

ABSTRACT

THE INTEGRATED SMALL GROUP: BIBLE STUDY, COMMUNITY, MINISTRY, AND MISSION

by

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The purpose of this study was to discover how to develop an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry. Most small groups fall short of their full potential and the opportunity to lead individuals in comprehensive discipleship.

Using Appreciative Inquiry, existing integrative small group participants from four different churches were interviewed to discover the positive qualities that contribute to effective discipleship, which strengthens the ministry and mission of the church.

This study proved to demonstrate the potential impact of integrated small groups. As the four practices of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission interrelate, they provide avenues of holistic discipleship; however, to make integrated small groups successful, intentionality and transition are needed.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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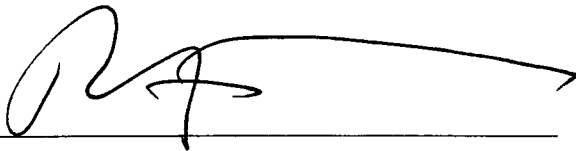
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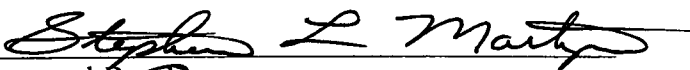
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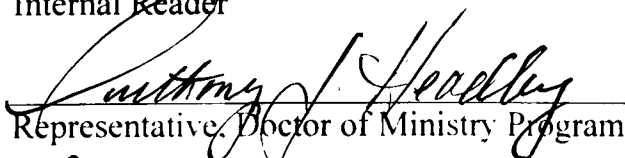
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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

I recall two intersecting formational experiences from my past. A part of my seminary experience was being placed in a small group with other seminarians. While this experience was perfunctory, I enjoyed a much more positive experience at my local church. This church was based on small group ministry. Everyone involved with the church was connected to a small group, meeting in someone's home. During my tenure there, I was privileged to host one of these meetings, and during my pastoral internship with the church, I led one of the groups. The church's small groups were very formative in my life. The group provided a relational connection I had not experienced before. Deep relationships were formed. Members were caring and supportive of one another. We grew together in the Word. The small group felt like family.

Another strong guiding influence in my life and ministry was a short-term missionary experience in the Philippines. While in the Philippines, I was impressed with the way the Filipino Christians lived out a wholehearted dedication to God. I witnessed their faithfulness in worship, Bible study, and evangelism. With them, I attended small group Bible studies, evangelistic services held in factories, and evangelistic crusades in the provinces where they would sing and share their testimonies. I shared my testimony for the first time. With each believer I saw an unswerving devotion to God and commitment to the mission of the Church. They were ready to forsake all for the sake of Christ. They were willing to leave their jobs in order to follow Christ and to do his ministry. They were not attached to any one thing more than their attachment to Christ

and his mission. During this time God made clear his call upon my life. God was sending me back to the United States to nurture and challenge such commitment and sacrifice in those who were known by his name in the States.

These two experiences had tremendous impact upon my spiritual life and call. As I desire to lead the church to be faithful disciples, fulfilling the mission of Christ, I ponder whether these two meaningful experiences can become one, whether the small group can become a catalyst for mission and ministry.

Problem

Small group ministry has the potential to provide a safe place for individuals and groups to become actively involved in ministry and mission, and yet most small group ministries fail to integrate the vital aspects of Bible study and community with ministry and mission. A disconnect exists between the dispensing of information and the transformational power of the Word of God.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover how to develop an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry. Smaller groups within the whole of the church are entrusted with the same purposes and goals as the church. Small groups will serve as avenues to involve everyone in the ministry of the church. Small groups will disciple people not only in head knowledge but will move their hearts closer to the heart of God. The practical outworking of a transformed heart is to be about the things of God: loving others into relationship with God.

Research Questions

In light of the problem and purpose stated, the following research questions emerged.

Research Question #1

What are the practices of an integrated small group?

Research Question #2

What do integrated small groups do to promote and sustain participation in Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?

Research Question #3

In an integrated small group, what is the interrelationship of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?

Definition of Terms

Terms that are specific to this research are integrated small groups, Bible study, community, ministry, and mission.

Integrated Small Groups

Small groups are gatherings of eight to ten people who meet on a regular basis for Bible study, community, mission, and ministry. The frequency of meeting may vary according to the group, with a minimum of two times per month recommended. The groups are open, meaning that new people can join at any time, and group members are encouraged to bring unchurched friends.

The integrated small group is a combination of the relational small group and task small group. Relational small groups are ordered around the purpose of Bible study, discussion, and community building. Task groups are organized around the purpose of

accomplishing a ministry or mission task. The integrated group strives to balance all four tenets of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission.

Bible Study

The Scripture is a standard component of relational small groups; however, Bible study is not standard to task groups. Scripture is the guiding principle for the activity of the church. The integrated small group brings together *what* the church does with *why* the church does it. Bible study in the small group allows all members to participate and share in discussion.

Community

Small groups provide a place to nurture meaningful relationships. Community can be built while people discuss the Scripture together. Community can be built while people enter into ministry and mission together. Community forms when people begin to care compassionately about one another.

Ministry and Mission

For the purpose of this paper the words ministry and mission are inclusive of any form of evangelism, outreach, or service that occurs outside the small group. Ministry that occurs within the small group, by one small group member to another, is part of being in community with one another. The integrated small group reaches beyond itself to serve and impact others. For the small group, reaching beyond itself may include ministry within the local corporate body of believers to which the small group is a part and ministry that reaches beyond the body of believers. The emphasis is that ministry and mission require action. Ministry and mission are the deeds that go along with the words. Ministry and mission are the practical outflow of what is learned in Bible study.

Context

Three churches within the state of Pennsylvania with small group ministries that identify Bible study, fellowship, ministry, and mission as components of their small groups were chosen to be a part of this study. The churches were The Bridge in Shillington, NorthPointe Community Church in Limerick, and Washington Crossing United Methodist Church (UMC) in Washington Crossing. Washington Crossing UMC declined participation; therefore, Living Word Community Church in Red Lion, served as the third site. First Presbyterian Church of Beaver, pastored by small group author Jeff Arnold, was chosen as an exemplar. The context of each is derived from a questionnaire completed by the senior pastor and/or the director of small groups.

First Presbyterian Church of Beaver

First Presbyterian Church of Beaver is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA). The town of Beaver has a population of six thousand with an additional seven thousand in the surrounding township. Beaver is a suburb of Pittsburgh. Beaver is a very stable community with little transitional movement. The Church was founded in 1798 and is described by the pastoral leadership as “one of the longest most influential institutions in Beaver.”

The church placed emphasis on small group Bible studies seven years ago, beginning with one “pilot group” and expanding to nearly two-dozen groups with around two hundred adults involved. Also, small groups for youth and other affinity groups were attempted. An associate pastor is the leader of the small group Bible study ministry, with the assistance of three group shepherds.

The vision/mission statement of the church is, “To Declare His Praise.” The Scriptures reveal that one way in which God is glorified is through the formation of a holy people—a community of godly, Christlike disciples. Small group Bible studies are one way in which discipleship is carried out and, therefore, bring glory to God.

Living Word Community Church

Living Word Community Church is a nondenominational church located in Red Lion, a rural town bordering York, which is considered a suburb of Baltimore, Maryland. Red Lion is a stable and growing community, experiencing rapid sprawl.

Living Word Community Church began in a basement in 1978, hiring a pastor in 1979 who remains the current senior pastor. It moved to three or four locations arriving at its current location in 2000. It now consists of more than two thousand active attenders and members, not including children and youth.

Small group ministry existed from the founding of the church, becoming more central in 1989. A director of small groups began with twelve groups, growing the ministry to its peak of 155 groups in 2004. The small group ministry continues to be led by a pastoral staff member and administrative assistant. Currently seventy-five groups exist with 750 small group members. The mission statement for the small groups is, “Growth Groups exist to help people experience the transformed life that Jesus intends by creating communities where people connect relationally to God, to each other, and the world.”

The Bridge

The Bridge, located in Shillington, a suburb of Reading, is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Church. The community is described as mostly stable. The church was

established in 1972, composed of transplanted southerners, never surpassing fifty in attendance. The church changed its name and target group and now averages 175 in attendance.

The small group ministry has gone through several transitions over a twelve-year period. The first format was a Bible study, then Care Groups were founded for the purpose of pastoral care, and now, for about one year, GRACE Groups are organized around the focus of each group living the mission of the church. The purpose of GRACE Groups is, "Gather to Reach the lost, Adore the Lord, Care for the needs of others and Equip the body of Christ for ministry." Currently nine groups exist with a total of seventy-five participants.

NorthPointe Community Church

NorthPointe Community Church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Church and is located in Limerick, a stable yet growing bedroom community of Philadelphia. The church is seven years old, worships in a school building, and has grown to two services totaling 455 in attendance, including approximately 150 children ages birth through sixth grade.

Small group ministry has been attempted since the inception of the church but is described as being in existence for about four years. A layperson is the point person for this ministry. Currently seven groups exist with sixty participants. The mission statement for the groups is, "Bring together people into an intimate environment for growth, discipleship, caring and accountability and to reach out into their local community to point people to Christ."

Methodology

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was the method of study. Through appreciative inquiry, I affirmed the positive qualities of small group ministry. I studied these positives and what they revealed as to how small group ministry can effectively disciple believers and, in doing so, strengthen the mission and ministry of the church.

At the four churches, the church ministry staff selected at least three small group participants and at least one small group leader to interview. Eighteen interviews were conducted using a researcher-designed questionnaire that followed the AI format.

Theological Foundation

Acts 2:42-47 gives a snapshot of life in the early Church. In verse 42 Luke gives a general summary indicating that early Christians were devoted to four things: “the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (NIV). Luke continues to expound further on these four practices in verses 43-47. These four items were standard components of the early Church (Barrett 160), which is evident in their repeated occurrence in the book of Acts, especially in 4:32-35 and 5:12-16. Therefore, this passage was not informational in content but was intended to edify believers to continue in this manner (160).

Devotion portrays a strong ongoing commitment to these activities, to each other, and ultimately to God. Luke encouraged the believers “to be constant” or “to be steadfastly attentive” or “to persevere” in these four matters (“Strong’s Number: 4342”).

The believers were devoted to the apostles’ teaching. The apostles would have taught not only from the existing Scriptures but also from what they had seen and witnessed. Just as on the road to Emmaus where Jesus connected the message of the

prophets (the Old Testament) to what had just taken place in the events of his suffering, death, and resurrection, the apostles would make these connections, teaching that the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus, as is evident in the preceding pericope where Peter addresses the crowds. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring things to their remembrance, and the Holy Spirit was active and guided the apostles as they taught. The apostles would have taught what Jesus taught them. As the apostles were groomed and prepared for this moment by Jesus, so the apostles were pouring into others so that others might be prepared and effective in their living and ministry. To hear the apostles' teaching is to put it into practice. The believers were devoted to listening to the teaching and then applying it to their lives (Barrett 163).

The fellowship that was among the believers is emphasized throughout the passage. In the NIV, the word *together* appears three times, translated from three different Greek words or word groups. In Acts 2:46, "they continued to meet together in the temple courts." The word *homothumadon* is better translated "with one mind," "with one accord," or "with one passion" ("Strong's Number: 3661"). This word is unique to the Greek language, compounding two words, meaning *to rush along* and *in unison*. A togetherness, a oneness, a unity exists in the Christian community that binds believers together in the things that are meaningful to the community. This togetherness is illustrated in this passage by praying and worshipping together, having possessions in common, and eating together.

Commentators believe that when the twelve were with Jesus they had all their possessions in common, with Judas as their treasurer (Barnes 57). The apostles and first Christians followed in this practice, selling their possessions, and having everything in

common. The purpose was so that they could help those who were in need. Theologians disagree how long this practice continued, but one thing cannot be disputed: The Word of God had always taught God's people to care for the poor and the needs of others.

The believers broke bread together, with verse 46 adding that they ate together. Theologians debate whether the "breaking of bread" refers to the Lord's Supper or to the common meal. Hans Conzelmann conjectures that Luke's lack of distinction between the two portrays the unity of the two (23). Joseph A. Fitzmyer also upholds that verse 46 refers to the Lord's Supper and then the ordinary meal that was shared together at times for the purpose of sustenance (272). Jesus introduced the Eucharist in the midst of the Passover meal, a complete meal.

The fourth concept named by Luke is prayer. Prayer is further expounded in verse 46 where the disciples continue to meet in the temple courts. The believers prayed together and may have prayed common prayers together. They may have attended Jewish prayer services in the temple (Bruce 73). F. F. Bruce goes on to uphold the temple as not only a place of worship but of witness, which concurs with the additional mention of Solomon's colonnade by Luke in 3:11 and 5:12 (74).

Luke concludes this passage, saying, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b). Some theologians begin this pericope with verse 41, which states the result of Peter's sermon, three thousand baptized and added to their number. Evangelism is not included on the list of four but is, nonetheless, present. Perhaps these four practices both result in and provide a place of assimilation for new believers.

A glimpse of the typical life of the early Church is seen in this passage as including the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. These concepts were given not for information but for edification, that believers today might also be encouraged to be continually devoted to these practices. The forms and packaging may change to adapt to the culture, but the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer will always be defining characteristics of the Church.

Overview

In Chapter 2 I proceed to review the small group literature in order to determine the different models and purposes of small group ministry. Chapter 3 covers in detail the appreciative inquiry methodology of the research, with a record of my findings in Chapter 4. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I evaluate and interpret the findings in light of the literature review.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature pertinent to investigating the development of an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry. I introduce the reader to the most common small group models and their emphases. Also covered is literature that supports the development of an integrated small group model. The first section reveals a culture that is ripe for this type of integrated model.

Cultural Shift from Modern to Postmodern

Entrance into the twenty-first century and the move toward postmodernism has brought a paradigm shift to the culture from which the Church has not remained insulated. The under-thirty-fives are absent from the pews. “Younger adults are walking away from institutions characterized by a culture of control and a style of delegation that is considered disempowering” (Gibbs 13). In contrast, older members of the congregation may suffer from what Eddie Gibbs calls an “entrenched dependency system” (35). In years past, the pastor was assigned the duty of all things spiritual and the congregation assumed responsibility for other more “practical” items such as finance and property. The paradigm shift calls for the pastor and lay leaders to address all aspects of the church together.

