world. Such growth required special accommodations and restrictions for gatherings of believers within these communities. Moreover, the core of these practices has paved the way for a practical and foundational understanding and application for the researcher's intervention approach in developing and deploying more leaders through small-group communities.

According to Filson, small-group communities assembled in intimate house settings because no other venue met the needs of these local gatherings better.¹⁷⁴ The movement ignited gatherings to transpire in individual homes. In agreement with this truth, Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey explain that "House churches played an essential role in the rapid growth and ultimate triumph of Christianity, and it would be safe to say that the first three centuries belonged to the house church movement."¹⁷⁵ Even while churches shifted building-centered

¹⁷³ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), 13-14.

¹⁷⁴ Floyd V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58, no. 2 (1939): 106.

¹⁷⁵ Atkinson and Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," 76.

religions during the Middle Ages, small groups survived through those who sought to preserve the fundamentals of the Bible. During the Reformation era, small groups also contributed to enhancing the spiritual maturity and missionary work of Christians. This expansion of the church was fueled by the basis of what Mikaelian describes as a gathering that fosters discipleship and service. She further mentions that small groups practically facilitate change by providing a safe, loving, and caring environment where the members have close relationships, trust each other, and feel accepted and supported but at the same time challenge the members to rethink their values and take risks.¹⁷⁶ In the same manner, local churches could consider intentionally implementing similar groups that will enable these identical applications. Schapiro supports this idea in saying that “in small groups relationships do not just provide the context or container for the learning, but it is within the dialogue, debate, and interaction of the relationship that transformation occurs.”¹⁷⁷ In essence, from historical periods to present day, small-group communities have practically addressed the need for spiritual and personal development.

The researcher’s discovery in this project reveals a demand for a revived transformation, although small-group implementation still deems a higher priority in the local church today. Manna Church must continue to encourage the philosophy that it is a small-group church and not one that does small groups. Findings determined from the research also close the gap of internal and external reasoning as to why attendees are not actively engaged. Additionally, the findings display that the local church must capitalize a preeminent effort toward small groups as an

¹⁷⁶ Mariet, Mikaelian, “The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members,” *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (2018): 178.

¹⁷⁷ S. Schapiro, “Creating Space for Transformative Learning,” in *Innovations in Transformative Learning: Space, Culture, & the Arts*, eds. B. Fisher-Yoshida, K. D. Geller, and S. Schapiro (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2009), 37.

avenue for helping people discover their callings while aligning those callings to the mission of the local church.

Future Research

This researcher recognized that small group directly impacted active service for participants but did not provide clarity on internal factors that could potentially affect why participants were not active prior to the project. The researcher recognized that there was a need for recruitment and sustainability plans for each department leader. Therefore, further research requires in necessary to reach a more effective solution. A future study could be based on the following questions:

- Who is responsible for recruitment and development within each department?
- What systems and strategies are in place to “shoulder tap” or connect people to groups?
- What “shoulder tapping” or recruitment model exists within Manna Church or other local churches?
- What other outcomes can be expected by people connected to small groups?
- What makes FirstStep and free-market groups attractive?
- How does Manna Church advertise and “sell” beyond video announcements, sermons, hosting, etc.?

Leaders of each department were asked questions found in Appendix C to begin an open discussion regarding how to further address the concerns beyond the project. Unanimously, leaders recognized there is still a need for additional efforts to improve the process and avenues that fuel voluntary service. Based on these conclusions obtained in implementing this project, three recommendations are presented to potentially improve small groups’ future impact.

1. A recommendation to department leaders: First, department leaders must display and initiate the benefit of becoming a carrier of the culture of Manna Church. Brad House defines a community or small group as “a people who understand their identity in Christ

and have a corporate or communal understanding of that identity.”¹⁷⁸ Moreover, teams must embody the philosophy that Manna Church is not a church that does small groups but rather a small-group church. Finally, the lane leaders should ensure newly formed small groups are at the forefront of their vision. They must create more opportunities for leaders to mobilize small groups that align with specified interest and needs within their ministry lane.

