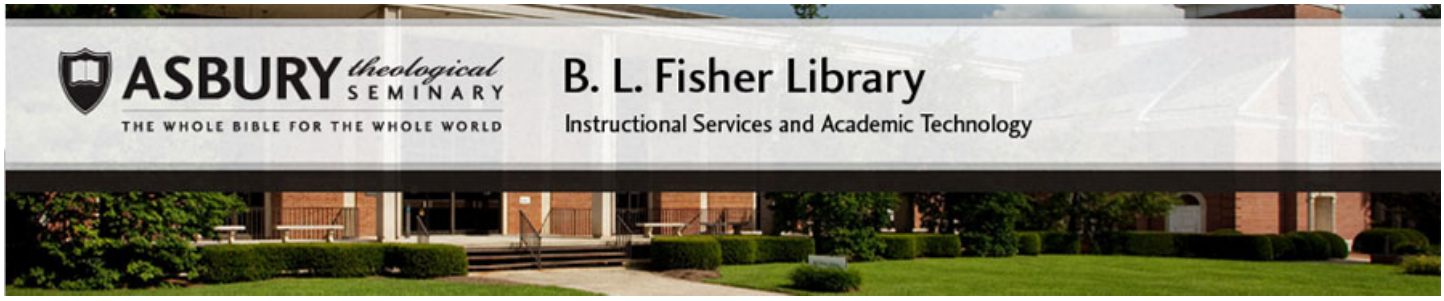

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ABSTRACT

WORSHIP WARS:

MINIMIZING CONFLICT AND MAXIMIZING UNITY

THROUGH A WORSHIP TRANSITION

by

William A. Fisackerly, IV

In order to be relevant in a changing world, churches often look to new styles of artistic expression to make God's message of hope and healing more accessible to the communities in which they live. Experimenting with new ways of faith expression can cause conflict for the established membership of a church. Current members like the stability of using familiar styles of worship.

The purpose of the research was to observe churches that were embarking upon a worship transition to determine what studies, practices, and leadership resources helped them through their transition with maximum unity and minimum conflict. This exploratory, mixed-methods design used qualitative case studies and focus groups.

Three United Methodist churches from Florida participated in this research. The findings of this study recommend three practices that will help churches attempting to undertake similar transitions. These practices are developing a shared church vision, working through teams, and giving the process time to work. By following these suggestions churches can avoid unhealthy conflict and work together with greater resources and energy.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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MINIMIZING CONFLICT AND MAXIMIZING UNITY

THROUGH A WORSHIP TRANSITION

presented by

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My appreciation goes out to Brian Russell who reminded me that BICHOK (Butt in Chair, Hands on Keyboard) is the most effective way of getting a dissertation done.

In addition, appreciation goes out to Daryl Smith and Milton Lowe for their willingness to keep a seventh-year student hanging on until he got it all finished.

This work is dedicated to all of the churches, pastors, and church leaders who have a passion for God and a passion for the lost and who want to bring the two together—specifically my father, Rev. William A. Fisackerly, III.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

Our church noticed that we had very few eighteen to thirty-five-year-olds in the congregation. Young adults were in the community, in the malls, in the schools, and at the sports fields, but they were not in our church.

The gospel is relevant to everyone's life, including young adults. God has not stopped caring for his children. As our church studied the problem, we realized that the fault must be in *ourselves*—we were not making the gospel appealing to young adults. The words of truth were not being delivered in a way that made an impact on young adults. Our church looked at ourselves, our worship practices, and the Scriptures in order to determine what we could do to let God reach these young people through us.

Our church began to ask questions of relevance and worship. We began with the questions of what constitutes the essential elements of worship. We did not do any specific studies on historical worship liturgy but tried to develop the answers on our own. We developed a list of practices that we believed were important for worship and would also convince the existing church members that the new service was a valid worship experience:

- Scripture reading,
- Relevant message expounding upon the Scripture,
- Music/worship time,
- Prayer,
- Offering, and

- Communion.

We believed that if these essentials were in place, we were offering legitimate worship. Such elements as musical style, the clothing we wore, or the place or time were not as important. We wanted to strip down our worship to its basic elements and offer the basics to those who were missing.

A lack of young adult attendees is not a problem that we alone had been experiencing at our local church. The United Methodist Church (UMC) is losing ground. Between the years of 1970 and 2000 the UMC in America declined by 27.9 percent. In the year 1970 there were 10,671,774 persons who identified themselves as United Methodists, and 8,341,375 persons in 2000 ("Archives"). During that same time, the population of the United States grew by 35.3 percent. The United States had 207,976,452 citizens in 1970, and 281,421,906 persons in the year 2000 ("Table 1: Population of the United States: 1970 and 1960"; "Table 1: Population of the United States: 2000"). While the population of the U.S. continues to grow, the UMC has declined. An additional concern is the aging of the church, specifically the clergy. The number of United Methodist clergy under the age of thirty-five has dropped to 5.25 percent of all clergy, while the average age of all persons living in Florida is 39.06 ("Lewis Center Report" 8; "Table 1: Population of the United States Census: 2000"). Young clergy are important for reaching young people.

Young adults between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five are largely absent from the UMC. The problem becomes worse because many congregations seem unwilling to make any changes. Churches are wary of change and often do not have the finances to make change occur ("Connectional Table" 7). Oftentimes churches assume that the lack

of young adults is just a temporary thing, and the young people will all come back eventually, especially when they start having children of their own.

Passion for reaching the lost has been replaced with a consumer mentality that favors the status quo. Faith, however, says that the Church is the instrument that Christ has chosen to offer his hope and salvation into the world. Believers have a mandate to reach out to those around them, as evidenced by Jesus' words in Matthew. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Evangelism is the primary purpose of the church, not maintenance.

A growing number of churches are wrestling with this mandate and are experimenting with new ways of spreading the gospel. One of the most common exercises is to offer what is called *indigenous* or *contemporary worship*—a worship experience that is tailored specifically to tastes and styles that will appeal to a target group of the community that is not currently in attendance at that church. This style usually includes a casual atmosphere, band-driven (rather than organ-driven) music, and a high concentration of video imagery (Ruth 86).

The purpose of these services most often is to be an inroad for the non-churched. Churches hope that this type of service will bring young adults into the faith, or at least in through the doors. The change of musical style is seen as a way to bring in the lost.

This process of adding a new style of worship can result in a great amount of church conflict, however, especially if the existing congregation feels neglected by the leadership. A lot of time and energy is required to start a new service, and so the leadership of the church often must give more attention to the start-up at the expense of

the existing worship experiences. A feeling on neglect may arise, especially when the church in transition is not unified in its mission.

Many scholars agree that churches have become battlefields (e.g., Ellen-McKinney; Susek; Mosser; Towns; Long). Conflict occurs whenever change occurs. The stress of adding a new worship experience can be high, especially if the church has not taken adequate steps to prepare the existing congregation for the upcoming changes. Thrusting change upon a church without giving adequate time for reflection and dialogue can result in hostility and division (Halverstadt 22), but the healthier a congregation is, the more freely information can flow (Steinke 10). As David W. Kale and Mel McCullough say, "[W]e either try to ignore [conflict] or handle it badly. But well-managed conflict is a healthy part of a growing, responsive, in-touch church body" (5). When a church faces conflict in healthy ways, unity is present.

Change can be viewed as an indictment against the old ways of doing things, and a loss of control. Some hold to the belief that the old ways were the *right* ways and that the new ways are abandoning the old faith. As Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky suggest, people do not resist change as much as they resist loss (2).

When upcoming change is discussed honestly and openly and when the entire congregation is in agreement with the need for change, it can encourage creativity and new life in a congregation (Kale and McCullough 12). Instead of spending time in argument or soothing hurt feelings, a congregation that shares a common focus will have more energy for reaching the lost.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to observe three United Methodist churches of the Florida Conference that were dealing with the change of adding a new worship experience over the first three months of the new service's initiation in order to develop a protocol that other churches who will be facing a similar transition can use to maximize unity and minimize conflict.