The top-down, hierarchical control systems that disempower others are giving way to systems that partner and network with others, which Gareth Weldon Icenogle describes as the move “from the pyramid to the circle, from power down to power around, from bureaucracy to organic structures” (10). The evolving structure serves to

empower others in the ministry of the church. Rather than the church leaders determining ministries and finding people to participate and assist in these ministries, people are free to follow their heart for ministry. Participants are involved with every aspect of the ministry, from birth of the vision to evaluation of effectiveness. The result is more creative, productive ministries (10). This style can more quickly respond to the needs and the rapid rate of change in society.

A different style of leadership is required from the pastor and the administrative body, which Thomas G. Bandy calls the “permission-giving church” (35). The pastor and lay leaders work together and agree on the core values, beliefs, vision, and mission of the church (38), which serve to define the congregational identity and to provide guiding boundaries from which groups can “discern, design, implement, and evaluate” ministry (127). The key leadership’s role is more behind-the-scenes or along the sidelines. They are advising, coaching, mentoring, equipping, and sending. They are “*low-profile* [original emphasis] relationship-building over high-profile control” (Gibbs 108).

Icenogle, Bandy, and Gibbs all agree that this paradigm shift paves the way for small group ministry, cell group ministry, and/or ministry teams. These groups naturally provide the place for people to come together for the purpose of going forth into the world in ministry and mission. Relationships are built and spiritual growth inspires ministry ideas. Small group ministry is a place where people can put into practice what they are learning, both within and beyond their group.

Before looking at the integrated model, the next section presents descriptions of the most familiar small group models.

Small Group Ministry Models

The majority of small groups fall into one of three categories: task, relational, or affinity groups. Affinity groups are gatherings of people with a common interest, and include support recovery groups. For the topic of this study, I am interested in the task and relational groups. This section gives summary descriptions of small group ministry models. John Wesley's organization of societies, bands, and classes is the historical foundation for the small group model. Covenant Discipleship Groups are an adaptation of Wesley's class format currently used in the United Methodist Church. David Yonggi Cho was the first to use small group ministry in the recent past. Dale Galloway studied and adapted Cho's model in the United States (Galloway and Mills). Carl F. George developed the MetaChurch model that emphasizes church growth. Also included are Ralph W. Neighbour's small groups and Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson's description of small groups at Willow Creek Community Church. Lastly, Jeffrey Arnold proposes an integrated model.

John Wesley

The society in Wesley's day experienced a cultural shift similar to the current shift from modernism to postmodernism. Eighteenth century England was in the midst of an industrial revolution "which was transforming Britain from an agrarian to an industrial society" (Manskar, *Small Groups* 3). People were flocking from the rural to urban settings to work in factories, mills, and mines. Many found themselves in poverty, and they had left family, friends, and any support systems behind. "[T]he Methodist societies and class meetings became their support network and spiritual home (3-4).

Wesley was an effective organizer, utilizing a system of society, classes, and bands. Wesley studied and modified other group systems, including that of the Lutheran Pietist leader Philip Jacob Spener, the Moravians, Anabaptist groups, and the societies within the Church of England (Hunter, *Church* 84).

The society was a larger gathering of perhaps fifty people, similar to the local church of today. Michael Henderson refers to the society as the cognitive model; it existed for the purpose of education (83-84). The society “included lecture, preaching, public reading, hymn singing, and ‘exhorting’” (84). Those in attendance did not participate by sharing on a personal level. The society assessed and cared for physical needs.

The class was more the size and function of today’s cell or small group. The class emerged out of financial need. In an attempt to clear the debt on the New Room, the meeting house in Bristol, Captain Foy suggested that each member of the society give a penny a week. Societies were divided into groups of twelve with an appointed leader to visit each member on a weekly basis to collect the money. If a member could not afford to give the penny, the leader would contribute it for him or her. The benefits of the group coming together once a week rather than have the leader visit each home soon became evident. Opportunity for pastoral oversight became obvious and was soon incorporated (D. Watson 93-94).

Henderson refers to the class as concentrating on the behavioral mode (93). Spiritual growth with the goal of personal holiness was the aim with the transformation of outward observable behavior as the focus. All class members shared from their own experience, reflecting on the state of their soul and “advice, correction, reproof, and

consolation” were offered (D. Watson 95-96). The class faced the reality of sin with the hope of God’s transformational power (Henderson 104). The class was a closed group for reasons of confidentiality and acceptance (107). Henderson believes the class to be the “most influential unit and probably Wesley’s greatest contribution to the technology of group experience” (93).

The band existed for those desiring “a more rigorous disciplinary oversight” than the classes offered (D. Watson 117). The emphasis was more on the affective mode, where “motives and heartfelt impressions” were examined (Henderson 112). The band was also a closed group for purposes of confidentiality. A penitent band also existed, which is comparable to today’s support group.

Wesley championed lay leadership of these groups and in other capacities that to this point in time were limited to ordained clergy. The leadership of the classes, which were mixed gender groups, was open to men and women alike (Henderson 98). The classes were the only one of their kind in Britain where people from all socioeconomic levels mixed (98). The system emphasized personal growth and accountability to one another. The class meeting was “a means of seeking obedience to God’s will” and although it was not the focus, through this process the classes had effect on the world around them (D. Watson 142). While service was not a major purpose for the classes, many poor were coming to know Christ, and their needs were met in an anonymous manner. Wesley and the Methodists provided schools, hospitals and other economic developments for the poor (143). Great numbers were coming to know Christ, but this growth was a result of Wesley’s open-air preaching activity rather than the classes. The

societies and classes, however, proved an effective means of connecting these great numbers and bringing about true transformation in their lives.

Covenant Discipleship Groups

Covenant Discipleship Groups are a contemporary rendering of Wesley's class meeting currently promoted within the United Methodist Church. Steven W. Manskar claims, "Covenant Discipleship Groups ... are direct descendants of the class meetings" (*Accountable Discipleship* 98). These groups "lifted out the pieces of the class meeting that are most needed for Christians today: mutual accountability and support" (Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship* 16). "The purpose of Covenant Discipleship is accountability" (16). Members of Covenant Discipleship Groups draw up a covenant with clauses holding them accountable to acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion. The categories of the acts are based on Wesley's general rules: Do no harm, do all the good you can, and attend to the ordinances, which are a balance between what Wesley called "works of mercy" and "works of piety" (25). These two categories of works balance a Christian's relationship with neighbor, "works of mercy," and relationship with God, "works of piety" (25).

Covenant Discipleship Groups are basically accountability groups. "They are not where our discipleship happens but where we make sure that it happens" (G. Watson 28). Gayle Turner Watson defines Covenant Discipleship Groups as a place "where Christian disciples give an account of their walk with Christ" (27). The covenant that is written by the group provides the agenda for the meeting. The leader, who rotates each week, reads a clause from the covenant and responds to it. The leader then guides each member to respond. The response includes how the member has fulfilled or failed to fulfill the

clause. Group members also share noteworthy happenings that may help other members or any special difficulties that they are experiencing (44-45).

The goal of Covenant Discipleship Groups is not Bible study, community, ministry, or mission. In the words of Covenant Discipleship, the groups' intent is not to perform acts of compassion, justice, worship, or devotion together as a group. The purpose of the meeting is to hold one another accountable to practicing these works throughout the week. The covenant serves as "a guide for a life of faithful discipleship" ("Accountable Discipleship" 3). Manskar briefly mentions that works of piety, such as Bible reading and prayer, can be included in group meetings (*Accountable Discipleship* 16). No mention of works of mercy is included; however, an article in *Covenant Discipleship Quarterly* suggests that caring ministries, visitation, be the focus of some Covenant Discipleship Groups: "[T]he primary focus for members of the group would be compassion, the other components ... [j]ustice, worship, and devotion would be integrated into the group process (Reuteler 7).

David Yonggi Cho

Cho seems to be the first to reintroduce the small group concept, which he refers to as home cell groups, to the church in the contemporary era circa 1964. A pastor of a large congregation in Seoul, Korea, he found himself physically, emotionally, and spiritually depleted. A doctor advised him to find a less demanding career, telling him he would never recover. Cho heard God say that he would heal him over a ten-year period. Cho chose to believe God and to seek God's direction in ministry. God guided him to develop small group ministry, to be led by laity. Although the deacon board, comprised of all men, saw the biblical basis for the concept, they did not respond positively to taking

on this responsibility. In further prayer, God revealed the use of women as lay leaders, a risky innovation for their oriental setting.

Cho, in authoritarian style, assigned all people, according to geographic regions, to a small group. Some resisted the groups at first, but they were quickly accepted.

The groups began with Cho offering only two “suggestions” to his first small group leaders: “Watch the Christians to see that they don’t backslide, and go out and win your neighbors for Jesus Christ” (32). Fellowship is not a concern and even seen as a real danger as groups will “feed on themselves” (113). He fears fellowship will lead to the neglect of evangelism. Fellowship is more defined as social activities. He never mentions service as a requirement for the group. Group members do serve one another in time of need.

The groups are largely evangelistic in nature. One tool of evangelism is that of serving others. He tells of one person who dedicates a few hours every Saturday to riding the elevator of her city apartment building in order to assist people when needed. In time she learns their names, develops a relationship with them and invites them to her apartment group meeting. The elevator evangelism has been so effective that others have adopted this evangelistic method. Cho does not promote door-to-door evangelism, knocking on someone’s door and making a gospel presentation or invitation to salvation or even to the group. He does not use the term, but the method seems to be more of a relationship evangelism style.

The other “suggestion,” “Watch the Christians to see that they don’t backslide,” is only addressed in passing. This suggestion could be called accountability, as elements of accountability surface in the book. Cho mentions the leaders calling on those who are not

present at group meetings. He also tells a story that would be described as harassment in the United States. One leader was persistent in inviting a couple and the couple could not say no to attending. Finally the couple sold their home and moved across the city, but the leader tracked down their new address and gave their contact information to the group leader in that geographic area.

In summary, Cho's groups primarily focus on evangelism. The groups contain elements of biblical fellowship in that the members care for one another in prayer and service. Service occurs as an aside of evangelism and care for one another is offered in the sense of biblical fellowship. Worship is also always a part of the groups through the singing of songs. The thrust of the groups is growing the church, growing the groups, and growing the large Sunday morning worship gathering.

Dale Galloway

Galloway is known for having built a successful church through small group ministry. He adapted Cho's model to his setting in the United States (Galloway and Mills 15). While he states four purposes for groups—evangelism, discipleship, shepherding or care, and service—the emphasis is on pastoral care and evangelism. This emphasis is evident in his definition of a small group as an “ongoing relational gathering” (53), the name of the groups, TLC, Tender Loving Care groups, in his twenty-one principles (69-77), as well as the choice between pastoral care and evangelism as group objectives, defining the TLC groups as encompassing both (136). Service seems limited to using one's gifts within the group. His “unlimited opportunities of service” is only accompanied by one specific example of training a new small group leader (67-68).

The responsibility of care rests upon the group leader in Galloway's groups. The group leader, called a lay pastor, carries the roles of evangelist, connector who reconciles others to God, shepherd who cares, and servant (Galloway and Mills 83). Galloway instructs that burnout is to be expected in leaders and to offer them periods of restoration. Unfortunately he offers no tips for avoiding burnout. The Willow Creek model, described later, advocates mutual care. This mutual sharing of responsibilities by all group members lessens the burden on one individual, illustrating the ultimate potential and strength lying within the body of Christ.

Overall, Galloway offers three types of groups: nurture/care, task, and support. A geographic group may be suggested to individuals, but the church will work with individuals to find a group in which they are comfortable. Individuals ultimately choose the group they join. Groups are open to new members at any time. The groups emphasize a loving, caring atmosphere and the purpose of evangelism.

Carl F. George

George is associated with the term MetaChurch. In 1986, George introduced the MetaChurch Project at the American Society for Church Growth ("MetaChurch Project"). The MetaChurch model organizes the church into three different sizes of groups: celebration, congregation, and cell (*Prepare Your Church* 76-77). The celebration is the large gathering of all members for corporate worship. The congregation is a grouping of fifty to one hundred people and is explained as a church-within-a-church. This group is similar in size to Wesley's society. The congregation meets for general fellowship and has a family feel to it. The cell is the small group meeting of about ten people and will be the focus here.

George believes cell groups to be “the most strategically significant foundation for spiritual formation and assimilation, for evangelism and leadership development, for the most essential functions that God has called for in the church” (*Prepare Your Church* 41). Like Galloway, George defines the groups as an “ongoing relational gathering” (59). He outlines the purpose of the cell as accomplishing four “dimensions”: “loving or pastoral care, learning or Bible knowledge, deciding or internal administration, and doing or duties that serve those outside the group” (89). He says that depending on the group, one or more of these dimensions will be emphasized above the others.

Most groups fall into either nurture and task groups. The nurture groups emphasize caring and sharing but may take on service projects or other “doing” responsibilities outside of the group. The task groups focus on doing and deciding but a need of loving and learning is necessary for the survival of the groups. While George recognizes the possibility of service outside of the group, he does not include service as a requirement. Service *may* occur, but the organizational structure does not intentionally plan for service.

An emphasis on pastoral care is present overall with a special emphasis given within the nurture groups. George finally explicitly states this emphasis: “[P]astoring supersedes teaching” (*Prepare Your Church* 99). George cautions against rigid agendas that push out the care of others.

Ralph W. Neighbour

Neighbour also utilizes the terminology of cells, congregations, and celebrations (94). His cells are called “Shepherd Groups”:

The Shepherd Group is the cell where people are nurtured, equipped to serve, and where members build up or edify one another. It forms a

community where believers are called to be accountable to each other, and where they can be totally transparent with one another. (218)

He refers to edification as most important (219). The four stages of the group meeting further define their functions. They are welcome, worship, word, and works (264). Works are defined as evangelism.

Three to four members of the Shepherding Group form a sub-cell called a Share Group (Neighbour 220). Evangelism is the premier function of the Share Group. Unbelievers are invited to join the Share Group in a relaxed, nonthreatening setting (294). Unbelievers are embraced where they are. Neighbour speaks against the use of Bible study to reach unbelievers, referring to the method of the Apostle Paul in Athens in which Paul begins with the understanding of the people and builds upon it, leading them into biblical truths (104).