2. A recommendation for a recruitment model: Leaders could seek to generate a how to guide based on Chapter 6 of *Empowering Leadership* by Michael Fletcher. In doing so, it is recommended that leaders look for evidence of character and skillsets. According to Mark Ingmire, “The key to identifying small group leaders for a small group ministry is to look for three qualities: good character, good people skills, and people who value community.”¹⁷⁹ Following the Fletcher model of recruitment through the art of “shoulder tapping” is assumed to produce and empower more people into leadership and active service within the local church.
3. The organization (Manna Church) could consider additional creative innovations to encourage members and attendees to join Growth Track and other free-marketed small groups. Chan supports this effect, stating that it is not enough for Christians to lead people to the saving knowledge of Jesus; one must also teach them how to be successful disciple makers.¹⁸⁰ Correspondingly, Ondari says that, whether the result is success or

¹⁷⁸ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 95.

¹⁷⁹ Mark Ingmire, “A Commonsense Approach to Recruiting New Leaders,” *Christianity Today* 5 (July 2, 2008): 79.

¹⁸⁰ Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2018), 179.

failure, the rise or fall of religious or secular groups is determined by the quality of leadership.¹⁸¹ The ideologies mentioned suggest that any initiative hinges on the intentional efforts of a quality leader whose primary emphasis is on equipping and empowering others. Newman challenges a deeper consideration of leadership innovations, noting that the test of being a servant leader is whether they give the highest priority to meeting his own needs or the needs of other people.¹⁸² It is therefore recommended that leaders of Manna Church consider how to ensure that attendees see their first step toward the Growth Track or other small groups as a personal and eternal investment.

4. Leaders should consider what specified steps are necessary for each stage in how volunteers are recruited, equipped, and sent out for ministry. While these are not exclusive, below the research provides a figure and recommendation by which leaders could consider.

¹⁸¹ William Ondari, "The Practice of Leadership among Seventh-day Adventist Associations," *Journal of Adventist Thought in Africa* 1 (1997): 54.

¹⁸² David J. Newman, "Servant Leadership and Robert K. Greenleaf," *Ministry* (March 1991): 14-15.