Research Questions

The study asked the churches to identify the factors that led them to consider a new worship experience, looked for practices or actions taken by the churches that they believe helped them to build unity through the experience, and asked what advice they would give to other churches anticipating a similar worship transition. In addition, I identified areas of common stress that the churches experienced through the process.

Research Question #1

What factors led you to start this new worship experience?

Research Question #2

What practices did you find were most helpful in building unity during the start-up of the new worship experience?

Research Question #3

What would you suggest to other churches that are anticipating a similar worship transition?

Research Question #4

What would you do differently if you had this transition to do over again?

Definition of Terms

The following terms require specific definition for the purpose of this study:

Conflict

Conflict itself is neither negative nor positive. Conflict is simply the recognition that things can be viewed in more than one way. *Unresolved conflict* is negative. Unresolved conflict prevents a church from having a unified goal and mission. For this reason *conflict* in this study has a negative connotation, specifically defined as the continual unresolved disagreements that hinder the ministry of a church.

Worship

Because *worship* is a very broad term, for the purposes of this study the term refers to living in an attitude of constant devotion toward God and having one's activities guided by this devotion. Worship in this definition is differentiated from worship as something one attends with others (traditionally on Sunday morning) but in which one does not actively participate. The key is seeing worship as a verb and not a noun–something one lives, as opposed to something one attends.

Worship Experience

A *worship experience* is a public gathering of a church body where the focus is to honor God and the congregation is encouraged to draw closer to God. The term *experience* implies participation on an emotional and spiritual level, as opposed to the term *service*. The participants are invited to engage in the experience, not simply to be served.

New Worship Experience

A *new worship experience* differs in some way from the primary worship experience that a church currently offers, including but not limited to musical style, liturgy, and/or inclusion of new technology. The new worship experience may focus on reaching a generation or social group that is either missing from or not highly represented in the current worshipping congregation.

Traditional Worship Experience

A *traditional worship experience* is the historic worship experience of a church that the majority of the current membership attends. Each congregation will have different specifics in how it views traditional worship. The important dynamic for this study is that the new worship experience being offered is different in some substantive way from what this particular church considers *traditional.* For this study, *traditional* refers to a worship experience that uses formal liturgy, is mainly clergy led, and uses a choir and an organ as the primary source of music.

Contemporary Worship Experience

Contemporary worship experience refers to a style of worship experience that has a variable liturgy, is more lay driven, and makes use of musical instruments other than a soloist on the organ. Contemporary worship experiences are widely varied, depending upon the indigenous culture of the church.

Unity

Unity refers to having a common goal or shared purpose. Individuals and groups within the church do not have to agree on everything, but they agree on their central purpose and trust each other to carry out that purpose through different ministries.

Context

Churches starting a new worship experience comprised the context for this study. Some impetus drove the church to break the status quo and face the ensuing conflict in order to follow their vision, which set them apart from the majority of churches that are content to leave everything alone. The underlying passion for reaching the lost could be the factor that helped them face conflict in healthy ways, or their leadership or shared vision. Studying these churches can demonstrate how to reverse the trend of stagnation and decay seen in most North American churches.

In order to make this project manageable, the study was limited to three case studies of United Methodist churches of the Florida Annual Conference. This limitation provided enough differentiation to give accurate results, but was not too large to become cumbersome. The United Methodist Church was chosen because it is my home denomination and has a history of adaptability in regards to evangelism. John and Charles Wesley gave the denomination a heritage of using the art of the day, specifically music in their case, to capture people's attention and to teach them the faith. The Wesleyan movement faced much scorn and derision for their attempts to use new styles of evangelism, such as field preaching and non-ordained lay pastors. The Methodist movement was willing to face opposition because they took risks in doing whatever it took to reach those whom the traditional church was not reaching. The Methodist historical predisposition toward using the artistic styles of the common person to preach the gospel should make the current United Methodist Church more open to innovations in worship styles. Every United Methodist church does not necessarily have a creative attitude, but our cultural background encourages openness. Historical precedent toward

creative evangelism helps to still criticism when attempting something new. The churches involved in the study were true to their Wesleyan heritage by their willingness to step out of the mold of denominational decline and to risk trying something new.

Methodology

This was an exploratory, mixed-method design study with qualitative case studies and focus groups to determine how the three churches faced the process of change as they initiated a new worship experience. The research involved three instruments, all of which were researcher designed: a pre-event questionnaire, a post-event questionnaire three months after the transition was initiated, and a post-event focus group with the primary leadership of the church and six representative members of the congregation held three months after the start-up.

Participants

Three churches from the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church that were initiating a new worship experience were the population of this study. The criteria was that each church was starting a new worship experience within the time limits of this project, the senior pastor was expected to remain at the church throughout the entire worship transition, and the church was willing to answer two questionnaires and join a focus group to discuss their experience. Each church had a representative sample of ten persons to participate in the study. The ten persons were the senior pastor, the lay leader, the administrative council chair, the worship team leader or equivalent, two persons who were on the worship team or equivalent who did not participate in the planning but were a part of the implementation, and four persons chosen at random from the church. Of the four persons chosen at random, two of these were persons who attended the new worship

experience, and two were persons who attended the church's traditional worship experience.

Instrumentation

This study used three researcher-designed instruments. The first instrument was a pre-event questionnaire administered the week before the new worship experience was scheduled to begin. The second instrument was a post-event questionnaire scheduled three months into the worship transition. The third instrument was the post-event focus group at each church involving the participants who had filled out the questionnaires, again at three months after the initiation of the new worship experience.

The pre-event questionnaire asked the participants open-ended questions about their reasons for wanting to start a new worship experiences. The post-event questionnaire asked questions about the practices they had found during the previous three months that they believe helped them to maintain unity in the church and what resources they would suggest for other churches anticipating a similar worship transition. The post-event focus group asked open-ended questions concerning what they learned about themselves during the experience, what they would recommend for other churches, and what they would do differently if they were planning to add another new style of worship.

Variables

As exploratory research using case studies, I was looking for the factors that the church groups themselves said either helped or hindered their process of unification through the transition. However, the study itself may have been an intervening variable in the research. I did not want to skew the results by suggesting to the churches that they

should use some form of outside resources (e.g., books, seminars, or other sources). Even the question of asking what resources it had used might cause a church to rethink its strategy. If the church had not read any books or attended any seminars, I did not want to suggest that they should. For this reason the question about the resources that the churches had used was not asked until three months after the transition began.

Data Collection

The church participants sent their responses to the questionnaires electronically through a researcher designed questionnaire administered by SurveyMonkey. The second questionnaire followed three months later, also on SurveyMonkey. I met personally with the focus groups and recorded them with audio and video recordings. I had the notes transcribed to have a written record of the discussion. The churches received a $1 bonus for every questionnaire returned by the specified date, and an additional $1 for every participant who came to the focus group.

Data Analysis

I did a contextual analysis of the data collected through the three main instruments (the pre-event questionnaire, the post-event questionnaire, and the focus group). In this analysis I looked for emerging themes that would lead to further study.

The data concerning the reasons for starting a new worship experience was divided into four categories. The first category was *practical.* This category included all responses that dealt with time/space/logistical efforts. If the sanctuary was not large enough to hold all of the worshipers, or the time that worship was offered left out a large number of constituents, churches would make a decision to add or change an existing service for practical reasons.

The second category was *evangelistic.* This category included all responses that centered on wanting to bring more people into the kingdom of God. The third category was *creative.* These responses dealt with attempts to try something new and different as an artistic alternative to what was currently being offered in worship at that particular church. The fourth category was *spiritual.* This category identified attempts to include a more spiritual emphasis over what was already being offered.

The data concerning the resources that helped the church through the transition was divided into three categories. The first category was *external,* the second was *internal*, and the third was *none. External* resources included books, seminars, and outside leaders. *Internal* resources were the pastor(s), church-led studies or retreats, and wisdom gleaned from members of the congregation who had been through this process before. The resource listed as *None* was from one member who was not involved and did not know what his or her church had done.