Evangelism is a definite emphasis in Neighbour's groups. He refers to "personal growth with a motive—winning the lost!" (277). The congregations, comprised of five cell groups, also hold special evangelistic activities (224). At the congregational level members engage in community projects such as "Caring for Aged, Rap Sessions for Teens on Drugs, and Assisting Families in Crisis" (224). Christian social action and equipping events are also a part. Service opportunities beyond the cell and the congregation are available.

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson

Willow Creek Community Church has altered their original approach to small group ministry. They used to offer one style of group for the purpose of serious spiritual growth. These groups were open only to married couples who would make a two-year commitment to three meetings per month. Willow Creek now offers a variety of groups.

They distinguish themselves as a church *of* small groups rather than a church *with* small groups. The small group is the organizational structure of the church.

Willow Creek offers five different types of groups, each with a different emphasis. The disciple-making groups develop the spiritual disciplines and also disciple others. Community groups build community and invite new members. Service groups are a task group, responsible for a certain task. They may also invite new members. Seeker groups lead people to Christ and disciple new converts. Lastly, the support groups support each other as they work through personal difficulties (Donahue and Robinson 183).

Even though these groups are varied, Donahue and Robinson spend a good bit of time unpacking two emphases: community and spiritual growth. A two-part definition of shepherding encompasses both of these emphases: Caring is defined as supplying for the needs of participants, and discipling is defined as developing participants (107). These emphases are vitally interrelated as the authors state, “[S]piritual growth cannot take place apart from community” (59).

Donahue and Robinson give five aspects of authentic relationships: transparency with one other, caregiving, humility in service, admonishment described as “truth-telling,” and affirmation in the form of celebration (60-68). I list these areas to show the presence of service within his description of community. Serving one another is a part of community and is highly emphasized. Donahue and Robinson note that service can extend beyond the faith community, but this extension is not emphasized.

Donahue and Robinson caution one to balance the shepherding skills of care and discipling (118). The leader, as shepherd, models this balance for the group members.

They also stress the importance of mutual care within the group (114). Care is not just the responsibility of the group leader. Just as the pastor of a congregation is not called to be the exclusive caregiver, neither is the small group leader called to be the exclusive caregiver of the small group. Christians are called to care for one another. Care is the responsibility of the group. Mutual care provides an opportunity for group members to grow in their gifts and graces and guards against group leader burnout, as noted in Galloway's groups.

In summary, a variety of types of groups are offered at Willow Creek. They each emphasize one purpose: community, discipleship, ministry, or evangelism. Although Willow Creek is known for its seeker services, evangelism is not the dominant focus of its small group ministry or of Donahue and Robinson's book, *Building a Church of Small Groups*. The community aspects of care for one another and discipleship are the emphasis. The groups are all open, meaning that new people can join at any time. Service to one another is expected as a part of community life. Service groups are organized around certain tasks. Service outside the group or outside the realm of task responsibility is not a matter of discussion.

Jeffrey Arnold

Arnold names Neighbour, George, and Donahue as defining the three existing models of small group ministry. In his study he has found that groups in churches include these commonalities: Groups are "small and Christian in orientation, some study occurs, and people feel loved and cared for" (*Big Book* 11). Arnold offers the following working definition of groups: "A small group is intent on participating with Christ in building his

ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world” (23).

Three different relationships exist in this definition that are also drawn from Ephesians 4:11-16: “the individual’s relationship with the group (the inward dimension); Christ’s relationship with the individual and group (the upward dimension); and the individual’s and group’s witness to the world (the outward dimension)” (Arnold, *Big Book* 32). The inward dimension encompasses discovering spiritual gifts, developing lay leadership, and practicing effective congregational care. The upward dimension includes Bible study as spiritual nurture and thanksgiving and praise. The outward dimension is service and evangelism, which comprises evangelism, spiritual and numerical growth, and group multiplication.

Like Donahue and Robinson, group care is shared among all the group members and is not just the group leader’s responsibility (Arnold, *Big Book* 56). A balanced view of service and use of gifts is reflected in the belief that “each member of the group exists in ministry within the group, and for ministry outside the group” (58). Arnold is also sensitive to impacting people both near and far in his definitions of evangelism and mission. Evangelism is Christians reaching people with whom they have everyday contact through word and deed (203). Mission is used to reach people of “every race, language and nation” (221). Arnold does not get bogged down with distinguishing between social concern and evangelism when defining missional outreach. He says the “goal of mission is evangelism, but the means is compassion” (221). Arnold provides the most holistic approach to the small group, upholding the purposes of discipleship, fellowship, worship, service, and evangelism.

Having surveyed the most common small group ministry models, I now look at the key elements comprising the integrated small group model.

Key Components of the Integrated Small Group

Three or four key components arise out of the survey of the various small group ministries. They are Bible study and prayer, a ministry task, and mutual care and support of loving relationships through biblical community and, for some, the component of worship. These aspects are reflected in the study of Acts 2:42-47. The disciples were devoted to the apostles' teaching, as they learned and applied what they learned. They are in community, sharing their meals together. They are worshipping, studying the Scriptures, and praying together. They are serving others, sharing their possessions. They are witnesses, as others accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The mission statement of the Church I currently serve, Faith United Methodist Church, suggests a way to outline and embrace all the key components. Although overlap will occur, the following categorization is offered. "Connect with God" encompasses worship, Bible study, and prayer. "Connect with Others" is the community in mutual care and support of one another. "Connect Others with God" is the outreach and mission of the church. Arnold similarly integrates these in his three dimensions—upward, inward, and, outward (*Big Book* 32). Based in Paul D. Hanson's study, Icenogle brings together these three concepts, saying, "Worship is the just relationship with God, righteousness is the just relationship of persons with one another inside the community, and compassion is the just mission of the community into the world" (63).

Connect with God

I begin with worship, as it is not included as a standard component in all small group definitions. The limited definition of worship in song, which can be difficult in a small group, especially if no one in the group is gifted to lead in music, is the major reason for its lack of inclusion. However, expanding the definition to include times of worshipping God through prayers of thanksgiving, psalms of praise, and through encounters with God through the study of Scripture opens the door for all groups to worship. As the holy and living God is encountered, the only response is one of worship. Some may respond in singing, some in prayers of adoration, and others with a hush of awe, but worship will be a part of gathering with God. Furthermore, worshipful encounters with God transform and lead people to share the good news of Christ with others joyfully. One must be a worshipper before being a witness (Gibbs 84). Witness is a result of a worshipful encounter with God.

The Scriptures are standard to any small group relational meeting; however, Scriptures are not always a part of the task group. The Scriptures are necessary to the task group as they are the basis from which people learn and understand what they do. Without any biblical grounding or spiritual influence, the task becomes just a task. A task informed by the Scriptures and empowered by prayer becomes a ministry.

The Scriptures are the springboard into mission and ministry. The emphasis is not on information but spiritual formation and transformation. Believers approach the Scriptures expecting to encounter the God of the Scriptures, from which they leave changed persons. “To know and not do, is not to know” (Donahue and Robinson 73). The small group provides a place to learn and grow and develop into mature disciples, putting

into practice what is learned. “Mission is always the fulfillment of learning” (Icenogle 120).

Western society tends to divide belief from action, faith from works (Icenogle 66). The small group is a place to integrate being and doing, faith and action. This integration requires extra effort because even many small group curricular resources fail to help a group consider the ministry implications of the Bible study (112). Roberta Hestenes in *Using the Bible in Groups* introduces several methods of study that move toward service and increased application. Wesley’s class meetings and societies served to incorporate scriptural learning into personal piety and social holiness or responsibility (Lyddon 7). Scripture transformed the individual, and those transformed impacted the world around them. “Prayer, worship, and Bible study—all lead to this end: participation in God’s love for the world and service that leads to greater well-being for all” (Foss 99).

Prayer is an essential part of any small group gathering. Prayer is communication with God. Arnold names three main types of prayer to include in small group life: worship, confession, and petition (*Big Book* 185). Every member should be encouraged to participate in prayer. Involvement can be as simple as going around the circle and each person praying a sentence prayer or a popcorn prayer where each says something for which they are thankful. The group should be challenged to build and grow together in the discipline of prayer. Donahue and Robinson caution the group not just to do the circle prayer but suggest praying in pairs, praying silently, or writing prayers in journals (86). Cindy Bunch has many practical suggestions for all the small group components. She suggests occasionally devoting an entire meeting to worship and prayer (65).

Connect with Others

From the Greek *koinonia*, community or fellowship is the key emphasis of relational groups. Community provides a sense of belonging to those in the group. The “one another” passages of the New Testament open up the concept of mutuality. No one person is always giving or receiving. An interchange occurs between persons. The group is interdependent. Mutual love is the foundation for mutual care and concern, mutual encouragement, mutual submission, and prayer for one another. Donahue and Robinson sum up these mutual practices, stating five that are absolutely necessary for authentic relationship. Self-disclosure is to know and be known, caregiving is to love and be loved, humility is to serve and be served, truth telling is to admonish and be admonished, and affirmation is to celebrate and be celebrated (60). Whereas Galloway expects small group leaders to experience burnout (Galloway and Mills 109) as they offer pastoral care to group members, mutuality prevents any one such person to carry this heavy load and provides for the longevity of the leadership. As stated previously, the paradigm shift calls for leadership responsibilities to be flattened, shared among the group, and biblical mutuality sustains this concept. In other words, “disciples take care of each other” (Foss 75). Believers receive care so that they may care for others (Komisky 57).

Eugene H. Peterson has warned against turning “community as commodity” (qtd. in Gorman 227). True community is a gift of God. Individuals can only make themselves available in intentional ways. The Holy Spirit works to form and grace the group with so great a gift.

I include in this section any ministry or gift of service that is given to the church or among church attenders, reserving the following section to those ministries with the

purpose of evangelization. Small groups may minister together in church ministries. I belonged to a church in which each small group took turns cleaning the church. Small groups can consider needs within the local congregation to which they would like to minister together. Small groups may minister to church members who are outside their small group. In my local context, the lay leadership is excited about the idea of each small group adopting one of our homebound members. The small group can meet spiritual needs, holding their meetings occasionally in the homebound member's home, as well as being aware and available to meet other essentials, such as physical needs as they arise.

The small group must guard itself against the same tendency of the church, to turn inward upon itself, rather than reaching out to others. Very few groups, except for the support and recovery groups, advocate closed groups where no one else may join after the group has formed. Unfortunately, the concept of community has been widely misunderstood and distorted to mean exclusivity, where the biblical model of community is anything but that. Arnold embraces community as the foundation for all the other small group components. He describes small groups as a caring community, a studying community, a praying community, a multiplying community and a mission-oriented community (*Big Book*). Donahue and Robinson say, "Spiritual growth cannot take place apart from community" (59). They further define community as "being Christ to one another, sharing the fullness of his life with everyone we meet" (11). Icenogle, in speaking of the apostles, says, "Their ministry emerged out of their gathering to share their common life—their personas, their relationships, their possessions, their food, their meetings and their worship—with whomever had need for them. Their life together

became their ministry” (326). William M. Easum and Thomas G. Bandy speak of the twin “flows” of relationship building and faith development as “currents that carry the participants forward eventually to flower into mission” (153). People will grow spiritually through their acts of service to one another (Mallory and Smith 203). Darrell L. Guder states that the practices of the church, “joining and sharing, eating and drinking, listening and caring, testing and deciding, welcoming and befriending” (181), “not only form and guide the internal life of the community but also define the church’s action with the world” (182). God always has desired to bless others through his people. When God called Abram, his desire was to bless Abram, so that he could be a blessing to others (Gen. 12). Christians are called together by God as a faith community through which he desires to accomplish his mission of drawing others into relationship with him.

Connect Others with God

This section deals with mission and outreach. For the purposes of this study, mission is ministry or acts of service to another people group with the intent of evangelization. Outreach is ministry or acts of service with those in one’s own geographic area with the intent of evangelization. Mission and outreach are any attempt to connect others with God.

Small group ministries such as those designed by Cho and George have excelled in the area of evangelization. They have emphasized evangelization and multiplication of groups above any other component. Evangelization can either be the greatest strength or greatest weakness of the small group. The area of ministry to others was such a great concern for Arnold that he dedicated an entire book to outreach, *Small Group Outreach: Turning Groups Inside Out*, six years after his well-balanced integrated approach to small

groups in *The Big Book of Small Groups*. Arnold says, “The challenge for groups and individuals using this resource is to prepare to move from self to other, from one small group to many small groups, from a static ministry (my group) to a dynamic ministry (God’s groups) and from inreach to outreach” (*Small Group Outreach* 11). Icenogle warns to guard against isolationism (63). He says, “Too often small groups have a reputation for being caring and supportive of one another but having no positive impact on the way people behave toward creation or the world beyond” (24). He speaks of *intragroup* and *intergroup* ministry orientation. “Every covenant group has a call to itself and a call beyond itself ... a call to meet God and a call to help others meet God” (42).

Small groups can serve as the link to help others connect with God. Witnessing to others comes more easily to small group members. Small group members become accustomed to talking about their faith within the safe atmosphere of their small group community, preparing them to talk about their faith in a more natural manner with those outside the group and outside the church (Hunter, *Church* 115). Still, very few Christians do personal evangelism. Cincinnati Vineyard has conquered this obstacle by having small groups participate together as a group in outreach projects every four to six weeks (117). Cincinnati Vineyard and Steve Sjogren have popularized “servant evangelism” with large service blitzes or free giveaways with “no strings attached” (17). Servant evangelism offers another tangible way for small groups to be present in their geographic communities. These projects also offer opportunities for the group to grow in their relationship to one other (Arnold, *Small Group Outreach* 98). Small groups also offer a low-key, nonthreatening place for small group members to invite pre-Christians. Lyman Coleman refers to small groups as “side door evangelism” (qtd. in Arnold, *Small Group*

Outreach 31). The seeker is able to ask probing questions and the person who has invited the seeker now has a whole group to help answer these probing questions (33-35). Arnold praises small group ministry as “the most effective means of direct evangelism that exists” (35). Small groups may also financially and spiritually support mission and go on short-term mission trips together.