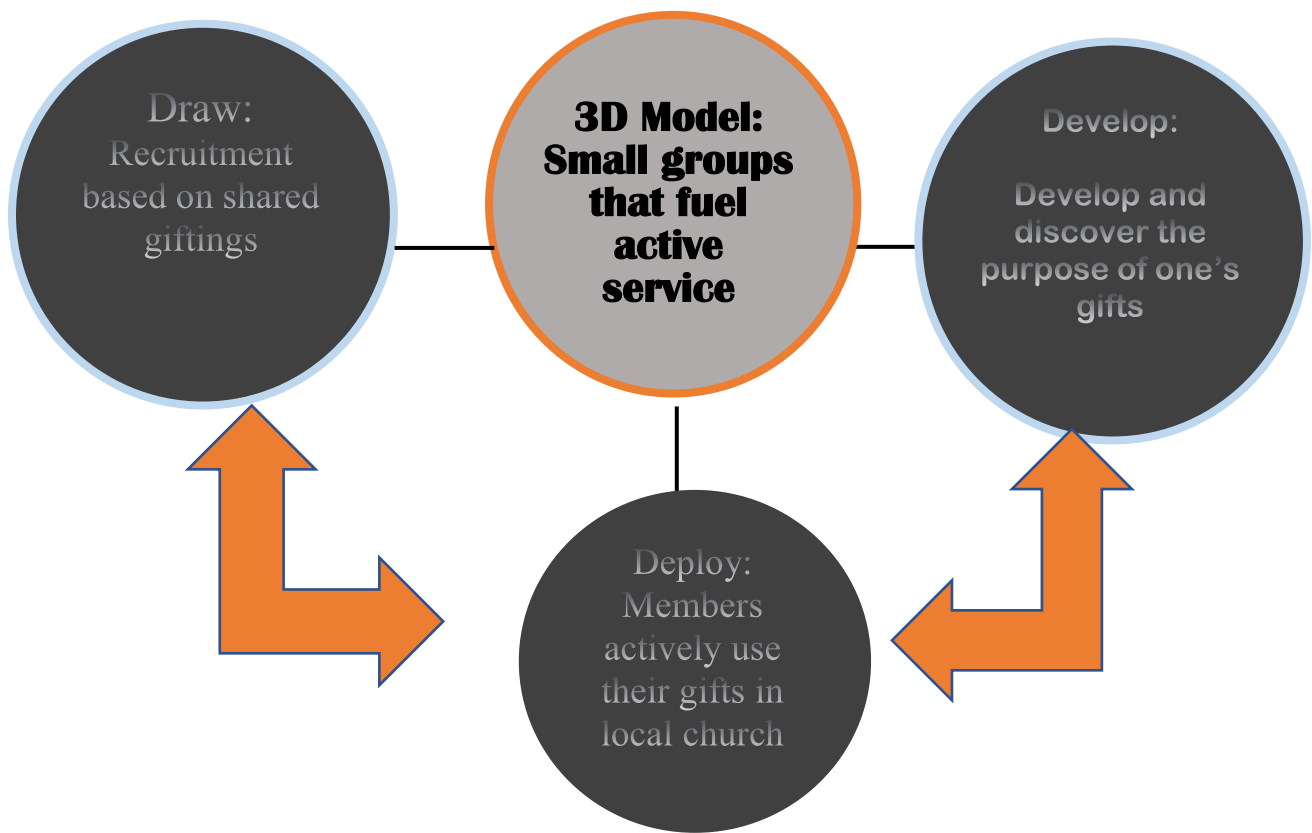


Figure 2.10 3D Model Diagram

Drawing Stage:

- Create a recruitment plan.
- Get by-in from team collectively.
- Be authentic in all your communication.
- Offer flexible serve opportunities.
- Recruit through current volunteers.
- Reach out digitally to potential volunteers.

Developing Stage:

- Define the mission clearly.

- Build deep relationships.
- Equip the necessary skillsets that are expected and required to produce excellence.
- Show appreciation and provide intentional actions that communicate their value.

Deploying Stage:

- Discover and connect their desires with an assignment.
- Help solidify a good fit that aligns with their calling and interest.
- Empower service as kingdom investment.

Final Statement

The advancement of the kingdom resides in the faith and works of people. Therefore, voluntary service is the sole avenue for advancement in the local church. Voluntary service, at its core, is fueled by desire and connection to the church's mission. Small groups can be used to communicate the mission of the church while also developing the personal and spiritual formations for every person who attends Manna Church. As a result, small groups enable proper consideration for church members, thus assimilating newcomers, connecting them to the church, and developing and deploying more ministry volunteers. The conclusions of this research project have foundationally presented an implementation plan that has benefited attendees and ministry departments in increasing personal and spiritual development while also addressing the inactiveness of attendees within Manna Church.

Appendix A

This resource provides practical steps and guidance for leaders to take in achieving the skillset for their small group. Such guidance will ensure small group leaders have support in the intervention plan of drawing, developing, and deploying team members.

SMALL-GROUP GUIDE

Draw

Goals:

- Discover individual skillsets.
- Connect people to a unique small group.

Reflection Questions:

- How are people enjoying the group?
- Are people connecting their skills and interests?
- Does everyone in the group understand why you are gathering?

Tips

- Create quality relationships through quality time.
- Discover shared interest through intentional involvement.
- Cast a vision statement and, from time to time, ask others to open the group with the vision.

Develop

Goal:

- Cultivate and deepen a personal relationship with Christ.
- Leaders will empower disciples to do the ministry's work through devotion to Christ.
- Discover God's plan for one's life.
- Develop talents and other God-given giftings for the local church.

Reflection Questions:

How is your devotion life?

How would you describe your relationship with God?

How are you currently using your gifts to advance God's mission for the church?

What are the areas that need strengthening?

Where can everyone connect to the local church?

Tips

- Actively listen by using body language to communicate your interest and engagement.
- Ask good questions that prompt good discussion and then follow-up on a few responses.
- Motivate and support throughout development without judgement.
- Provide useful resources that expand one's knowledge and skillset.

Deploy

Goals:

- Provide an opportunity to contribute and put one gift into action, building up the body of Christ.
- Raise up new leaders.
- Send out gifts to connect with specific ministry lanes.

Reflection Questions:

Who in the group has influence?