The data for the question on recommendations for other churches was divided into three categories. The first was *external*, which included studies, books, or programs that came from outside the church. The second was *internal,* which were events that called the church together into prayer groups or support groups that did not involve external materials. The third category was *attitude*, which dealt with recognizing and facing the emotional/spiritual/psychological distress that accompanies a worship transition.

The data for the question on what they would do differently if they could do it over again was divided into three categories. The first was *internal.* This category included more time spent on interchurch communications and meetings, seeing in retrospect how they did not communicate as well as they thought they had. The second

category was *external.* This data came from one church who felt that they could have done more mailings and signage in the community to advertise their new worship experience. The third category was *attitude.* These responses formed a large category focused on both keeping the leadership team encouraged and on dealing with complaints from current church membership.

Generalizability

This study was limited to existing churches who added a new worship experience that was substantively different from the traditional service(s) of that church. As such, the findings from this study may not apply to churches that are radically changing an existing service, or to new churches that do not have an existing tradition upon which to draw.

Nevertheless, the recommendations from the churches should be appropriate for any church facing a transition. The concepts of *building unity* and *involving the whole congregation in the process* are valid. Many times the opponents on an issue are not looking to stifle the process; they just want to know that they are still respected and that their voices are heard.

Theological Foundation

The central tenet of the Christian faith is that God reaches out to include human beings into his family. God is creative in the ways that he communicates with us. Each person is different, so God uses different strategies to get each person's attention. God adapts God's methods to reach each succeeding generation through ways that they will understand. Jesus said in Mark 2:22, "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined.

No, he pours new wine into new wineskins." New methods require new strategies in order to make them effective.

The body of Christ, the Church, is called to continue the work that Jesus started in bringing the world to himself. Each new generation of believers is responsible for reaching out to its own peers to include them in God's plan of salvation. God said that he was "the God of Abraham, and [then] Isaac, and [then] Jacob (emphasis mine; Exod. 3:6). This continuation of calling means that each generation that follows chooses to follow God or not. Humanity still has the opportunity to make Yahweh its own God and to follow in the faith.

The church's task is to speak the eternal word in the words of its own day–to make the eternal relevant. Karl Barth encouraged young theology students to "take your Bible and your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible" ("Theologians"). The church lives in two worlds, being culturally relevant while striving for religious purity. Churches often slip from one extreme or the other, so the tension between remaining in contact with the world while preserving integrity is difficult.

When a church believes that a broad cross-section of the community is missing from its ranks, one of the first things that many churches do is to start a new worship experience that is radically different from what they are already doing. The problem is that sometimes the leadership of a church can rush into these changes without involving the existing congregation in discussions about the reasons for the anticipated change. As a result, the existing congregation can feel imposed upon because they are told to change without knowing why, which leads to resentment and additional conflict.

Paul is a good example of a leader living out his beliefs in such a way that people could see the vision by which he lived. Specifically, in his letter to the Corinthian church Paul stated his belief that his freedom and comfort were secondary to his passion for reaching the lost:

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law, (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this of the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor. 9:19-23, NIV)

Paul took Jesus as his example—God incarnate. Jesus took on human flesh in order to break down any barriers that could possibly stand between humanity and himself. Jesus was born of a woman, lived on earth, and died a human death, experiencing every emotion, every betrayal, every brokenness that constitutes human life. He then took this brokenness to the cross with him.

Paul continued to speak of his understanding of Christ's connection with us by saying:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-12, RSV)

Paul believes that the most important thing that human beings can know is that God offers salvation. Jesus started the process by his willingness to leave behind his heavenly

glory in order to come to earth. Paul was also willing to let go of the old standards that previously constituted religious behavior in his mind, such as adherence to dietary laws, the marking of days and seasons, and the persecution of those who violated the accepted customs. Paul realized that the law of grace was more effective than the law of Law. This concept caused great turmoil not only for the Pharisaic community, which he left, but also for the Christians he was joining. The Pharisees considered him a traitor to their own cause, and the early Christian community was even unsure about how far away from traditional Judaism Paul wanted to take them.

Paul believed in an incarnational theology: The best way to reach people was to speak to them on their own terms in their own language. The gospel is to be lived out, not just preached. For this reason Paul was willing to endure hardship and suffering, even rejection from his own people, in order to make connections with the lost. Paul recites a litany of his troubles in 2 Corinthians 11:25 where he lists being beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, and marooned for the sake of the gospel. In Paul's mind these things were trivial compared to the grace of being privileged to share the Word. In his speech to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20, Paul said that all of these troubles really do not matter, as long as he was able to continue to preach of Jesus. In his farewell to the Philippian church Paul said that he was willing to accept good and bad, times of plenty and times of hunger, to be abased and to abound, as long as he could preach the word of God.

The specifics of his situation led Paul to consider how he could best speak to a people. One clear example is when Paul spoke in Athens after his troubles in Thessalonica and Berea. The story found in Acts 17 shows his heart in making the gospel relevant to a new people.

In this story Paul was walking through the city streets of Athens. He had fled from two previous cities, Thessalonica and Berea, out of fear of losing his life. While Paul was not afraid of death, he did want to keep on living so that he could tell others about Christ. Paul was evidently taking a more subdued approach in Athens than he had in previous cities he had visited. Rather than go directly to the synagogue or public forums, Paul spent some time walking around the city and observing the customs, the people, and the architecture.

Paul was taking time to get to know the heart of Athens. Instead of jumping headlong into heated debate, Paul was considering how best to grab the attention of the people of this city. Paul wandered and was distressed to see so many altars set up to a plethora of false gods, but he also realized that these altars gave him a great opportunity. These people were searching, and they recognized the need for spiritual formation. They were looking for spiritual answers to life's questions.

When an opportunity arose for Paul to speak to these people, he had a plan. He began by complimenting them on their open views. "I see that in every way you are very religious" (Acts 17:22). He then let them know that he respected them enough to get to know them. "I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship" (v. 23a). Paul then used the Greeks' own terminology and their own beliefs to draw them into a positive conversation. "I even found an altar with this inscription–'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (v. 23b). Paul proceeded to tell them, in their own language, what he had found in Jesus.

Paul not only spoke of an incarnate gospel, but he lived it. He made the gospel itself incarnate, having the eternal Word come alive in the words and customs of the

culture to whom he was speaking. Both Jesus and Paul gave the example of laying aside rights and comfort in order to take the message of salvation out to those who need it. Paul relied upon the example of Christ, who showed that comfort is less important than willingness to go wherever and to whomever God requires. Paul violated customs, laws, and ceremonial rites for the greater purpose of leading persons to Christ. Paul believed that bringing people into a relationship with Jesus was more important than doing things the same way just because things had always been done that way. Just as Christ reached down to humanity and offered his grace, his followers now have the mandate to continue to reach out as Jesus did to bring others into the family of God.

Worship is, many times, a reflection of customs and preferences. As H. Richard Niebuhr points out, humans use many ways to try to make connections between our faith and our culture (xliii). No single Christian interpretation exists that excludes all others. The danger of trying to assert that Christ supports any specific culture is that cultural differences can be seen as religious differences, and lines can be drawn over stylistic preferences that do not have theological integrity.

The Scriptures record a variety of ways in which persons have worshiped in the past. Cain and Abel are the first indication of specific worship. Although Abel's worship gift was accepted and Cain's was not, the criteria by which they were judged is not clear (Gen. 4). Both Cain and Abel are said to have brought an offering to the Lord.

The earliest acts of formal worship recorded in Jewish history primarily dealt with sacrifices and offerings, both of animals and of riches. Noah presented a burnt offering after emerging from the ark onto dry ground after the flood (Gen. 8:20). Abraham gave a

tenth of his spoils of victory to Melchizedek as an offering of praise to God (Gen. 14:17-20).

When the worship of Yahweh became codified and corporate worship overtook individual sacrifices, Aaron and his sons were appointed to organize and perform the sacrifices on behalf of the people (Exod. 29). The sacrificial system was not the end in itself. The intent was to purify the people so that they could come into God's presence and worship him with a clear conscience.