Small groups can and should be catalysts for mission and ministry. A sign of spiritual maturity is evident when individuals and groups move beyond themselves to minister to others (Icenogle 110). Participation in mission and ministry will contribute to their spiritual maturity and growth.

The Integration of the Small Group

Having defined the key components of the integrated small group and showing how these components interrelate to one another, the challenge comes in accomplishing the integration and maintaining a balance of the components. Balance of two or more purposes is difficult. Even groups that exist for the two purposes of Bible study and community struggle not to become preoccupied with one or the other of these purposes. Balance is not the same as equality. Balancing does not mean that equal time is dedicated to each of the key components. It does mean that all the components are a part of group life. The challenge in this paper is the balance of Bible study and community, on one hand, and mission and ministry on the other. The challenge is integrating the two major types of groups mentioned earlier as task and relational groups.

Many have recognized this challenge. Robert Wuthnow identifies the “two axes of debate” as individual responsibility, composed of individual spiritual development, personal development and mutual support, and faith and works, which is defined as

putting faith into practice (345). He warns of a personal piety that removes service from everyday life (365). Hestenes defines the challenge as institutional versus relational. The institutional is the formal organizational structure of the church. The relational is the relationships that form a sense of belonging. Hestenes warns that congregations can become a place of conflict as these two groups try to coexist with their differing goals within one congregation (*Turning Committees* 4-8). Sue Mallory and Brad Smith identify the two imbalances as teaching and activity (122). They further observe that most evangelical churches tend toward the teaching imbalance and mainline churches tend toward the activity imbalance (122). The struggle for balance is not a new challenge, for many of the ascetics are known for their extremes, but Saint Benedict called for balance, a harmony of being and doing (Canham 11). Luther E. Smith, Jr.'s book surveys a number of groups who strive to hold the balance. The groups "labor for a fellowship of *intimacy* [original emphasis], where members nurture and care for one another's physical, emotional, and spiritual need. And they work toward a fellowship of *mission* [original emphasis], where compassion for God's people involves the fellowship in social transformation" (22). Lyman Coleman, founder of Serendipity groups, also called for a "delicate balance between study and action, fellowship and outreach. Otherwise, you run the danger of slipping into a flabby, undisciplined fellowship" (18).

Being aware that balance is difficult to achieve, many also identify small groups ministry as just the place to seek a balance of Bible study, community, ministry and mission. Intentional integration of these concepts is crucial. "Christian small groups seldom 'spontaneously' erupt into mission or serious Christian service" (Hestenes, *Turning Committees* 9). Mallory and Smith also comment that churches teach biblical

principles assuming that people can put them into practice on their own. Churches help individuals identify their giftedness assuming that they will find a place of ministry on their own. According to Mallory and Smith they seldom do so. “Only a small percentage of the population has the entrepreneurial ability or the initiative to launch out without further help” (204). Small groups can be the avenue to bridge the gap between being and doing, learning and applying, teaching and activity.

Hestenes notes the difficulty in adding ministry and mission to a group that is already established with the purpose of Bible study and community (*Turning Committees* 9). Mallory and Smith, whose ultimate purpose is equipping the laity for ministry, encourage equipping ministry to be weaved into already existing structures, such as the small group (101). They see small groups and equipping ministry complementing one another through easy assimilation, interactive Bible study, and gifts discovery in an intimate, caring setting (112).

Whether already established and moving toward a ministry/mission focus or whether starting out with an integrated approach, groups must choose their avenue of ministry and mission involvement. “Imposing tasks doesn’t work, because it is extraneous rather than arising from within the group’s own internal process of setting goals and priorities” (Hestenes, *Turning Committees* 10). Unless ministry/mission involvement is grassroots, the group will not be committed to the ministry (10). It will become a task, rather than a ministry. The best way to introduce ministry/mission to a group is through Bible study application. Groups can discover together that “mission is part of being a disciple” (12). And then move to making ministry/mission involvement a part of their covenant. A study of the gifts and doing a gifts assessment together as a

group is also recommended. Small group members who know one another can help identify and affirm giftedness in one another. In addition they may be also able to help each other find their niche and support each other in their ministry involvement. Bruce Bugbee's *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ* is a comprehensive resource considering not only personal gifts but also personal style and passion. The book includes assessment tools and discussion questions.

While important for groups to establish their ministry/mission goals on their own, the guidance of their leader is necessary. Leaders will need to be trained and provided with resources to work toward an integrated small group. Leaders also require the support and encouragement of the ministry staff and of other small group leaders.

Tension may arise between individual and corporate ministry (Olsen 112). The integrated model in this paper encourages small group members to engage in ministry and mission together. These are considered corporate ministries. Those group members already engaged in ministry beyond their small group may drop out of the small group altogether if they feel pressured to give time they do not have to additional ministries. Charles M. Olsen encourages the adoption of ministries by the group with the understanding that "individuals will involve themselves in varying degrees" (112). Hestenes' grassroots approach will help resolve this issue as well. Mallory and Smith also realize that as individuals discover their gifts they may employ those gifts in ministries outside the small group. The group may even assist in pointing members in that direction. The small group can still play a vital part in support and encouragement of these individuals (114). Someone once said to Olsen, "No matter how well we train and equip a

person for ministry, unless we build in a support system, we know that he will not make it!” (13).

These major components paired together in one group offer great benefit.

Christians in the Western world all too often dissect and compartmentalize sections of their lives. Americans have accepted the separation of church and state to the extent that they have practically extracted living out the Christian faith in the public sphere. “We ... compartmentalize our lives into private life (family, leisure), public life (work, volunteer activities), and worship life (church and service)” (Arnold, *Small Group Outreach* 19).

Christians know that they are to share their faith, but many struggle with how to be a witness. The degree to which they are content with this compartmentalization is an indication that faith operates on the margins of their lives rather than at the center. A necessity arises calling for leaders “to form a covenant people” (Guder 199). Covenant identity is found in baptism where all are baptized into the ministry of the church. Small groups have the potential to provide the space for Christians to integrate their lives once again and discover what Mallory and Smith call “whole-life ministry” that people will discover “who they are in and through the church permeates who they are in the workplace, in their communities, and in their families” (203).

Summary

Current culture supports the leveling of leadership that small group ministry can offer the church. Small groups can provide the grounding in the Scriptures and prayer that will give birth to new ministries in the midst of the local church. Small groups provide a safe place for people to venture into ministry and discover the gifts they have to offer the church. Small groups can become turned inward, so the purposes of ministry

and mission must constantly be emphasized within the integrated group. However, in a group of doers, they must be continually reminded of why they are doing what they do.

The integrated group is a marriage of *being* and *doing*.

Chapter 3 introduces the appreciative inquiry method to the study of specific small groups in four settings to discover how they have developed an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

A study of Acts 2:42-47 reveals believers in the early Church were involved in study of the Word and fellowship as they met in their homes to eat together and minister to one another's needs. The supplying of needs may have extended to those outside the community of believers. They continued to worship together in the Temple. Lastly, many were coming into relationship with Christ. The church today must strive toward an integrated lifestyle including Bible study, fellowship, worship, ministry, and mission.

Small group ministry has the potential to nurture an integrated lifestyle; however, most small groups fall short of an integrated model where Bible study, community, ministry, and mission are all vital aspects of group life. The purpose of this study was to discover how to develop an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in ministry and mission.

Research Questions

The following research questions were distilled from the purpose of this study.

Research Question #1

What are the practices of an integrated small group?

An integrated small group is defined as one that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry. These basic practices were investigated within the small group setting, both in theory and in praxis. The small groups interviewed were identified for study because the churches

defined the purposes of their small groups as Bible study, community, and some type of ministry and/or mission focus. The interviews looked to identify whether the small groups were, in fact, living out these purposes.

Research Question #2

What do integrated small groups do to promote and sustain participation in Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?

This question revealed how churches and groups keep the four aspects of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission central to their existence. What do church leaders do to promote the four practices? What do small group leaders do to promote participation of the four practices in the midst of the small groups they lead? How are the four practices balanced in the group setting?

Research Question #3

In an integrated small group, what is the interrelationship of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?

This question sought to uncover the interconnectedness of the four practices. Does Bible study move the group to participate in ministry and mission? Does active participation in ministry and mission help the group understand the Word better? Does involvement in ministry and mission affect the community life of the group? As the members of the group grow in their relationship with one another, are they more apt to seek out ministry/mission opportunities together?

Population and Sample

I conducted a study using appreciative inquiry of the small group ministries of four churches. Using criterion sampling, I began with a list of thirty-one Pennsylvania

churches with small group ministries (“United States: Pennsylvania”). I looked at the Web site of each church, if it had one, to see if the church’s description of small group ministry included Bible study, community, ministry, and mission as its focus. After doing so, it was necessary to broaden the scope of my search by identifying groups that did either ministry *or* mission, rather than ministry *and* mission. Six churches out of the thirty-one fit my criterion. Using random purposeful sampling, I selected The Bridge in Shillington and NorthPointe Community Church in Limerick. Through stratified purposeful sampling, I chose Washington Crossing UMC in Washington Crossing. Washington Crossing UMC was the only church on the list of those meeting the criterion that was obviously a mainline denomination. Serving a mainline denomination myself, this church was a particular subgroup of interest. However, Washington Crossing UMC declined participation due to the number of research projects in which they have been involved in the recent past. Through random purposeful selection, Living Word Community Church in Red Lion became the third church of study.

Prior to my scheduling of these three churches, I contacted and scheduled First Presbyterian Church at Beaver, Pennsylvania, as an exemplar site. The significance of this church as an exemplar lies in the fact that Arnold is lead pastor at First Presbyterian. Arnold’s writings are influential in the literature review of this paper and upon discovering that the church he pastors is located in Pennsylvania, the dissertation committee proposed the benefits of viewing his small groups firsthand. This church was to serve as a point of comparison to the three churches participating in the research. In conducting the interviewees it was discovered that First Presbyterian did not serve as an

exemplar. The research gathered was treated equally with the others as an additional fourth site of study.

I instructed the church ministry staff to select at least four small group participants and at least one small group leader to interview. Participants represented at least two different small groups. As churches found difficulty in scheduling this number of people consecutively, I decreased the requirement to at least three small group participants and at least one small group leader. Using appreciative inquiry, the staff was free to select the best of their groups for interview. This sample included a variety of participants as available. If the church transitioned to small groups, those who were with the church at the time of transition were represented among the interviewees.

I conducted eighteen interviews at four sites. I eliminated two from the data analysis, as they were church staff. I originally asked that no church staff be included to ensure that the interviews reflected what was actually occurring in the small group ministry and not the idealized vision of the church staff. The data analysis is of the remaining sixteen. Twelve interviewees were group members and four were group leaders. Participants were at the church ten years or less, and their participation in their current small group ranged between six months and eight years, with seven having participated in small groups prior to the present time.

Design of the Study

I selected appreciative inquiry as the method of research. Several aspects of AI attracted me to this method. AI is collaborative. As many people as possible across all levels of an organization are involved in the entire process, which was important to me as I speak of the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism in Chapter 2.

Postmodernism moves away from a top-down hierarchical system to a “power around” participatory structure (Icenogle 10). AI is a participatory method. AI is narrative; it invites participants to share their stories. Storytelling is another prominent aspect of the postmodern culture. The telling of personal stories is also nurtured in the small group ministry setting, better known as testimonies in the Christian circle. In AI people share their stories in a one-on-one interview setting. This relational setting parallels the relational component of small group ministry.

I was also attracted to AI by two of the eight or so assumptions of AI. “People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known) ... If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past” (Hammond 21). Much has been written regarding the challenge of initiating change in organizations, and a body of literature is dedicated specifically to change in the church. The point of any dissertation is that something needs changing. AI approaches change in a positive, beneficial manner, seeking to bring all those affected onboard in the process through their participation.

The very premise of AI is to discover and build upon the very best of an organization. Another assumption is, “In every society, organization, or group, something works” (Hammond 21). AI looks for what works, for what is best. “Appreciative Inquiry works by focusing the attention of an organization on its most positive potential—it’s positive core—and unleashes the energy of the positive core for transformation and sustainable success” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 6). Mark Lau Branson includes in his list of assumptions, “Organizations are heliotropic” (24). Heliotropic is a botanical term that means that a plant leans toward the sun. Organizations lean toward those things that

give it energy. AI “is a form of transformational inquiry that selectively seeks to locate, highlight, and illuminate the life-giving forces of an organization’s existence” (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros xiii).

AI was first introduced as an approach to research by David Cooperrider, a graduate student at Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio, along with his faculty mentor, Dr. Suresh Srivasta (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 82). AI has been adapted and used in many fields, including organizational development. “Although AI started as a new approach to research, it has flourished more within the organizational change community than in academia” (Reed and Holmberg 2). Branson sees AI as more than either a strategy for change or method of research. Branson believes, “AI provides an organization-wide mode for initiating and discerning narratives and practices that are generative” (19).

AI is most criticized for its emphasis on the positive as compared to the more popularly accepted method of problem solving. Problem solving looks for the problem and the cause of the problem, and then a strategy to fix the problem is developed and implemented. Problem solving is a simple four-step procedure that has a beginning and ending. AI realizes that development is ongoing. AI is a process that is never ending. It does not aim to be a simple fix-it solution that returns to the status quo but realizes that organizations should always be developing and growing. AI seeks to develop learning organizations.

Problem solving looks at everything like a mechanical piece of machinery that can be fixed. The church, as well as any organization, is comprised of people. People cannot be fixed; human systems cannot be fixed. They can be transformed. AI believes

that transformation and growth will stem from the input and involvement of the organizational participants in the process.

Problem solving focuses on doing less of what is not done well. AI focuses on doing more of what is done well (Hammond 23). Problem solving can become self-defeating, for as the organization looks at the problem, the problem becomes the focus of the organization's attention and can drag the organization down overall. "By *focusing* [original emphasis] on the deficit, we simply *create more* [original emphasis] images of deficit and potentially overwhelm the system with images of what is 'wrong'" (Watkins and Mohr 9). Focusing on the positive does not mean that problems are ignored, but the problems do not become the focus. The difference is that difficulties or obstacles are viewed as "sources of insight into strategies for effective forward movement" (62). In reality, if an organization identifies a problem, they already "have an image of how that situation ought to be—how we'd like it to be" (9).