Who in the group has strong ethics, character, and discipline?

Who has potential leadership in the group?

How can I help develop and deploy specific attributes of gifts in individuals?

How would I explain why starting new groups is effective in making disciples?

Tips:

- Once group members are proficient in their skillset, encourage them to make their part even better.
- Encourage group members to engage in ministry.
- Be intentional about identifying leaders in your group.
- Look for people with strengths and talents in leadership (musicianship, communicating, organizing, motivating, relating, strategizing, etc.).
- Cultivate a multiply mindset within your group.

APPENDIX B

FACILITATOR'S NAME: STEPHEN LOVE

STUDY TITLE: A DECREASE OF SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH
PARTICIPANT URVEY

- 1) How long have you attended Manna Church?
- 2) Prior to the project, how often did you serve?
- 3) Have you or are you actively involved in a small group?

Using a 10-point scale, rate the following responses accordingly:

Strongly Disagree = 1 Disagree = 5 Strongly Agree = 10
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Small groups are important to my connection with God and the local church.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. It is a must that every member of Manna Church joins a small group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Only the staff of Manna Church should serve during weekly services.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Every believer is called to serve the local church.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Manna Church has enough space for everyone to belong.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. People connect to God and others when they are actively engaging in the church.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Do you feel that joining this small-group project has motivated you to get more involved at Manna Church?

Appendix C

FACILITATOR'S NAME: STEPHEN LOVE

STUDY TITLE: STUDY TITLE: A DECREASE OF SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Leadership Interview Questions

1. Systems: Describe your onboarding process.
2. How do you develop and deploy leaders?
3. What mechanisms are you using to recruit new volunteers to serve in your lane?
4. Do you believe every person is called to serve at Manna Church? Why or why not?
5. How beneficial do you believe small groups are at Manna Church?
6. Do you believe every member is called to serve in some capacity within the local church?
Explain.
7. Post COVID-19 pandemic, have you recognized an increase or decrease in team members actively serving?
8. What factors do you assume could contribute to the active service of team members?
(Include both internal and external factors.)
9. If there are any challenges, how have you addressed the shortage of volunteers within your lane?

Appendix D

FACILITATOR'S NAME: STEPHEN LOVE

STUDY TITLE: A DECREASE OF SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Consent Form

I have been given information about “The decrease of service in the local church” and discussed the research project with Stephen Love who is conducting this research as part of a Doctoral of Christian Leadership program at Liberty University. I have been advised of the potential burdens associated with this research, which include multiple meeting times and potential expectations of starting or joining a small group in the upcoming small-group cycle.

- I have had an opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the research and my participation.
- I also understand that my participation in this research is voluntary.
- I am free to refuse to participate, and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my treatment in any way and will not prohibit any future opportunities within my area of ministry.
- I understand that if I have any additional question about the research, I can contact the facilitator at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]
- If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Doctor of the Ministry Department at Liberty University for all resolutions.
- All information obtained will be kept in confidence and only shared with parties involved in the project.
- I attest that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any point from the project with no penalty or unjust treatment.

By signing below, I am indicating my consent to all expectations outlined in the project proposal. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for the purpose of evaluating the thesis and for journal publication, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Signed

Date

...../...../.....

Name (please print)

.....

Date: 3-2-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY21-22-533

Title: Small Groups That Fuel Active Service in The Local

Church Creation Date: 12-10-2021 End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Stephen Love

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

		Decision	No Human Subjects
Submission Type Initial	Review Type Exempt	Research	

Key Study Contacts

Member Jacob Dunlow	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	jdunlow@liberty.edu
Member Jacob Dunlow	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	jdunlow@liberty.edu
Member Stephen Love	Role Principal Investigator	Contact	slove7@liberty.edu
Member Stephen Love	Role Primary Contact	Contact	slove7@liberty.edu



To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves to grant Stephen Love permission to implement his intervention plan at Manna Church. The Lead Team of Manna Church will meet with Stephen Love on March 22, 2022, to discuss the vision and implementation of his plan, and they look forward to the learnings gleaned from his results.

Sincerely,

Christopher Fletcher
Lead Pastor
Manna Church Fayetteville. Ft. Bragg.

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