Spontaneous worship is also evident throughout the Scriptures. Miriam broke into song when the Lord delivered the people from the armies of Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds (Exod. 15). David danced with joy when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the city (2 Sam. 6:14). The people threw down their cloaks and carried leafy branches when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt. 21).

Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria that true worship is not dependent upon set times or places but that one day all who worship God will worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:1-24). The book of Revelation reveals that all of the world's people will come to God and worship him together, bowing down before the throne and giving praise to the one true God.

One form of worship is not mandated for all time. In each situation and to each generation God communed with his people in ways that were appropriate to them. David was not asked to sacrifice his son. Moses was not told to build the Temple. God is looking for sincere devotion that comes from the heart, submitting the self to God's grace and allowing him to mold according to his will.

Worship can be either a verb or a noun. Human beings *go* to worship, but they also *worship.* Worship must be more than something to come and observe. Worship requires involvement. God warns the people through Isaiah: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isa. 29:13). Clearly, worship is a commitment of more than just rote movement and recitation of words.

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus emphasized involvement of the whole person–heart, soul, mind, and strength. He then included the responsibility for acting directly in the lives of one's neighbors. He emphasized not just adherence to rules and rituals, as the lawyer who asked the question had assumed. In Jesus' thought, one cannot choose between either intentions or actions. Belief is revealed through actions. Worship is the focus of a person's entire life, not just an event attended on weekends. Worship is revealed in a person's priorities.

God intends for worship to be an offering of the whole self in order to be acceptable in his sight. When worship is separated from the soul or is seen as just another duty, worship becomes a noun that is just one activity among many. When worship is seen as a way of life or a paradigm through which people behave, it becomes the map that guides everything.

Sometimes maps change. When a new street is built, or a river takes a different course, old maps become obsolete. Some of the main framework may still be present, but new roads and new rivers alter paths. Starting points and ending points can be the same, but the journey is different. A different journey does not mean the old paths were wrong; they were right for their time. The old paths may be traveled again. In order to keep up

with the new traffic flows and growing community, looking at new maps can help to find more useful routes and more efficient ways of getting work done.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews literature concerning the dynamics of church transitions, world systems theory, family systems theory, conflict, and worship. Chapter 3 details the project's design and methodology. Chapter 4 reports the finding of the study. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the study and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

The design of this project is to assist the Church in reaching the world through effective worship transition. While God never changes, the ways in which he speaks and reaches out to his world are constantly changing. This change, however, is often difficult for individuals and churches to implement.

The broad literature review allows for integration of a wider spectrum than simply evaluating the current situation of worship transition. Complex processes always have more dynamics at work than are initially seen, so setting up a groundwork of how nations, organizations, industries, and families relate on a global basis gives a broader base for understanding how churches face transitions.

The decision to delineate *worship transitions* from *historical church conflict* in general was made because of the specific emotional nature that changing a style of worship entails. While all conflict can be emotional, worship practices in North America evoke a deep, gut-level reaction. When a church changes its liturgy, leadership, or political stance the result is conflict, but these are usually discussed and decided upon at a bureaucratic level and not at the grassroots (Schalk 16). The decision and implementation of worship is currently done primarily at the leadership level, in the local church, and, therefore, has a greater effect upon the average church attendee. Historical church conflicts give a starting point, but often not an accurate record of the dynamics that leads to or results from the transitions. For instance, organs were widely rejected for the first

fourteen hundred years of the church's existence, but we have no record as to exactly when or why they came to be accepted in the latter part of the second millennium.

The final section of this chapter reviews the style of research used in this project. It provides the reasoning for choosing an exploratory case study using qualitative, mixed-methods design.

Definition of the Problem–Dealing with Change

Change produces conflict. Humanity has a tendency to seek stability and order, and change upsets stability. Human beings seek ways to manage or lessen that stress (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, and Callan). Depending upon the situation and the emotional resources of the person under stress at the time, conflict might be handled positively or negatively (Tice 133; Kale and McCullough 5). Positive conflict results in new understanding and security; negative conflict results in additional stress. The influence of whether a person believes that this change will be beneficial or detrimental to goals must also be considered. If a person believes that the change will be beneficial, that person is more willing to accept the change. If a person believes the change to be detrimental or if the personal cost of the change is too high, that person will have a tendency to rebel against the change (Tice 137).

A World Systems Understanding of Change

While the interest in this research is primarily for local churches, the examination of the process of change in a global perspective is helpful. Churches can be understood as organized groups and, as such, can become microcosms of what happens at a larger level. The research of Donald Black and Immanuel Wallerstein and others on the nature of

power and institutional and international change can provide insight into the reasons why churches might have a difficult time changing.

The positive and negative reactions to proposed change fall into a set pattern of behaviors that can be identified regardless of the size of the sample being surveyed. Whether an individual person makes a decision about conflict in his or her own life or countries gather together at the United Nations, similar dynamics are at work. Wallerstein's key identification in understanding the reactions to proposed changes are based upon whether the person or the nation in question sees itself as *core, semi-periphery,* or *periphery* in the conflict at hand (3).

Core is the current power structure in any situation. Decisions made between core parties involve a ready acceptance of each other's equality and a respect for the sovereignty of each nation (party) to follow its own path. Agreements between core nations result in trade agreements; disagreements may result in war. *Semi-periphery* nations would be considered *second tier* or second-world countries that are industrial and competing on the global scale but do not have the resources or influence upon other countries that the core nations exercise. In this area the response to pressure changes: While semi-periphery parties can relate to each other the way that core parties do, their response to core nations is not and cannot be the same. The power structure does not allow it. Adding in the *periphery* nations, commonly called *third world*, the actions and reactions to conflict become even more complex (Halsall).

The dynamics of *greater versus lesser* and *lesser to greater* power exchanges are intriguing, how parties of different respective levels tend to respond in conflict situations. Table 2.1 illustrates the different actions/reactions that nations of different levels often

use against each other in a conflict situation. While nations of equal status tend to abide by the same conventions, nations of lesser status react to nations of greater status with tactics that are labeled as *uncivilized, barbaric,* and *terroristic* (Borg 266-68).

Table 2.1. World Systems Theory Conflict Responses

	Core	**Periphery**	**Semi-Periphery**
Core—positive	Trade agreements	Discipline	Incentives
Core—negative	War	Military establishments	Military intervention
Periphery—pos	Productivity	Trade agreements	Incentives
Periphery—neg	Rebellion	War	Terrorism
Semi—pos	Appeals	Incentives	Trade agreements
Semi—neg	Rebellion	Embargo	War

The question remains how to categorize nations into three groups: *core, periphery,* and *semi-periphery.* While the simple solution is to make the decision on an economic basis (e.g., Gross National Product or natural resources), the decision becomes more complex when emerging nations suddenly develop a source of income that lifts them higher than their neighbors. The United Nations is constantly reviewing growing nations in order to offer United Nations membership, and the concept of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council raises questions as to whether political power in the past is a valid reason for continued decision-making power in the future.

Viewing churches through a world systems theory lens gives insight as to why seemingly simple matters in a church become enlarged to critical status. Core, semi-

periphery, and periphery dimensions add understanding to church systems and can help the leadership of a church work for unity in conflict situations.

While larger churches sometimes understand the concept of hierarchies within the organization, most medium to small churches and the pastors of these churches tend to see themselves as *all one family*. Pastors preach that churchgoers are "all part of the same Body" (Rom. 12:4) and assume that everyone hears and believes that they are all equal. Pastors often do not recognize that many of the church constituents consider themselves outsiders. Although church leaders may be familiar with the 80/20 rule (i.e., 80 percent of the people do 20 percent of the work, and 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work), this functional formula is not recognized as possibly having a role in decision making or unity building.

Pastors often labor under the illusion that the members of the congregation all see themselves as equals. Although pastors preach that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free" (Gal. 3:28) and tell people that they are all equal in God's sight, this admonition of equality does not equate to an automatic sense of authority in the congregation. Many times the pastors and church leaders assume that everyone knows that he or she has a voice and a vote in the decision-making process. However, the reality is that longtime members see themselves as deserving a greater voice than newer members, and new members are put in their place by structures similar to those in world systems theories.