AI is a four-step process following one of two models. The Four-D Model is comprised of discover, dream, design and delivery. The Four-I Model is outlined as initiate, inquire, imagine, and innovate. While both models incorporate the same five generic processes of AI, I chose to follow the Four-I Model because it places more emphasis on the beginning stages, which is a better fit for research application.

The *initiate* step, at its simplest, is choosing to focus on the positive in inquiry. Initiate can include introducing and educating the organization in AI, determining the overall focus of the project, and developing a strategy. Much of what is written thus far in this chapter can be considered a part of the initiate step. Additionally, the explanation

shared with church pastors and staff and the interview participants about the type of interviews conducted is part of this first step—initiate.

Inquire consists of developing the interview questionnaire, completing practice interviews in order to polish the questionnaire, and conducting the actual interviews. The inquire phase is explained in the instrumentation and data collection sections following.

The *imagine* stage encompasses the data analysis. This stage seeks to identify the positive, life-giving themes that emerge from the interviews. The themes are affirmative statements grounded in the examples of what has happened when the organization is at its best. They serve as a challenge and reminder to create more of what works. The imagine phase is found in the data analysis section following and in Chapter 4.

Innovate allows the organization to explore and commit to new ways of creating more of what works. It is a consideration of how “all the creative ways your ideals might be actualized” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 220). As innovations are implemented, ongoing AI dialogue makes the organization a place of continued learning. The findings presented in Chapter 5 correspond with the innovate stage of AI.

Instruments

The instrument used was a researcher-designed questionnaire following the AI format. The questionnaire is found in Appendix A. The questions are written in a manner to invoke a positive response and are intended to reveal what the participants appreciate or value about their small group experience. Questions focus on the four practices of an integrated small group as defined in this paper: Bible study, fellowship, mission, and ministry.

Variables to the research included the selection of the participants. At each church I gave a pastor, staff person, or layperson overseeing the small group ministry the instructions to select at least four small group participants and at least one small group leader to interview. As stated previously I decreased this number to at least three small group participants and at least one small group leader to accommodate the challenge of scheduling this number of individuals together in one consecutive time period. I was at the mercy of the church leaders to meet this requirement. I found that I needed to be clearer as to what I did not want—a church pastor who does not work directly with the small group ministry was included as a participant. Another variable was the weather. I conducted the interviews at one church on a snowy day, and the last participant could not make it. Another variable was the definition of small group. While I confirmed that all the churches' small groups were formed with the purpose of Bible study, community, and ministry or mission, I did not distinguish whether these groups met together long-term or short-term, affecting the degree of intimacy of community experienced among the group as well as the degree to which they have integrated ministry and mission into the group.

Data Collection

Each of the churches selected were contacted through an e-mail letter to the lead pastor, briefly describing my research topic, method, and timeline, and how the church was identified through the listing at smallgroup.com. I indicated that I would call the next week to discuss their participation further. The senior pastor at Beaver First Presbyterian responded by e-mail, putting me directly in contact with the associate pastor responsible for small group ministry. I spoke to all the other senior pastors reiterating the purpose and topic of my research and research method, asking if they had any questions regarding the

project or their participation in the project. Each agreed to participate, with two giving the names of individuals working directly with their small group ministry. I worked directly with the senior pastor at the third church. Repeated phone calls and e-mails ensued until interview dates were established. Dates were finalized at two sites rather quickly and easily. The other two required repeated contact by e-mail and phone.

Because First Presbyterian Church of Beaver was intended to be the exemplar, I set up the interview date with this church before I called the others. Before going to Beaver I conducted a basic trial interview or pilot with my local church Research Reflection Team in a group setting. We do not have long-term ongoing small groups, so I asked the questions of our church setting rather than of a small group setting. The trial interviews served as practice in using AI and to see how others interpreted and responded to the questions so that I could make any revisions. I was able to make a few minor revisions before the first research interviews, allowing me to use the same questionnaire for the intended exemplar as well as for the other three interview locations.

I conducted one-on-one interviews on-site using the researcher-developed AI questionnaire. The interviews were limited to forty-five minutes in length and were relational in nature. In AI I was free to ask follow-up questions in order to probe deeper into areas of interest. I found that with some participants I needed to ask more questions, inviting them to tell me the stories rather than just outlining the facts. During the interviews I had a summary sheet where I took notes. I also recorded the interviews so that if I had questions regarding my notes during the data analysis I could go back and listen to those portions of the interviews again. Following the interviews, while the conversations were still fresh in mind, I typed up my interview summary notes.

Control

Appreciative inquiry encourages a broad spectrum of participants. For instance, where the betterment of a community is the topic of inquiry, the leadership of the community as well as people from all economic statuses have input. The only control I imposed was interviewing small groups members *and* small group leaders but not interviewing the staff member or pastor having oversight for the small group ministry. This control was in order to separate vision from reality. I wanted to discover what was really happening in the trenches.

Data Analysis

Diana Kaplin Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom refer to data analysis as “meaning-making” (165). In AI this meaning-making is meant to be a collaborative effort. Data analysis of my research according to AI would have included some or all of those who participated in the research interviews at its best, but, unfortunately, the differing locations of these churches did not allow for their participation. However, I was able to divide the interview summaries among my Research Reflection Team. Each read over the summaries with instructions to identify those items or stories that were most meaningful to them. They were also asked to identify the very best that small group ministry has to offer. In preparation for discussion with the Research Reflection Team, I read and highlighted the interviews. At the group meeting, each shared this information, with discussion following. I typed up an overview of the meeting for later reference.

AI is qualitative research, so the number of times something occurs is not important. “Higher ground” is identified rather than “common ground” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 167). Themes and patterns are identified with the possibility that items

may occur only once. Jane Magruder Watkins and Bernard J. Mohr define a theme as “an idea or concept about what is present in the stories that people report are the times of greatest excitement, creativity, and reward” (119). The very best small groups have to offer is identified as a theme. These were plotted on a chart, which Watkins and Mohr call a scattergram (120).

I developed a scattergram coordinating with my research questions. The left-hand column indicated the interviewee; the row across the top indicated the categories. I read through the interview summaries a second time using coding in the left-hand margin that coordinated with the scattergram. I looked for Bible study, “B,” community, “C,” and ministry or mission, “M.” I looked for Bible study interrelated with community, “B-C;” Bible study interrelated with ministry or mission with “B-M,” and community related to ministry or mission, “C-M.” I also looked for ways integration was promoted and indicated the presence of promotion in the right-hand column, “promo.” Lastly, using the same coding process, I categorized the interviewees responses to the question regarding their wishes for the future of their small group. After the coding was complete, I went through the interviews indicating the findings on the scattergram. Reading through the summaries one last time, paying special attention to the coded items, I used a highlighter to color code the items relating to each research question.

The results of this analysis appear in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I evaluate and interpret the data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Small group ministry has the potential to provide a place for individuals and groups to become actively involved in ministry and mission, yet most small group ministries fail to integrate Bible study and community with ministry and mission. The purpose of this study was to discover how to develop an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in ministry and mission. Three questions guided this study:

1. What are the practices of an integrated small group?
2. What do integrated small groups do to promote and sustain participation in Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?
3. In an integrated small group, what is the interrelationship of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?

This chapter presents the findings uncovered through the analysis of data gathered in the field research as it relates to each of the research questions. Table 4.1 (see p. 64) plots the findings of the data analysis.

Research Question #1: The Four Practices

All participants identified Bible study, community, and some aspect of ministry or mission as part of their small group experience. Explanations of each are given in brief as communicated by the participants in the interview. Because community is only observable by the marks of community, descriptors are given to indicate if true biblical community exists and perhaps to what depth it is experienced or understood. The words

of the participants appear in quotation marks. The explanation of the presence of Bible study, community, and ministry/mission indicates where the groups currently are; topics of the wishes for the future of the small groups are given to indicate the direction in which the individual or groups desire to move.

The interview participants at First Presbyterian Church at Beaver represented two small groups. The first interviewee was the only member from the one small group. She described the reason for the existence of their group as “nurture on the personal level.” She indicated a “shared spiritual fervor” was present in the group. When asked what contributed most to her spiritual life, she responded, “A couple of studies remain in mind.” She recalled, “These went beyond stimulating, to spiritual” and recounts being “more transparent.” Sharing on a personal level with the group also “brings accountability.” Ministry and mission occasionally occur because they are the “expectation from the church.” One story shows the group offering “feedback” to individual ministry and mission as she was “sharing [the gospel] with a coworker over a two-year time period.” Two of the three wishes are related to Bible study and/or community, with the third being an overlap of community and ministry/mission.

The next four participants interviewed at First Presbyterian Church at Beaver are members of the same small group. All aspects are present in the group. While the group started with the leader preparing and leading the Bible study, they now rotate this responsibility with all members leading. An expression of community of the group is the “degree of preparation” of the group members, stated interviewee two. He said that they “value one another’s time.” Interviewee three also said that an important value of the group is to “come prepared.” Interviewee four further described their “commitment” in

that “everyone does their part.” A strong sense of community existed, with interviewee two describing their relationship as a “brotherhood” and interviewee four as a “brotherly bond.” The group used many words to describe their community relationship.

Interviewee two used the words “accountability,” “respect,” and “commitment.”

Interviewee three used “trust.” Interviewee four used “respect,” “admire,” “familiarity,” and “unique” to describe their relational bond. The group is active in ministry and mission. They lead church-wide projects, as well as participating in ministry and mission projects together as a group. These ministry/mission projects include “Operation Christmas Child, Fix-It Brigade, Aliquippa mission, and Breakfast for Women’s Center.”

While some wishes interrelated with other topics, nine out of eleven wishes have a ministry and/or mission focus such as “bringing others into the group,” “do more outreach,” “have lots of income to spend on projects,” and “become more focused on obedience to God’s word; works as obedience.”

At Living Word Community Church in Red Lion, I interviewed four individuals. These individuals meet in groups of about one hundred and then break into small groups. Three were a part of the same large group with one a part of a different large group. Three of the four indicated the presence of the four practices. One indicated ministry/missional involvement in the past but not as a part of this current group.

Of the first larger group, interviewee one and two indicated the importance of the study to “bring structure” and “discipline of daily devotion.” Interviewee one tied community specifically to the largeness of the church, indicating the “need for small groups to make connections” in order to “see and recognize small group members on Sunday.” Interviewee one described community as “more personal,” as a time to “open

up” and “learn more about others’ lives.” Interviewee two said that small group is “connecting with other believers,” “provides accountability,” and a time to “share experiences” and “realize that you are not the only one striving.” Two of the three shared a story of a bonding moment. Interviewee two told of when her daughter “didn’t believe in God”; “I wondered what I had done wrong.” “Others shared that their kids went through this,” and she realized that “it wasn’t anything I had done or had not done.” One described their participation in ministry and mission as doing “community service regularly”; they “did two already this year, and will do one in the Spring.” Interviewee one indicated the personal growth impact of participation:

When the envelope came to me for the fire victim, I thought, “I don’t know him, why should I give?” But I did. And when he came to speak to the group, I was touched by his testimony and touched that I had helped.

The wishes indicated interest in Bible study through a “deeper understanding” and community growth to “ensure deepest relationships possible” as stated by interviewee one.

The interviewee representing the other larger group identifies Bible study and community as present in his current group, although he shares stories of ministry/mission involvement in past groups and values them as part of group life as an opportunity to “reveal gifts,” to “apply learning,” to “experience life,” and to do things that one is “not as prone to do alone.” When asked what has contributed most to his spiritual life, he responded, “The studies have contributed most.” He expressed, “I learn from the other guys.” Community is described using the words “support,” “encourage,” and “care.” His wishes are ministry/mission focused with wanting “more people involved” in small groups and for “all groups” to “experience outreach.”

Interviews at The Bridge, Shillington, are drawn from three interviewees, each representing different groups. Two interviews were not included in the analysis as they were pastoral staff. All aspects are present in each of the groups at varying degrees. Interviewees two and three especially reveal a deep hunger and openness to learn from the Word. Interviewee two described herself as a “very new Christian” who “never read the Bible”; interviewee three expressed wanting to “dig deeper in Scripture” to “understand.” Interviewee two and three indicated the importance of fun activities. They both pointed to humor as their gift, with interviewee two saying, “I like to be silly and have fun,” and interviewee three saying, “I have the gift of laughter.” Interviewee three especially indicated regular outings beyond regular group meetings, including “breakfast together,” “going shopping,” and “surprise birthday parties.” Community is described by interviewee two as “honest,” “open,” and “confidential,” by interviewee three as “freedom to disagree” with “no grudges,” “like family,” and “can call on any to help when I am in need,” and by interviewee five as “safe,” “grace accepting,” and “share the real things.” Ministry and mission involvement is indicated by each, but more intensively by interviewee five, who is a group leader. She shared from the past about a group of high school girls who were full of ministry/mission ideas. She also recalled a group choosing “to do backpacks filled with items needed and hand them out to the homeless.” A desire for ministry/mission involvement was indicated by the other two with interviewee one longing to “find a mission project to do together, to impact someone’s life” and interviewee three indicating, “more mission involvement ... not just standing against an issue, but doing something.”

At NorthPointe Community Church in Limerick, three of the four interview participants have been involved in small groups prior to their experience at this church. Two interviewees drew heavily upon past experience. Groups are not ongoing. They meet for the length of a particular study and then regroup. All elements are present in all interviews. According to interviewee four, “topics” of the studies “attract” the “unchurched.” These include “marriage, money, jobs, anger, and children.” Interviewee one sees groups as a way to develop “close, intimate relationship” with others, without which “it’s harder” for him. Interviewee two views the “social” element as her forte, and she said, “Small group is an outlet to use my gift.” She likes to “coordinate” and “celebrate” together. Community elements included by interviewee two are “accountability,” “share about self” and “open up to others,” “feel safe to share struggles,” and the “group is there for us.” Interviewee three continued with “common interest,” “relationship built on trust,” “need-based” “honesty,” “frankness,” and “transparency.” Interviewee four reiterated “transparent” and added, “sin confessed.”