As Table 2.1 shows, if persons or groups within a church see themselves as semi-periphery or periphery, they will react differently than a core party would to the same conflict. Periphery parties are more likely to use rebellion as self-help (Borg 267) or desertion as avoidance (269) than to sit down at the same table to discuss the issue.

Furthermore, to invite persons to the table who do not believe that they even belong at the table adds to the confusion. Those doing the inviting might assume that all parties now see themselves as equals and will contribute to the discussion, whereas those who feel outside the group (even though they are sitting at the table) will still react with semi-periphery/periphery responses.

In a hypothetical discussion about changing the time of worship on Sunday morning, the pastor announces at the church worship experience that the worship committee will be discussing the possible change, and all individuals having an opinion on the issue are welcome to come on Tuesday night to the meeting to have their say. The pastor thinks that he or she has done a good job of communicating the information to everyone and assumes that those who are interested will attend.

Jane Churchmember, however, is upset. She had not heard about a possibility of a change in worship time. She was not a part of the preliminary discussions as to why a change in time was even suggested. She distinctly believes that she is not a part of the *core* because whatever discussions were going on did not include her. She does not feel comfortable coming to the worship committee meeting because she is just a church member and has not been elected to office. Her response, then, would be one of *lower to higher.* She thinks of herself as periphery or semi-periphery.

The pastor and the worship committee go ahead and have their meeting. A few people come, usually persons who have been on the church council before. They have been a part of the core in the past, and so they have lost some of their fear of the process. The discussion of the new worship times most likely includes like-minded people who have attended the meeting. For all of their well-intentioned efforts at getting the pulse of

the congregation, the fact that the average congregant does not see him or herself as an equal voice within the group does not arise. If the pastor and leadership of the church are not aware of this dynamic, they might assume that the discussion went well because nobody objected, but they would be wrong.

A Family Systems Understanding of Change

Virginia Satir, in her work on family systems, provides an insight into the conflicts that develop in churches that do not seem to make sense to the naked eye. Satir suggests that much of what happens in any society is a reflection of the family dynamics that take place in the background (360).

The most basic form of family role-playing is in the parent and child system. In this form, the parent is the influencer and the child is follower (Kale and McCullough 66). While a parent may be involved in the church leadership structure, this dynamic is not always the case. The boundaries between parent and child go one way: Parent influences child, and child follows.

As the family structure grows more complex because of church size, the dynamics grow more complex. Multiple parents, children, and independent children add to the conflict. The primary dynamic is still present in that those calling the shots (the parents) may or may not be in the forefront, but their presence is still felt in the conflict. The work of Hugh Halverstadt refines the process, and he states that any church conflict contains no more than five principal players (74). At this point boundaries come into play, which is the term used to describe how information passes between involved parties. Boundaries can be open or closed, diffuse or unclear, mixed, or even disputed (Cosgrove and Hatfield

36-39). The difficulty in conflict settings is understanding where the boundaries are, who placed them, and who is influencing whom.

With all of the complexities of communication that exist, churches can still work through the problems. The problems can either be met with creativity and dialogue or with discipline and demands. The decision of how to handle conflict will have a direct result for the future of the church (Susek 27; Ellen-McKinney 8).

The common theme in working through church conflict is to have a shared vision, not just among the leaders but also throughout the entire congregation. The solution will not be found in solving the problem; the solution will be found in working through the relationships involved (Preston 139; Southerland 74; Ellen-McKinney 38). These researchers agree that speed is the enemy when going through a transition. While the physical steps of a transition may occur quickly, the time required to make the transition go smoothly is long. As Kale and McCullough say, "Churches are like horses–they don't like to be startled" (16). The time a church invests in studying and publicizing vision results in unity instead of conflict.

Conflict within the Apostolic Church

Hierarchies exist in every organization. The church has been no exception. Three examples in the Scriptures bear examination: Jesus' call of the disciples, the development of *deacons* to oversee the food distribution to the widows, and the Council of Jerusalem concerning the circumcision of Gentile believers.

During Jesus' ministry hundreds of persons followed Jesus. The Scriptures refer to them as "disciples" (Luke 6:17; 10:1; John 4:1). Of those hundreds, Jesus chose to call twelve for special training and guidance as his inner core (including/excluding the

Judas/Mattias debate). An inner core also exists within the inner core, consisting of Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1; Mark 14:33; Luke 8:51; see also Gal. 1:18-19). Jesus often took his disciples out into the wilderness to get away from the crowds, and just as often Jesus took only a few to be alone with him.

Wallerstein suggests that every society has at least one class, sometimes two, but cannot tolerate more than two (233). When societies start to have three classes, the highest levels of conflict can ensue. Luke 9:45 clearly indicates a struggle among the disciples about their relative position within the class. The disciples start arguing among themselves as to which one is the greatest. More struggle arises when Jesus heals on the Sabbath and upsets the religious leaders (Matt. 12:10). This episode could reveal a three-class struggle in which Jesus represents the core, the crowds represent the periphery (those through whom God is building the new kingdom), and the current religious establishment represent the semi-periphery (in between those doing the work and those directing it).

In a family systems model, the conflict that develops comes from competing influencers. Jesus would be considered a parent in this situation, as would the Pharisees and religious leaders in Matthew 12:10. Their boundaries are rigid, meaning that neither information nor influence was likely to pass through to the other group.

Seeing the disciples as children is appropriate throughout the Gospels, since they were being influenced and, on the whole, not being influencers. In Mark 9:14-29 the story of the disciples trying to heal a boy who was possessed with an evil spirit reveals their lack of influence. Try as they might, they could not cast the evil spirit out, so they brought the boy to Jesus. After he had cast the spirit out, the disciples asked, "Why could

we not do it?" (9:28). This question indicates that, although they were attempting to imitate their master, they did not have the authority yet in themselves to do such things.

As the church began to grow, the delineation of responsibilities became a factor, not only in worship but also in administration (Acts 6:1-7). The authority of the disciples as the core was being called into question because the basic needs of the Gentile widows and orphans were being neglected. The response can be seen as one of rebellion (self-help, drawing attention to the cause) by the periphery or as competing parents in family systems. They were calling into question the discrepancy between what was being preached and what was being lived out, namely, that the poor were important and should be held in just as high regard as those who were rich or who had power.

In this situation class distinctions were being made between the old establishment (Judaism) and the new way (Christianity). The oversight of the widows' portions might have been deliberate or could have been inadvertent. The important point is that the apostles took the charges seriously. They called for a meeting and began to share their power. They asked for "seven men of good repute" (Acts 6:3) to take responsibility for the physical (and, hence, spiritual) needs of the whole congregation.

The core entails the twelve disciples. The periphery includes the poorest (and least respected) members of the community. The semi-periphery were those who had been neglecting (or possibly interfering?) with the work of grace that was to be done. As a family system, the twelve disciples had to make a choice as to which parental authority, Christianity or Judaism, was going to be their guide. The prejudice of the Jewish Christians against the Gentiles was becoming clear, and boundaries were drawn. The

disciples exercised their authority to claim that the new loyalty of all persons being family members of Christ superseded the old loyalties of Jewish class structure.

Another example of the church dealing with conflict was at the Council of Jerusalem (ca. CE 50). The council was the first indication of a growing structure within the church to make decisions of policy. Paul led a delegation of Gentile Christians to ask for a ruling on whether or not Gentile believers had to conform to Jewish rituals in order to be considered faithful believers (Acts 15:1-29; Gal. 1:1-10). This Council of Jerusalem indicated that a core or central ruling body was needed to oversee the theology and actions of the various churches within the Church to ensure that the faith was being preached properly. The periphery consisted of the churches that were going out to preach the Word.

Each of these conflicts was handled by the hierarchical structure of the time. In the first instance, that of Jesus calling his disciples, Jesus was the center of the movement. He took the initiative to choose whom he wanted as his core. Peter, James, and John became the inner core through their relationship with Jesus.