Currently groups do not participate in many ministry/mission projects together; however, interviewee four expressed a strong evangelistic focus. He became involved with small groups because they “allowed me to bring some unchurched friends.” He used the language of the “open chair,” saying he would “like to have a lost person” participate in his small group. His wishes are evangelistic in nature, expressing a “passion to fill the open chair,” to “grow,” and for “every member to eventually start another group.” The other three indicated wishes relating to community and ministry/mission. Community wishes include interviewee one wishing groups would “continue on” so that members can “gel, develop,” and “own relationships,” and interviewee two looking for “consistent

attendance” with members making “small group a priority.” Wishes for ministry/mission include interviewee one wanting to be “more intentional” in the “focus outward,” interview two wishing for “community outreach,” and interviewee three wishing for small group members to “tell others and invite others to be involved in small groups.”

Generally, the analysis reveals the four tenets of Bible study, community, mission and ministry are present in groups. The Bible study is the basic foundation of the group meeting. Community exists in groups at varying degrees. Involvement in mission and ministry is the variable.

Research Question #2: Promoting Integration of the Four Practices

Three sites were selected for interview by the descriptions of small group ministry at each church Web site. The sites all defined their small groups as including Bible Study, building community, and some kind of ministry and or missional emphasis. I now look at what the data revealed as to the promotion of these practices within the groups.

First Presbyterian Church, Beaver was chosen because writings by their lead pastor on the topic of small group ministry are integrative in nature. Interviewee one was very aware that ministry and mission in the small group was an “expectation from the church,” yet this small group decided that they did not desire ministry/mission participation for their group because they were “involved in ministry anyway.” They did occasional projects together. One such project, ringing Salvation Army bells, was done “at the urging of Henry,” the associate pastor in charge of small group ministry. Thus, the integration was expected but intentionally disregarded.

The second small group represented at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, was fully integrated. All aspects were important to the group. They regularly met for Bible

study. Biblical community was evident. They regularly led and participated in ministry and mission together with one participant leading the Fix-it Brigade and one leading Operation Christmas Child. Their stories evidenced that ministry and mission were a very important part of their life together, in addition to the Bible study and community they enjoy. The method of Bible study indicates an intentional focus on integration. As they study the Word, they ask, “What does it say?” “How does it apply to life?” and “What will we do about this?” The questions lead to action. Interviewee one revealed that ministry/mission involvement is the expectation of the church, but none of the interviewees representing the second group indicated this expectation.

The only evidence of integration at Living Word Community Church in Red Lion is in the first group represented in the interviews. According to interviewee two, “Two people oversee” the large gathering of about one hundred, and “these two people give ideas” for ministry and mission participation. “Some of these are done by the large group; some as small groups.” Some flexibility and input by the group members is evident as interviewees two and three told how each of the small groups were given ten or twenty dollars and “challenged to multiply it and give it to ministry.” One group “made around \$400” and “sent it to children in Sendafa [Africa].” The other group “made strombolis and raised nearly \$1,000” for “one member who shared she had a down syndrome son and struggled sometimes,” so the family could “send the boy to a Christian home that could help him.”

The group leader interviewed at The Bridge, Shillington, was intentional in the inclusion of all aspects of an integrated small group model. Responding to an introductory question, she stated the church’s small group mission/vision statement from

which the groups also take their name. Their groups are GRACE Groups: “Gather, Reach, Adore, Care, and Equip.” This leader is intentional “each month to address each” but “not every week.” She, with the assistance of “one or two” other group members, observed the group members to “identify gifts.” that will provide leadership within the group for each of these aspects. For example, “someone is in charge of adore and each of the five tenets.” The leader intentionally involves the group and the gifts in the group to address each aspect. She likes to “see others grow, develop, and use their gifts.” She also gave an example of one of the “first activities” in ministry/mission involvement in a group. “The group looked through a list of ideas” that she supplied and “chose” something that “tied them with one of their gifts/passions.” This leader is intentional about “drawing out” people into conversation. She indicated “encourager” as her primary gift and likes to “inspire” others “with confidence.” She draws on a “wealth of life experience,” “how God’s Word has shaped me along the way,” and “believes God’s Word will shape others.”

NorthPointe Community Church in Limerick is largely built on Bible study and community at this point. They struggle with any long-term commitment to small groups, with interviewee one wishing members would “continue on” and interviewee three explaining, “three-quarters through” “a ten-week commitment,” “commitment begins to wane.” Interviewee three continues that as they have identified this trend, they have confronted the problem by telling group members “upfront” “they will begin to feel less committed partway through.” Interviewee three says that they have opened the door for small groups to venture into ministry and mission beyond their small group by “asking small groups if they would help families in need of meals, etc., that are not a part of their

small group.” “These families may or may not be connected with NorthPointe at all or be connected but not involved in a small group.” Interviewee four did not identify that his group had difficulty with regular attendance. He exhibited a high tendency toward evangelism, indicating that his group practices the “open chair” to keep evangelism visibly before the group.

Ways that these groups promote integration is by church expectation, through Bible study method, through intentionally living out the mission statement by setting immediate goals and involving other group members, through the immediate leadership presenting opportunities to the groups, and through the “open chair.”

Research Question #3: Interrelationship of the Four Practices

In looking at the interrelationship of the four practices, I analyzed the interviews looking for places where Bible study and community intersect, where Bible study and ministry/mission intersect, and where community and ministry/mission intersect. I looked for places where one aspect encouraged, contributed to, or built on another.

All three possibilities of interrelationship were observable at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver. The first interviewee expressed how the community “brings accountability” to what she learns in the Bible study. Also expressed was the community offering “feedback” over a “two-year time period” of “sharing with a coworker,” which demonstrates the interrelationship of community with ministry/mission.

Interviewee number two articulated the “degree of preparation and study” as an expression of their commitment to community. Interviewee number three told of how “sharing the leadership” in his small group “boost [his] confidence,” moving him into ministry/mission as he “leads another group.” Interviewee number three told how he was

already involved in ministry/mission but “understood why as he studied.” “The Scripture reinforces what I have already started,” he explains. Interviewee number five tells of bringing “mission back ... to the Bible study.” A single Bible verse during the study “is the motivational force behind” interviewee four’s ministry/mission leadership of Operation Christmas Child. Interviewee number three commented during the Bible study that each shares from his or her “life experience,” illustrating a connection between community and Bible study.

At Living Word Community Church, Red Lion, interviewee one expressed one instance of interrelationship. In “studying the Word as a whole, I’m becoming more giving.” The example she shared was a spontaneous opportunity for giving, a form of ministry/mission involvement that was offered through the larger gathering of small groups. Interviewee number four shared ministry/mission involvement through past small group involvement and expressed that it is a time to “apply learning.” He also indicated that it is an opportunity to do things that one is “not as prone to do alone,” reflecting the connection between community and ministry/mission opportunities.

At The Bridge, Shillington, interviewee three gave an example of how the Bible study encouraged her to step out in ministry as the study asked, “When God calls, will you answer?” Interviewee five shared that as the group she led completed its first ministry/mission experience, “this impacted the group that they are not just here for themselves.” Ministry/mission involvement was a learning moment for the group, expanding their understanding of community.

At NorthPointe Community Church, Limerick, interviewee one commented at two different times about how community interweaves with learning the Word, stating

how one can “see how Scripture works in the lives of others” and “people teach me; I gain from each perspective.” Interviewee two comments how their group experienced “bonding when they give together” as they “adopted three families” in need. As the group works together toward a common goal of ministry/mission, they grow as a community. Also, she comments how a study of the book of Revelation was “terrifying for me; terrifying for the unsaved.” When asked if the study moved her to be more evangelistic, she responded, “Yes, for a time and then still some.” She proceeded to share about her work environment and how “I’ve had others come and ask for prayer.” Interviewee three shared how a study based on the book *Bad Girls of the Bible* built community among the group (Higgs). “They started loving/accepting unconditionally” and “invited others to small group, even from the community.” Interviewee four stated how some particular “topics attract” and “unchurched [are] present in the group.”

The interrelationship of the four practices, Bible study and community, Bible study and ministry/mission, and community and ministry/mission, are evident throughout the interview data. The interrelationship is two-way. For example, Bible study not only influences community, but community influences Bible study. The interrelationship will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Thematic Synopsis

The scattergram (Table 4.1) presents the findings from the data analysis of the interview summaries as it relates to the Research Questions. The Research Questions are indicated in the first row, with the second row further delineating the contents. The first column indicates the specific church and interviewee (see the code key following).

Table 4.1. Scattergram

Interview	RQ1: Four Practices			RQ2 Promo Integr	RQ3: Interrelationship			3 Wishes
	Bible Study	Commu nity	Ministry &/or Mission		Bib ↔ Comm	Bib ↔ M/M	Com ↔ M/M	
1 st P #1	X	X	X	X	X		X	B/M
1 st P #2	X	X	X		X			M/M
1 st P #3	X	X	X		X	X	X	M/M/M
1 st P #4	X	X	X			X		B/M
1 st P #5	X	X	X		X	X		B- M/M/M
LW #1	X	X	X		X	X		B/C
LW #2	X	X	X	X				C/B
LW #3	X	X	X					C
LW #4	X	X	X		X	X	X	M/M
Bridg #2	X	X	X					M
Bridg #3	X	X	X			X	X	B/M/M
Bridg #5	X	X	X	X		X		M/C/C
NP #1	X	X	X		X			C/M/M
NP #2	X	X	X			X	X	M/M/C
NP #3	X	X	X		X	X		C/C/M
NP #4	X	X	X					M/M

Code Key:

1 st P	First Presbyterian Church of Beaver
LW	Living Word Community Church, Red Lion
Bridg	The Bridge, Shillington
NP	NorthPointe Community Church, Limerick
Promo Integr	Promotion of Integration
Bib ↔ Comm	Interrelationship of Bible study and community
Bib ↔ M/M	Interrelationship of Bible study and ministry/mission
Com ↔ M/M	Interrelationship of community and ministry/mission
B	Bible study
M	Ministry/mission
C	Community
B-M	Interrelationship of Bible study and ministry/mission

The first Research Question asked, “What are the practices of an integrated small group?” The literature review indicated that Bible study, community, ministry, and mission are part of an integrated small group. The church Web sites indicated that their small groups are based upon these tenets. I analyzed the interview summaries to see if indeed these components were present in their small groups. As indicated on Table 4.1,

all groups practiced Bible study, community, and ministry and/or mission to some degree.

The second Research Question queried, “What do integrated small groups do to promote and sustain participation in Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?” Table 4.1 indicates one interviewee at each of the first three sites promoted integration.

The third Research Question was, “In an integrated small group, what is the interrelationship of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission?” Table 4.1 plots where an interviewee stated an instance where one practice influenced another. Each of the practices was found to interconnect in some way, indicating learning in one area carried over to another area.

The final column specifies the topic of the wishes. I identified a desire for ministry/missional involvement among the interviewees.

Summary of Major Findings

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis as they pertain to the three guiding research questions. Following are the major findings of the analysis of the research interviews:

1. Small groups will be as unique as the individuals who are a part of them.
2. Ministry/mission is automatically integrated into seeker group settings.
3. The interrelationship of the four practices reveals the benefits of the integrated small groups.
4. Bringing balance to promoting the closeness of biblical community and remaining open to new members are challenges.
5. Intentionality is a must for integrated groups.

Chapter 5 concludes this study by presenting these findings alongside additional resources.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The goal of this research project was to answer three questions regarding the integrated small group. The answers were distilled through the data analysis and revealed in Chapter 4. Bible study, community, ministry, and mission are the basic practices of the integrated small group; however, in practice they are present at varying degrees. Promotion of the integration was not evident in every interview. Ways of promoting and sustaining include church expectation, through Bible study, mission statement, leadership-presenting opportunities, especially for ministry and mission, and the open chair. The research revealed the interrelationship of the practices as integral. Each practice nurtures and grows another practice.

Chapter 5 presents an evaluation and interpretation of the major findings uncovered in the data analysis. The theological foundation of Acts 2:42-47, the literature review, insights from the research reflection team, and personal insights contribute to the discussion. Much of the literature review is found to be congruent and supported by the findings of this research.

Finding 1: Uniqueness of Groups

Small groups will be as unique as the individuals who are a part of them. Early in the interview process, upon completion of my first interview at the first site, First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, the interviewee had convinced me that an integrative small group was not what she needed in her life. She knew integration was the expectation of the church, but the group made a conscious decision after discussing their individual

involvement in ministry outside the group that participation in ministry and mission was not important as a group. She explained their focus as “nurture on the personal level.”

Focusing on personal nurture sounds very inward focused and dangerous, which is an obstacle that integrative groups attempt to overcome. In interviewing this individual and getting to know her personality and hearing her three wishes, I do not think becoming inward focused is a danger for this woman. She is very outgoing, hungry to learn, and full of energy and love for God and has an appreciation for small group ministry. Her wishes indicate she does not want to get too settled in a group. While she enjoys the community, she recognizes the need for change. She desires to be challenged by diversity of thought. Her suggestion that the next group be a group for seekers reflects a missional concern.

This interview was juxtaposed against four interviewees from the same group at this site. In their midst was a strong community presence. A passion for ministry and mission involvement was expressed as they led church-wide projects and participated in projects together. One member expressed that they each could lead their own group, but they do not want to give up this group.

The second group was a strong testament that the integrated model works, but the first group represented made a strong statement that it is not the only way. The integrated model is birthed out of a need for balance in the life of the individual and in the life of the community, including small group life and church life. Rick Warren has popularized the five purposes of worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship, which relate closely to the four tenets of the integrated small group. Warren points out that most churches do these five things, but usually one or two are emphasized over the rest. Warren says, “Balance is the key to a healthy church” (122). If balance gets worked out

in the lives of individual believers outside of the small group, in the whole of their living, so be it. If the small group is the vehicle that brings that balance, so be it. The small group is only a means to an end. Balance, grasping and living out the full call of Christ upon the life of the Christian, is the end.

Distinguishing between these groups and their group life corresponds with what Olsen refers to as the tension that can arise between individual and corporate ministry (112). These groups support Olsen's recommendation to plan ministry/mission involvement as a group and allow individuals to be involved in varying degrees (112). The first group also supports Olsen's recommendation that the group may offer a support system for individual ministry/mission involvement. Upholding one another in ministry materialized in the first group at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, as the individual witnessed to a coworker and the group offered support. As individual members of the second group led church-wide ministries, the group demonstrated ministry support for one another as they either participated in these events or brought emotional/spiritual support.