The situation in Acts 6 regarding the dispersal of resources among the early Church indicates the next level of hierarchy with a functional development of duties. The apostles (as the core) were still the presiding body, meaning that their decision came with the expectation that it would honored. Their method of solving the problem ("choose among yourselves seven men") indicates an attempt to give responsibility to the periphery and semi-periphery, possibly in hopes of uniting the two. Family systems theory identifies the full authority of Christ as the parent now, rather than Judaism.

The example of the Council of Jerusalem indicates a further evolution of structure. At this point the church began to tackle the theological issues that had led them further away from Judaism. The Scriptures say that "the apostles and elders" lived in Jerusalem and were considered the authority of the church (Acts 15:2). The debate had an almost court-like proceeding, and the resulting decision was received and followed.

Worship Conflicts in the Middle Ages

The history of the church includes many conflicts. The interest of this study was primarily worship (or liturgy) transition. This study limited itself to two primary art forms that were traditionally associated with the church–the use of organs and stained glass windows. These two elements were the architectural centerpieces of the Renaissance-age church and were still central in the modern church of the twentieth century. How they became established reveals two quite different stories.

The Organ

Organs were banned from church use for almost half of the church's history. Even Martin Luther called the organ "the instrument of baal" (qtd. in M'Clintock and Strong 762). The early Church was reluctant to use it for many reasons, most notably because of its use in the theater and the circus and its imperfections in the tone. For over one thousand years, chanting was accepted as the main form of musical expression, with very little attention given to meter or harmony. Early worship music consisted of singing mostly *a capella*, with only occasional use of a lyre or timbrel (Bewerunge). The beauty of the pure voice was preferred over instrumentation, partially because of a hesitation to follow Judaistic styles and partially to avoid the appearance of copying worldly festival practices (Bingham 137; Augustine 122).

No one knows exactly when organs were first used in churches for worship for two main reasons. First, very few records of the liturgy survive from the first-century period, and, second, the term *organa* is vague in the documents that exist. For many centuries the term *organa* was translated as the English word *organ*. Peter F. Williams strongly suggests that the term was widely used to refer to any organized system of musical production, including bodies of works stored in musical libraries (43). Moreover, the *organs* in the first three centuries were small, portable instruments that were more at home in the fairs and circuses than in churches (e.g., calliopes; 1).

The first reliable witness of an organ itself being used in worship was from Saint Augustine around CE 430, where he mentions organs using wind power in his discussion of Psalm 150 (514). This reference does not mean that organs were commonplace in churches at that time but only that they had enough presence within the church to be identifiable in discussions without having to elaborate upon them (Williams 22). Other witnesses mention organs being used for state affairs or special occasions such as royal visits or the announcing of a new pope, but evidently they were not used for everyday worship (21).

Organs were common in church worship in the thirteenth century, as evidenced by the comments of Gill of Zamora. He writes, "This is the only musical instrument the church employs, the other instruments all having been banned because of abuse by play-actors" (qtd. in Williams 41).The organ continued to exert more influence upon church music during this century.

Many persons assume that Pope Vitalian was responsible for the introduction of organs in the mid-600s, based upon the work of Bartolomia Sacchi in 1474 in his book on

popes (Williams 44). However, this research is suspect. Although Vitalian was supportive of the use of organs, many doubt that he was the primary reason for their acceptance (44). Almost 1,100 years passed before organs became commonplace in churches, and Mozart in 1777 was able to call it "the king of instruments" (qtd. in Williams preface).

The acceptance of organs into the worship life of the church took over 850 years, from CE 430 to CE 1320. Organs existed outside of the church, as evidenced by the development of the *hydraulis* by Ctesibius of Alexandria in the third century BCE ("Hydraulis"). The *hydraulis* was a water-driven system that used water pressure to force air through the pipes, creating shrill but distinctive tones that were used to play songs. The early Church was aware of these instruments.

Just because something is available and recognized does not mean that it is accepted. Augustine's reluctance to use organs was because of their secular connotations, their association with the sensuous heathen cults and the wild revelries of the circus. Williams indicates that some church leaders considered the organ to be "an unimportant crowd pleaser" (7). Erasmus objected to the presence of the organ and any instruments that overshadowed the voices of the singers, causing them to be lost in a confused, disorderly chattering (22).

Still, times changed. With the growth of the church came power and wealth. With power and wealth came resources that made new technologies possible. Whereas in former times the church met in small chapels with little room for ornamentation or instruments, as time went on larger monasteries and cathedrals were built that could house great racks of pipes and the tubing and bellows necessary for large organs. In simpler times, the human voice could be heard clearly in the small chapels. As

sanctuaries grew, more and more volume was needed to fill the structures and to reach all the way to the ears of the listeners.

Eventually organs came to be accepted as the standard for church music, although the reasons remain unclear. Most likely a combination of factors working together made organs acceptable. The organ has no champion or event that stands out as the pivotal moment in organ acceptance. As was mentioned previously, Pope Vitalian was given credit for introducing the organ, but more likely he simply recognized what was already happening in the life of the church and gave it his blessing. This blessing can be seen as a case of the core recognizing what was happening in the periphery and sanctioning it in order to promote morale, or as the parent giving direction and influence to the children.

The growth of cities led to the building of cathedrals. The increase of wealth meant that churches could afford to buy the copper tubing and hire craftsmen to form the pipes for the organ. Benedictine monks had a passion for innovation and bringing together different sciences to create such a complex instrument as the organ. Each of these events contributed to the acceptance of organs as appropriate for use in church settings. Somehow, in the fourteen hundred years since its inception, the church claimed the organ as its own.

Not only *when* but *how* the decision to use organs in worship came about is lost. Although Pope Vitalian may have been the titular leader when the official decision to accept organs was made, this decision cannot be interpreted as simply an executive decision or approval by a study committee. More likely the acceptance of organs was a case of the periphery church members exerting pressure upon the core, and the core recognizing and accepting the use of organs for the overall good of the order.

Stained Glass

A second art form closely associated with the ancient worship traditions of the church is stained glass. Of all of the artistic expressions through which the church has endeavored to share its faith, stained glass is the one that it can claim most rightfully as its own. The church developed the practice of painting on glass. While wealthy Romans in the first century decorated their homes with tinted glass, they used color only with no specific design (Fitzgerald). The earliest fragments of painted stained glass are of Christian religious origin; a fragment with the image of Christ was unearthed in Italy dating from CE 540 ("Stained Glass History").

Stained or pictorial glass never seemed to be questioned as a legitimate way of expressing the faith. No record of controversy over its acceptance exists, other than minor issues with the cost of production. Some of the Cistercian orders (founded 1098) argued over the use of muted colors or simple black on white glass as their preference (Brisac 16). The only other disagreement is an interesting squabble with the mural painters of the day, who were concerned that their ranks were diminishing because more people were choosing to paint on glass rather than to learn the techniques of fresco painting (14).

In addition to its beauty, stained glass had a strong theological backing behind it. The symbolism of "God as Light" and how the message came refracted through human experience validated the existence of stained glass in the church (Raguin 10-13). Whereas the growth of organ music took place mainly in the northwestern arc of the Christian Church (from Rome up through France and England), stained glass proliferated at almost every location within the church's reach (Brisac 17).

Church writings do not give any specific references as to how stained glass developed as a primary Christian art form. Although stained glass has a stronger theological basis for the acceptance than organs, the decision was not a core-led process. The church's adoption of stained glass indicates the existence of only one class, thereby eliminating any core-periphery struggle and any family struggle.

Current Study

The concept of *conflict* is central to this study. All churches have conflict. How churches deal with this conflict effectively is the key for a resolution to conflicts through worship transitions.

This study attempted to address the issue of conflict through the lens of *worship disagreements.* Everyone has a different opinion of what true worship is. Many authors suggest that the average person in the pew or auditorium seat confuses the style of worship with actual worship (Warren 65; Morgenthaler vii; Kimball 2): for example, "At our church we have the worship first, and then the teaching" (Warren 65). Worship is *living in an attitude of constant devotion toward God and having one's activities guided by this devotion,* regardless of the musical style or liturgy (Towns 3; Kimball 4). Worship is something that happens long before the worshipper enters the church complex. Worship is a continual attitude of attempting to live in God's presence.