The interview process revealed that the first interviewee was clearly an exception. All subsequent interviewees saw the benefit of a more integrated group, expressed by the desire for ministry/mission involvement. The need for assistance and group support in ministry/mission participation corresponds with Mallory and Smith's observation that most individuals will not find a place of ministry on their own (204).

No one small group model will suit all. Individuals must have the freedom to make informed decisions about the purpose of their group. Mandating ministry participation will not be successful (Hestenes, *Turning Committees* 10). The leadership is

responsible to actively shape the culture of the small group to the possibilities of group missional involvement through Bible study, reflection and personal example.

Finding 2: Seeker Groups as Ministry/Mission Field

Ministry/mission is automatically integrated into seeker group settings.

Interviewee four at NorthPointe Community Church, Limerick, displayed an overall concern for the unchurched. He demonstrated a genuine desire to involve the unchurched in the small group. He saw the small group as an opportunity to reach others for Christ and to see them mature to the point of starting other groups, practicing Coleman's "side door evangelism" (qtd. in Arnold, *Small Group Outreach* 31). Ministry/mission within the context of the small group is introduced as something the group does beyond Bible study and care for one another. One of the reasons for participation in ministry/mission together is to keep an outward focus, to care for others beyond the group. While seeker groups may participate in such opportunities, the reality is the seeker group itself is a ministry/mission. The mission field has come to the small group setting. The same types of ministry/mission involvement cannot be expected of seekers as spiritually mature disciples.

As seekers come to accept Christ, the same challenge will exist: to move from self-centered to other centered. A spiritually mature individual who practices a well-balanced life, or "whole-life ministry," is an ideal leader of seeker groups (Mallory and Smith 203). The leader becomes a model and mentor to the seeker. The leader will communicate the values of biblical knowledge, community, ministry, and mission through his or her lifestyle and group discussion.

Group leaders must operate with the understanding that seekers tend to want to feel as if they belong before they believe (Hunter, *Celtic Way* 55). The leader may introduce and involve group members in ministry/mission before members commit to Christ. Ministry/mission involvement can flow out of the Bible study conversation.

As seekers become followers, an excellent opportunity exists in small group ministry to implement a complete understanding of discipleship. Discipleship is not just the learning of head knowledge but also the putting of those things into practice. Small groups offer the flexibility for hands-on learning. Small groups can take advantage of field experience learning, which is the type of discipling that Jesus implemented with the twelve. Acts 2:42-47 continues to call all Christians to follow the way of experiential learning by actively participating in Bible study, community, ministry, and mission.

A part of the discipleship process must include gifts discovery. Mallory and Smith suggest the small group is an appropriate avenue for helping people identify their gifts. The small group leader can aid others in the discovery of gifts, with other small group members reinforcing the giftedness of individuals. Leaders should be familiar with ministry opportunities in order to give direction as to how individuals may use their gifts in the body of Christ. These gifts may be used within the group and/or beyond the group.

Finding 3: Interrelationship of the Four Practices

The interrelationship of the four practices reveals the benefits of the integrated small groups. The analysis of the research interviews reflects an interrelationship between Bible study and community, Bible study and ministry/mission, and community and ministry/mission.

When my research reflection team was asked to share the most meaningful story from the interviews, one shared a story about community, one shared a story about ministry/mission, and another about Bible study. The theological foundation of Acts 2:42-47 gives an overview of the activity of the first century believers that encompasses these practices. Three of the four dimensions of George's cell groups match with the four practices as they include Bible study, community defined as loving or pastoral care, and doing or duties that serve those outside the group (*Prepare Your Church* 89). Arnold's three dimensions of inward, upward, and outward are also similar to the four practices (*Big Book* 32). While these dimensions do not attest to the interrelationship of the four practices, they certainly speak to the necessity and importance of each.

Bible and community. Interviewee one at NorthPointe Community Church, Limerick, commented on the benefits of studying Scripture in community. In community, one gets to "see how the Scripture works in the lives of others." Each person is able to add his or her personal perspective to the discussion and the interviewee comments, "I gain from each perspective." When the research reflection team was asked the most important theme or best practice that small groups have to offer, one person noted having others to help one understand and explain the Scripture as a best practice.

Understanding Scripture goes beyond a head knowledge to a heart knowledge, to life transformation, which interviewee one stated as "how Scripture works in life." The community plays a role in the spiritual growth of individuals as they share their understanding and application of Scripture. Donahue and Robinson take this connection to the extreme saying that spiritual growth cannot occur outside community (59). As Proverbs 27:17 states, "Iron sharpens iron," the community learns from one another and

challenges one another to greater faithfulness. The community holds one another accountable in what they are learning and applying to their lives.

The interrelationship of Bible and community is demonstrated by interviewee one at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, who recalled her marriage being changed because of an insight in Bible study. As the group studied Philip Yancey's *What's So Amazing about Grace?* she had an overwhelming sense of the grace extended to her from her "husband who comes home every night" to her "with unconditional love." The group could see the extent to which she was impacted by this insight and she said their knowledge of this information alone brought "accountability." She says, "I care what others think" and so she remembered this insight and to continued to live out the transformation.

Scripture and ministry/mission. Bible study can bring a change in individuals that brings change to the individual's relationship with the group and beyond into the world. Easum and Bandy talk about the twin "flows" of relationship building and faith development, "currents that carry the participant forward eventually to flower into mission" (153). The reverse is also true; acts of ministry and mission bring understanding to Bible study.

Interviewee three at The Bridge, Shillington, shared that she was feeling led to go to "multiplier training," a training session where she would learn to train others. She said, "I didn't think I could do it." "They had a small group Bible study that asked, 'When God calls, will you answer?'" She said, "I prayed ... did the training, and it was easy." Then, she went to churches in other communities to do the training. She said she was nervous at first, but "the second day I was calmer." "The last training session I did," she said, "I felt

like I had done it forever.” God used the Bible study to speak to her and encourage her to step out in this ministry.

At First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, interviewee four shared how one verse spoke to him and prompted him to mission. The verse said something about “God’s name be known or exalted throughout the world.” “This is the motivational force behind Operation Christian Child,” a ministry that sends shoebox gifts to children all over the world. He organizes and leads this church-wide project once a year, but throughout the year he is looking for items for shoeboxes. The project had just ended for the year, but he came to the interview all excited about finding a bunch of backpacks on sale that he will store away for next year’s collection.

These two stories illustrate how Bible study can encourage ministry/mission involvement. Many argue that ministry/mission involvement is the natural outcome of Bible study. Donahue and Robinson agree by stating that if knowledge is not put into practice, then the information is not known (73). Icenogle affirms clearly that mission is the natural outcome of learning (120). Foss also concludes that Bible study leads to participation in what God is doing in the world (99). In the study of Acts 2:42-47, Barrett deduces that the devotion to the apostles’ teaching included applying the teaching to their lives, preparing them for ministry (163). Learning leads to action.

Interviewee three at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, reflects how his activity in ministry/mission preceded his understanding. He leads the Fix-It Brigade, the church’s construction ministry. He organizes and involves church members in doing repairs where needed in the local community. The Fix-It Brigade also shares their personal testimonies with those families they assist. Another person started the ministry, and when this person

discontinued leading, his construction gifts were a perfect fit to assume leadership. He actually began doing this work and leading this ministry before he really understood why he was doing it. He began to understand as he studied the Scripture. He explains, “The Scripture reinforces what I already started.”

This individual has only been a Christian for about four years, the same number of years he has been a member of this small group. This small group was a group of new Christians when it was formed. In finding two, I looked at seeker groups as being the mission but suggested that seekers can be involved in ministry/mission before they actually come to believe or as they are in the process of coming to believe. The story of this man’s involvement with the Fix-It Brigade, as a young Christian, reflects how those young in the Lord can participate in ministry/mission and how the ministry/mission work and the Bible study together can contribute to spiritual growth. Mallory and Smith agree with this, saying, “People will grow spiritually through their acts of service to one another” (203). Individuals participating in ministry/mission must eventually come to an understanding as to why they do what they do; otherwise, the ministry/mission may become a task, just a human accomplishment, not done with the heart of Christ.

Community and ministry/mission. A two-way interrelationship occurs between community and ministry/mission. Community can lead to ministry/mission participation or vice versa. Interviewee four at Living Word Community Church, Red Lion, stated how one might participate in ministry/mission with a small group that one is “not as prone to do alone.” He has been a part of a number of ministry/mission outreaches in the past. One such instance was regular visitation to a nursing home where they sang songs, had Bible study and prayer, and talked with the residents. Outreaches such as this one are less

intimidating as a group. Groups have a variety of gifts to offer, making the experience more interesting for everyone, which my experience as a pastor upholds. When I go to a local nursing home to speak at their midweek chapel service, I try to take a musical group from the church with me. I am a musician, so I could sing and preach, but the variety of someone else participating in the service makes the service more interesting for everyone. The residents also enjoy meeting and visiting with the other guests who are with me. The experience is more enjoyable for me as we participate as a team. Mallory and Smith agree that the community is essential in moving individuals toward finding their place in ministry and mission (204).

On the other hand, ministry/mission participation also builds community. The personal example of taking a team with me when I speak at the nursing home always proves to be valuable relational time spent with parishioners. At NorthPointe Community Church, Limerick, interviewee two shared of a previous small group experience where the group adopted a family at Christmas and visited the home to give the items to the family. She said, "Bonding occurs when they give together." The group was "exhausted from emotions," "the excitement in the preparation and getting the gifts." The experience "transformed them all" and bonded the group. I asked if the visit was awkward, and she responded that they "enter with joy." She looks for something in the home that "brings joy," "children or a book on the shelf, to open the door to share." They would take their children with them to "teach the tradition of giving." She says, "My kids are now thirty and love to give to others. It effected them in a lasting way." This ministry was not only shared together by the small group, but by the families as well. Ministering together as

family, perhaps demonstrates what Icenogle says of the apostles' ministry emerging from their common life together (326).

Interviewee five from First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, commented, "Faith, work, family, and avocations were parallel" in his life. He now strives to "make faith pivotal." As one realizes the interrelationship of Bible study, community, and participation in ministry and mission, one seeks to be a total disciple of Jesus Christ, growing all these areas. The integrated small group is the practice ground for all these tenets. The integrated group is the place to learn how faith is central to community life and relationships and ministry beyond. The integrated group is the place to move from compartmentalization (Arnold, *Small Group Outreach* 19) to integration, and to move faith from the margins to the center (Guder 199) to learn "whole-life ministry" (Mallory and Smith 203).

Finding 4: Balancing Community

Bringing balance to promoting the closeness of biblical community and remaining open to new members is a challenge. After the research reflection team read over the interviews assigned to them, I asked them what was the very best small groups had to offer, and three out of four of them commented on community. One commented on the opportunity to share and the ease of opening up in a small group. One observed how physical and emotional needs were provided for one another within the groups. Another pointed out the inherent need for relationships, that all want to feel needed and to have something to offer.

Interviewees two, three, four, and five who belong to the same group at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, exhibited the high degree of biblical community. They had

developed into what two of the members called a “brotherhood” and “brotherly bond.” The group has now been together for four to five years, in comparison to NorthPointe Community Church, Limerick, where groups are together for the length of the study, perhaps six weeks, and at Living Word Community Church, Red Lion, where groups reorganize on a yearly basis. The length of time a group is together will impact the depth of community.

Gordon MacDonald says, “An unguarded strength and an unprepared heart are double weaknesses” (32). In other words, one’s greatest strength can become one’s greatest weakness. This observation can be true of community life. Just as a church can become closed in upon itself, so can a small group. The challenge is to draw closer to one another and yet remain open to embrace and even reach out and gather others in, welcoming them into the community. Icenogle affirms stating that every group “ has a call to itself and a call beyond itself” (42). He also expresses the true purpose or view of community as “gathering to share ... with whomever” (326). The community does not just gather to share their possessions or to share the hope of the gospel with others. It gathers to share their gift of community to offer the gift of relationships.

The second group represented by interviewees two, three, four, and five at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver, continues to grapple with this concept. They have developed community among them, and they have reached out in ministry/mission to others. They now must endeavor to offer the gift of community to others. Throughout their time together, interviewee two says, “Some others have come to the group, but they didn’t offer the same commitment.” He continues by describing the group as having become “somewhat elitist.” Interviewee three recognizes that their small group can be a

“discipling tool” “to nurture someone else.” Interviewee five expressed, “They each could lead a group, but they say they won’t give up this group.” This group is at a crossroads. I sensed that they know God is calling them to reach others and disciple others and share this great brotherhood experience with others. The group is at an exciting yet difficult place. Following God will always eventually bring one to the crossroads of hearing and knowing God’s call and wanting to do God’s will, yet experiencing fear in taking that step of faith because following the call leads to untreaded territory and will bring change. I would be interested to do a follow-up interview of this group and see the outcomes, the choices they make.

The research reflection team had a lengthy discussion as to how long groups should remain together. One liked the idea of groups reorganizing every year, seeing the benefit of getting to know more people and avoiding cliques. Another felt strongly about remaining together. He was very open about bringing others into the group but wanted the group to stay together. He could not grasp the concept of the small group outgrowing the definition of a small group, a maximum of twelve members, necessitating multiplication, the formation of additional groups. For him, keeping the group together and growing is a matter of loyalty to one another; however, the opportunities to be loyal to one another will decrease as the group numbers increase. As the group grows larger less opportunity to share and to know one another is available. Community life will suffer. Groups cannot become static. If groups are growing, change will occur. Change is always a challenge.

Cho does not emphasize fellowship in his groups at the risk that evangelism will suffer (113). Cho’s position on fellowship is an extreme. The integrated group seeks to

bring balance, not neglect of any one tenet of Bible study, community, ministry, and mission. Arnold confirms the necessity to move beyond self: beyond oneself, beyond one's group, to accomplish the vital ministry of outreach (*Small Group Outreach* 11). The understanding of community as a gift of relationships to share with others may help to bridge the balance of seeking closeness and being open to others at the same time.