Adding to the confusion of the word *worship* is the definition of *style.* Contemporary, traditional, and blended worship means different things to different people and churches. What one church considers traditional may be vastly different from a church down the street or across the country. Paul E. Zahl suggests six different and distinct styles of Western worship that are found in North America today—formal

liturgical, traditional hymn based, contemporary music driven, charismatic, blended, and emerging (Webber, Introduction). George Barna says that despite all of the variations in expression and the research to the contrary, most people identify different practices of worship primarily by the musical style, not by the differences in liturgy or theology.

This study focused on two styles–traditional and contemporary. *Traditional* refers to a worship experience that uses a formal liturgy, is mainly clergy led, and uses a choir and organ as the primary source of music. *Contemporary* refers to a worship experience that has a variable liturgy, is more lay driven, and makes use of musical instruments other than a soloist on the organ. These forms are not the only Protestant worship available, but they are the largest categories currently practiced by active churches in North America. Other researchers identify *postmodern, seeker sensitive,* and *emerging* categories, in addition to the ones I have listed (Easum 20; Hybels and Hybels 172; Dawn vii). These categories were not explored in this study because they are predominately focused on reaching persons who have been disillusioned or disenchanted by the existing church (Kimball vi). This study was limited to those churches in the process of transitioning from a traditional style of worship to a contemporary style.

Barna found that 40 percent of adults in Protestant churches in North America today attend a traditional worship experience. He found that 76 percent of the persons interviewed said that if the service they currently attend changed its musical style, they would probably not change their attendance patterns. This apparent openness to change seems contradictory to actual experience. When the committee commissioned by the United Methodist Church went about restructuring its approved hymnal for use in worship, they revealed that they were considering dropping the hymn *Onward Christian*

Soldiers from the repertoire. This news stirred up such a furor that the committee retained the hymn although it was put on page 575, facing *Rise Up, O Men of God* so that both pages could be paper clipped together and ignored if one chose to do so (C. Young). Further evidence of the importance of musical style over theological process is found in the rewording of the Nicene creed by the United Methodist hymnal committee. No response or objection came from the people of the United Methodist Church. Musical style plays a greater role in a person's involvement in acceptance of worship than most people would like to admit.

An apparent contradiction arises in the transformation of worship. Surveys say that church members are fine with changes in the musical style, but when those changes are enacted, difficulties arise. The reasons for this contradiction could be a core/periphery split, a family systems dynamic, a problem with definitions, or a vocal minority whose objections make their numbers seem larger than they really are.

When most people speak of *worship wars*, they think of musical and stylistic differences–the raising of hands, guitars and praise choruses, and casual dress (Long 10; Towns 10; Parrett 3). The gurus of postmodern worship suggest two poles around which worship should center–*liturgy* and *relationship* (Dawn 1; Webber 248). While Lynn and Bill Hybels and Sally Morgenthal lean towards making the *human* feel comfortable in worship, Marva J, Dawn emphasizes a God-centered experience.

Conflict in worship is not new. Elmer Towns suggests that the first murder recognized in the Bible was a disagreement over worship: The Lord looked with favor on Abel's offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor (Gen. 4:4b-5a). While murder is not the standard for worship disagreements today, congregations have

split or splintered over changes in the worship methods, and this disagreement often seems to center on the style of music.

Worship wars erupt because of a gulf between the core and the periphery or because of competing parental authorities. The parties do not agree as to the purpose of their work. Usually conflict does not come from completely opposite perspectives, but because of at least two perspectives of how to reach the same goal (Ellen-McKinney 38). While both the core and the periphery would agree that the church's purpose is to support the established faith, they would disagree on what that support means. Supporting the faith could mean continuing the liturgy from the past for the benefit of those who are already church members, or it could mean retranslating the liturgy into contemporary language to reach those who are currently outside the faith.

Research Design

This project was a qualitative, multi-case study, using an exploratory, mixed-methods design.

Reasoning for Qualitative Study

A qualitative study is a better method for researching this topic rather than a quantitative study because worship transition is not easily measured by numbers and statistics. Simply counting the number of attendees at a particular worship experience before and six months after the transition occurred does not tell the whole picture of *why* the transition took place, *what facilitated the process,* or *if the worshippers feel a connection with God through the process.*

The key to this study was understanding what books/processes/dynamics in the opinion of the leadership team and parishioners involved in a worship transition, helped

to foster unity and to increase their connection with God. A qualitative study seeks specifically to understand the *what was going on* questions, not just results.

Reasoning for Exploratory, Mixed-Methods Design

The exploratory design looks at the study from the outside and asks, "What is the research telling me?" It does not come to the study with a theory to be proved; rather, it comes with an open mind and lets the participants tell what is happening to them.

This design is particularly well-suited for this study on worship transition because I wanted the participants to tell what they found to be most helpful through their own journey. I was not attempting to *explain* what was happening but to *explore* what the case study churches experienced.

The mixed-methods design is the result of combining pre-transition surveys, interviews, and post-transition surveys from participants in the process. The questionnaires were designed to be as open-ended as possible to allow the respondents to give their own opinion free from bias. For instance, if a question asked the participants if they had found any of William Easum's work to be relevant, the results would have been tainted by suggesting a resource that the church may not have considered prior to the study.

Summary

Transition is stressful, no matter how much planning occurs. Complex factors underlie all change, and a change in the style of worship that a church employs has additional dynamics that are often unseen by the participants. The question is not just of changing the music. Often deep theological, psychological, and sociological roots are tied

to worship practices. How a person believes that their voice is heard impacts how smoothly a transition can proceed.

The purpose of this study was to observe three United Methodist churches of the Florida Conference who were dealing with the change of adding a new worship experience over the first three months of the new service's initiation in order to develop a protocol that other churches who will be facing a similar transition can use to maximize unity and minimize conflict. By determining what obstacles churches undergo in a worship transition, steps can be identified to help other church to undergo a peaceful, unified change. Each of the churches studied experienced similar challenges, but their ways of dealing with them differed in slight degrees.

The churches in this study were similar in the ways that they faced challenges. This unity of attitudes and passion is essential for developing a protocol for churches anticipating similar transitions to use to promote peace and unity within the body of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

> On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea...
>
> –Wheatcroft, "Letter to Laymen"

Richard Wheatcroft tells a parable about the church—how it can easily lose sight of its mission and get caught up in the cares of the world. In his parable Wheatcroft describes a mission society dedicated to saving shipwrecked travelers along a rocky coastline. They knew that the sailors and passengers were in mortal danger without their help, and the society would gather the survivors of wrecks into their lighthouse and care for them after a storm. During the summer months, when the sea and the weather were not as rough, they would gather at the lighthouse to have picnics and fellowship activities. They began to fix up the lighthouse, and make the main room more comfortable. The problem came the next winter, when certain members of the lighthouse society objected when shipwreck victims were brought in, bleeding and soaking wet onto their new carpet and lounges. A division arose in the society between those who wanted to keep the lighthouse presentable and those who still wanted to go out and rescue the perishing. Eventually the preservationists won out, and those who wanted to care for the sick and injured were forced to go out a start a new lighthouse society, beginning the process all over again.

Wheatcroft's parable is about losing one's direction–moving from mission to maintenance. The members of the lifesaving society gradually became more interested in keeping their society functions going rather than rescuing those who were perishing. They had forgotten their purpose. Organizations typically become interested in their own survival at the expense of their purpose once they have tasted success. Churches are not exempt.

The problem is how to help churches face the risks associated with becoming mission oriented without splintering the congregation. While a worship transition is not the only risk that a church can take to rediscover its mission, this study focused upon the dynamics that accompany a worship transition in order to establish a protocol for churches in similar situations to follow. Having a protocol helps churches stay focused on the reason for their existence. A clear focus helps churches to prioritize. When a church has a clear focus, worship will emphasize offering up praise rather than focusing on personal styles and preferences.