Finding 5: Intentionality

Intentionality is a must for integrated groups. The group leader, interviewee five, at The Bridge, Shillington, displayed admirable actions of intent. The church had a memorable mission statement that stated the purposes of the integrated group, and she offered it without my asking. The groups are called GRACE Groups, the purposes of the small group being to Gather, Reach, Adore, Care, and Equip. The missional statement served as her guide to planning group life. She was intentional about addressing each of the five on a monthly basis, not every week. She had realistic goals in this respect. The mission statement did not box her in but provided the guidelines and framework to aid her in freely leading the group into all the purposes.

She involved the group in intentional integration. She and one or two other group members identified the giftedness of others in the group so that they could be in charge of leading the group in one of the five tenets. This group leader shared leadership.

As these examples indicate, this leader offers intentional, organized leadership. She also offers spiritual leadership. She has experienced God's faithfulness in her own life, some of which she shared with me. She is eager to share these experiences because they bring hope to others.

Wesley was a systemic organizer. George cautions against rigid agendas (*Prepare Your Church* 99). Intentionality without rigidly imposing an agenda on groups is a must. This freedom reflects the cultural shift from the modernism top-down approach to leadership to the postmodern move toward a partnership where leadership is shared (Icenogle 10). The role of the leader has become one of “advising, coaching, mentoring, equipping, and sending” (Gibbs 108). Hestenes forwardly warns against imposing tasks (*Turning Committees* 10). The role of leadership becomes more intricate in this environment, requiring the group leader to tackle the delicate art of guiding the group toward discovery rather than dictating a response. With the discovery comes greater spiritual satisfaction and spiritual growth. In order for small group leaders to lead in a mentor-like capacity, the church staff must lead in such a way. They must model this approach and small group leaders must be coached in this approach.

Bandy emphasizes the importance of the pastor and lay leaders agreeing on the core values, beliefs, vision, and mission of the church, which provide guiding boundaries (38, 127). The mission statement becomes the guiding force of intentionality. The statement places goals before the group toward which they work. The statement provides a necessary framework to keep small groups on course and to bring unity in diversity with multiple groups existing in one body of believers.

The mission statement is the reminder constantly before the groups. The mission statement must be memorable. The naming of the GRACE Groups keeps their purposes before them. Neighbour’s four Ws, welcome, worship, word, and works, simply keep the purposes before his groups (264). Arnold does the same with the inward, upward, outward aspects of group life (*Big Book* 32). Acts 2:42-47 is a reminder statement to the

early Church and the Church in every age. These actions are the same that the disciples did together with Jesus Christ. The church is reminded to be intentional, to be dedicated to these things, “the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2.42).

Evaluation of Study

The end of this study presents an opportunity for reflection and evaluation.

Sampling

A variance in the number of small groups represented by the interviewees at each site existed. I asked for at least two small groups to be represented by those interviewed. In one setting four were from the same group. Although additional gleanings were collected from each, the data became somewhat repetitive. Interviewing four individuals from the same group also limited my view of small groups in that setting. In two settings the interviewees were all from different groups. I was unable to substantiate or compare comments or grow my understanding of the group dynamics as I could when more than one member from the same group was present.

The variance in the time that groups stay together brought variance to the study. I did not qualify my definition of small group with time limitations. I would choose to add that members interviewed be part of a group for at least nine months in order to include those groups that change on a yearly basis, taking the summer months off.

Limitations

The fact that Washington Crossing UMC declined participation was unfortunate for this study. Being a minister in the UMC myself, I am sure that study of the small

group ministry in the same denomination would have offered insights that remain undisclosed to this research project.

The inability to draw upon First Presbyterian Church, Beaver as exemplar produced some limitations to this project. I could not compare the other sites to the small groups at First Presbyterian as planned. The benefit of studying a site where the integrated small group model is successful across the board is untapped in this research. The sites studied offered glimpses into the model.

The data analysis in AI at its best involves those interviewed. Studying four different churches located across Pennsylvania made interviewee analysis of the data impractical. The lack of involvement by the interviewees in the analysis did not provide a limitation to this study, but it did limit the impact upon the churches participating in the study.

Recommendations

I recommend further study of the interrelationships between the practices of Bible study and community, Bible study and ministry/mission, and community and ministry/mission. The study of these interrelationships presented in this paper was broad in scope. I recommend individualized study of the interrelationships that would provide three in-depth studies that would culminate into one.

The original idea for this study was the creation of a hybrid group, combining the small group ministry and ministry teams. At that point I did not realize that I had a limited view of small group ministry, and others have included and encouraged ministry/mission as a vital component to small group ministry. I still believe that a study of ministry teams will lend insight to the integrated small group. All the small groups I

interviewed were based on Bible study and community first and moving toward ministry/mission involvement or were founded on the integrated model. Of interest would be the study of task groups or ministry teams who are moving toward the inclusion of Bible study and community in their group life.

A study of the qualities and function of pastoral leadership necessary for the success of the integrated small group is also required. The literature review indicates the cultural shift from modern to postmodern. Pastoral leadership is at a difficult stage as pastors seek to minister to individuals belonging to both these cultures. Integrated small groups have the potential to serve as a transitional bridge for the church.

Data Collection Strategy

AI was an excellent choice of research methodology for me. I believe in small groups and their unleashed potential. AI was a way of looking for the very best that small groups have to offer so that the exceptional qualities could be uncovered and the process of promoting these characteristics in other settings revealed. I was able to look at the small groups others have established and take from them building blocks for a better small group, and ultimately a blueprint for fulfilling the mission of making disciples.

Appreciative inquiry will prove to be a valuable tool to local church ministry. The church is God's people organized for mission. AI does not look at an organization like a machine that needs fixing but recognizes that an organization is living and growing. The church is identified as such a living organism. Effective ministry requires the church to adapt constantly for effective ministry, something the church has not done well. Change is difficult for the church, but the church is at a crossroads. If the church is to have impact in the world, change must occur. AI acknowledges the positives of the church. By

involving the congregation in the process, AI surveys the territory, valuing the past, gleaning from the best of the past and using it as foundational, providing a passageway into the future. Congregational involvement and the security of carrying forward the best of the familiar can free the church to move into uncharted territory with fruitful ministry.

Pastoral Implications

In this section, I reflect on what I learned through this research project. I project how these findings will direct my pastoral leadership.

The concept of community is too narrowly defined by most. Christians typically describe community as activities that are shared together, with the more mature also embracing the relational connection that allows group members to care compassionately for each other. Community viewed as a gift of God opens the door to sharing this gift with others. Scripture teaches that each individual member in the body of Christ is given gifts that they are to share with the community (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4), which are given for “the common good” of the body (1 Cor. 12:7). When the gift of community is birthed within the body of Christ, it is given to share with others. Donahue and Robinson say that community is to be shared with everyone with whom Christians have contact (11). Icenogle expresses that relationships are to be shared with others just the same as possessions and food (326). Community is indicated as a desperate longing of the postmodern culture (Johnston 54). “Relationships rule postmodern life” (Sweet 195). Community is a gift with which God has graced the Christian church. He has given the gift of community in order that it might be shared with others.

This research has concentrated on one small group model, an integrated model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry. More than one small group model can coexist in any given setting. Pastors must analyze their particular context and assess the needs of the people. This model can serve as a springboard for those who have not been involved in ministry and mission to experience the joys of living out this call. The small group is a safe place to experiment and discover one's giftedness and a place for introverts to become courageous in ministry as they are surrounded by and supported by a group.

The integrated small group is also a place for busy people to experience "whole-life ministry" (Mallory and Smith 203). People do not have to attend one meeting for Bible study and one meeting for ministry or mission. Holistic discipleship is experienced in one setting with one group. The possibility exists that involvement will grow and expand after their initial experience, as they discover the desire to prioritize Bible study, community, and ministry/mission involvement in their lives. Those who are already committed to the point of involvement in multiple meetings may have the potential to express their gifts as group leaders of the integrated small group.

This model presents a need for transition in most of the churches in my setting. Vision casting will lay the foundation for beginning such a ministry. Vision casting communicates the benefits of small group ministry and the four practices that compose the integrated group by way of sermons, devotions, newsletter articles, and every other available avenue. As pastor I can lead a pilot group of potential leaders. This group will be in training for one year, learning the model through experience in order to prepare them to assume leadership of a small group. The following year, two people from this

pilot will lead a group together. This method of preparation mirrors that of Jesus Christ with the disciples. Regular times of training and reflection will always be provided for “[g]reat leaders are great learners” (Stanley 93). The small groups will become a place to raise up additional leaders.

Beginning a new ministry places additional time demands on a pastor. Vision casting must involve the appropriate committees of the church, gaining their support. While pastoral responsibilities and time are reallocated, the integrated small group will multiply the ministry of church. Andy Stanley says of developing other leaders, “Leadership is about multiplying your efforts, which automatically multiplies your results” (23). Also, the pastor and church leaders will work together to establish the mission and core values of the church, as Bandy recommends (38). A joint mission and core values will provide the framework and boundaries necessary to allow groups the freedom for ministry/mission involvement, while providing an overall unity within the church.

The role of the pastor and key leaders will be one of coming alongside and supporting ministry/mission efforts of small groups. Leaders will have the goal of giving ministry away, which will be a process as indicated in the vision casting and training of leaders. Transitioning to a shared leadership approach will be a process for the members of the congregation as well, and some will never embrace the change. Eddie Gibbs describes some older members of the congregation as suffering from an “entrenched dependency system” (35). Some people do not want or know what to do with this kind of freedom. Some will not make the transition. I believe they are to be valued as members of God’s family but certainly should not be allowed to derail the vision. I recommend AI as

a way to involve them in the process and assure them that their voice is heard and valued. AI allows the church to keep the best of its contributions while moving into future ministry/mission possibilities.

Postscript

I come to the end of this project convinced that integrated small groups, small groups embracing both Bible study and community and extending beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry are possible. I also know that this structure cannot be imposed upon any group. Small groups are living organisms. Neither I, nor anyone else, can determine a model and manipulate people to fit that model. I have presented an ideal, an ideal I believe is biblically based, and one that I believe can make the church more effectual in making disciples. Like any ideal, this model will not be perfectly attained, but the ideal is kept before the group, and the group keeps working toward the goal.

In the midst of working on this project, my husband, Randy, and I experienced the great joy of traveling to South Korea for the baby boy we are adopting, Ethan Quinn. While in Korea we were blessed with a personal tour guide, Jongsun Park, a Methodist pastor who introduced us not only to Korean history and culture but to the Christian church in Korea. He credits the explosive growth of the Christian church to two things: prayer and small group ministry. He made plans for us to visit his small group meeting. In a twist of events, we learned that we would receive Ethan two days earlier than planned, the afternoon before the small group meeting. Being first-time parents and not knowing how Ethan would react to leaving his foster family and joining our family, we expressed reluctance in attending the small group meeting, but our host persuaded us: "They are expecting you."

We received Ethan, and within moments he felt the absence of his foster mother. He cried for more than two hours. We traveled outside Seoul to our host's apartment, the

host family making great efforts to calm Ethan. While walking from one apartment to another for the small group meeting, Ethan, being carried by our host, finally stopped crying. Ethan, passed from person to person, was entertained, fed, and finally fell asleep. During that time we enjoyed a delicious array of home-cooked Korean foods. We then walked to another apartment, while the children and some adults stayed at the apartment where we had eaten. The small group meeting continued with a review of the Sunday sermon with each person offering reflection and prayer. They lifted up prayer requests, and we were told that they pray for each other every day at 10:00 a.m. They surprised us with a cake with one candle celebrating Ethan's new life with us. Randy and I blew out the candle (as Ethan slept), and we all enjoyed a piece of cake.

This small group brought unexpected blessing into our lives. Rather than handling a difficult situation alone, we had a community gather around us not only to celebrate but also to help the three of us through these transitional hours. We knew the host pastor for less than a week. We did not know the group members at all, but they welcomed us, embracing us and the challenge of a new baby. We will be ever grateful for the gift of community that was offered to us that night. In the midst of strangers, we found friends, friends we will remember for a lifetime, and a story that Ethan will grow up hearing and hopefully come to embrace as his own.

APPENDIX A

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SMALL GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introductory Questions

Tell me how you got involved in a (this) small group?

Are there particular practices of your small group that are most valuable to the group experience? In general, what things do you do together on a regular basis? (Bible study, community, ministry, and mission)

Topic Questions

Spiritual Growth—Connecting with God

When you consider all your small group experiences, what contributed most to your spiritual life? How has your small group helped you connect with God? Describe those times when you were most engaged in and shaped by God through your small group experience. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?

Community—Connecting with others

What has been most valuable about the relationships within your small group? How have you connected with one another? What would you say is most important about how you relate to each other in your small group? Give me an example of how you live together at your best. Was there a particular experience that contributed to your bond of fellowship?

Ministry/Mission—Connecting others with God

How has your small group connected you with others beyond your group, perhaps even beyond the church to the unchurched? When you think of ways your small group has connected with others, what has been the most important and meaningful to you?

Living the Word

Give me a specific example of how your study of Scripture changed or transformed you. Tell me a time Bible study has moved you to action, has prompted you to ministry and/or mission. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?

Gifts

Without being modest, what are the most valuable ways you contribute to your small group—your personality, your perspectives, your skills, your activities, your character? Give me some examples. Has your small group helped you discover these gifts? How so?

Concluding Questions

When at its best, what is the single most important value that makes your small group unique?

Make three wishes for the future of your small group. Describe what your small group would look like if these wishes came true.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

The purpose of this study is to discover how to develop an integrated small group model that embraces both Bible study and community and extends beyond as a catalyst for involvement in mission and ministry. This interview will be conducted using the Appreciative Inquiry model, which seeks to discover and learn from the best in an organization. You will be asked to share stories about your small group experience that will help me better understand how to establish and grow integrated small groups. This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry at Asbury Theological Seminary. Please be assured that your name will be kept in confidentiality; with only research findings to be reported.

Name _____

Contact Information (Mailing address, Phone number, Email)

Gender _____

Age _____

Ethnicity _____

Number years at this church _____

Church name _____

Number years involved in this small group _____

Have you had any involvement in a small group prior? _____

If yes, explain

Are you a small group member/leader/other? _____

Signed _____

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