The purpose of this exploratory, mixed-methods design using a qualitative, multi-case study was to observe three United Methodist churches of the Florida Conference who were dealing with the change of adding a new worship experience over the first three months of the new service's initiation in order to develop a protocol that other churches who will be facing a similar transition can use to maximize unity and minimize conflict. The churches participated in three, researcher-designed instruments that gave insight into their process at three different stages of the process.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

Four questions were asked of the churches involved in worship transitions. The questions were designed to reveal what these churches found beneficial through their own experience, what they would suggest for other churches embarking upon similar ventures, and what they would do differently if they had it to do over again. These were open-ended questions so that I would minimize the possibility of tainting the results.

Research Question #1

What factors led you to start this new worship experience?

The pre-start questionnaire provided the data for question #1. The participant congregations answered this question one week before the anticipated new worship experience's start date. The purpose of this question was to understand the motivating factors that prompted the church to consider adding a new type of worship.

Research Question #2

What practices did you find were most helpful in building unity during the start-up of the new worship experience?

The post-event questionnaire and the post-event focus group provided the data for question #2. This question identified what practices, studies, or events the participants found beneficial for making the transition occur smoothly. Because the participants answered this question individually, it proved helpful in revealing which practices stood out to the non-clergy members of the team. Pastors may misinterpret what the experience was like for the non-clergy members, so the answers given by the non-clergy give a truer indication of what the congregation as a whole experienced.

Research Question #3

What would you suggest to other churches that are anticipating a similar worship transition?

The second part of instruments two and three, the post-event questionnaire and the post-event focus group, provided the data for question #3. This question formed the basis of developing the protocol suggested in Chapter 5.

Churches want other churches to succeed, so this section provided advice. During the post-event focus groups I strove to keep a balance of clergy and non-clergy participation to avoid allowing the pastors to dominate the conversation.

Research Questions #4

What would you do differently if they had this transition to do over again?

Question #4 revealed a lot about the feelings of the participants concerning the overall process. It was only asked at the focus groups to allow a great deal of dialogue and interpersonal reactions.

Population and Participants

The population of this study was all churches going through a worship transition in which a worship experience unlike any they are currently offering was introduced. The sample for this study was three United Methodist churches of the Florida Conference who met the qualifications of the population.

Design of the Study

The district superintendent of the nine districts of the Florida Annual Conference (Atlantic Central, East Central, Gulf Central, North Central, North East, North West,

South Central, South East, and South West) were contacted and asked if they would send out a request for participation in this study to the churches under their jurisdiction.

From the response received after this initially query, three churches were chosen that met the following qualifications:

- They were planning a worship transition during the time constraints of this project;
- They would agree to participate with all three instruments (the pre-event questionnaire, the post-event questionnaire, and the post-event focus group);
- The senior pastor was anticipated to remain throughout the entire worship transition process;
- They gave their permission that the results of this study could be published; and,
- The church had been worshiping together regularly for at least ten years.

The participating churches were sent the pre-event questionnaire, which ten persons in the church were to complete one week before the anticipated worship transition began. The ten persons recommended for the study were the senior pastor, the lay leader, the administrative council chair, the worship team leader, two members of the worship team (or equivalent) who were not a part of the planning but were a part of the implementation, and four church members chosen at random (should be the same persons for each of the three instruments).

These participants were chosen to provide a balanced view from the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery of the church membership. The senior pastor, lay leader, administrative council chair, and worship team leader represent the core of this

process in that these people are the ones responsible for the initial conception and planning of the worship transition. The two members of the worship team represent the semi-periphery in that they were not of the decision-making body but part of the implementation. The four members of the church at large represent the periphery of this scope. The dynamics of parent and child were not introduced at this time, since they could not be predicted before actually meeting with the churches.

If the study included only the leadership team but not any congregants or worship team, the study would not give an accurate picture of what the church as a whole was experiencing. Similarly, polling the congregants without talking to the leaders would not reveal the background work that went into planning the transition. Recognizing all three groups gave a better chance of understanding the dynamics that were at work in each category.

The study was an exploratory, mixed-methods design. Both questionnaires and focus groups provided data. The advantage of the questionnaires was that they gave an opportunity for the periphery and semi-periphery respondents to give their true assessment of the process without interference from the leadership team (core). The advantage of the focus group was that it gave all participants a chance to jog each others' memories about the journey they had just taken together.

This study occurred over a period of six months, with each church participating in a three-month long segment. Although each church joined the process for only three months, not all of the churches began their experience at the same time.

Instrumentation

The instruments included two questionnaires, the pre-event and the post-event questionnaires, and a post-event focus group, all researcher designed. In total, all three instruments included four open-ended questions.

The pre-event questionnaire consisted of one open-ended question: *What factors led the church to start this new worship experience?* This question and this format allowed the respondent to give his or her own perception of experience. This questionnaire came one week before the new worship experience began, so I took special care not to introduce or suggest any resources that might have tainted the rest of the study.

The post-event questionnaire asked two questions: *What practices did you find were most helpful in building unity during the start-up of the new worship experience? What would you suggest to other churches that are anticipating a similar worship transition?*

These two open-ended questions were asked three months after the new worship experience had begun. The questionnaire was administered first, and the focus group followed. This order was preferable because it illustrated the difference between what the participants thought individually (the questionnaire) and what they remembered as a body (the focus group). It also revealed the differences among what the core (senior pastor, lay leader, administrative council chair, and worship team leader) thought was important and what the semi-periphery (i.e., two members of the worship team) and the periphery (i.e., four church members chosen at random) believed were the keys for success.

The focus group was asked the same two questions as the post-event questionnaire but included one additional question: *What would you do differently if you had this transition to do over again?*

This final question revealed much about the dynamics of the process as seen through the eyes of the core, periphery, and semi-periphery groups. It also provided a chance for the semi-periphery and periphery groups to move closer to the core and to take a greater ownership in the process. The wisdom from looking back was also used extensively in Chapter 5.

Expert Review

As researcher-designed instruments, the instruments needed review to determine if they were valid and reliable. Three experts reviewed the instruments: Dr. Brian Russell of Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Verna Lowe of Asbury University, and Dr. Terry TenBrink.

Dr. Russell has experience with theological and ministerial research and is on staff at Asbury Theological Seminary, Orlando campus in Orlando, Florida. He was the mentor for this dissertation. Dr. Lowe is an expert in education and teaches the D.Min. dissertation writing class at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, and is a full professor of education at Asbury University. Dr. TenBrink has over thirty years experience in developing and validating research instruments. His primary expertise is in education and research design and statistics.

The original questionnaires for this study were too long and time consuming. Both Dr. Lowe and Dr. TenBrink encouraged me to simplify the process and thereby increase the likelihood that the participants would complete the surveys.

Variables

This was a qualitative study. Case studies do not have dependent, independent, or intervening variables, so I was searching for and identifying variables for future research. The churches did not know that that their responses would be the focus of the study. Through their responses I was able to determine which factors either helped or hindered the process of unification through the transition.

Reliability and Validity

This study is reliable because of the mixed-methods design, using both questionnaires and focus groups. The focus groups allowed the participants to explain their answers more fully and to retract or expand upon what they had previously answered on the questionnaires. Reminders and incentives were given to encourage responses from the participants.

This study is valid because it recognized and made allowances for the different strata of the church—the core, the periphery, and the semi-periphery. If only core members were chosen to answer the questions (i.e., senior pastor, worship team leader, other executive power leaders), then the full picture would not have emerged. By including average church members and semi-leaders (those on the worship team who only implemented but did not plan the change), the entire process could be gauged with greater accuracy.

Data Collection

An invitation to participate in the process went out via e-mail through the Florida Conference United Methodist Church district e-mail system. The e-mail introduced the study and laid out the target group that was the basis of the study—United Methodist

churches in existence for at least ten years that were looking to add a new worship experience substantively different from what they were currently offering within the next three months, and whose senior pastor was expected to remain throughout the worship transition. Of the churches that responded, three were chosen that met the criteria and provided enough differentiation as to allow a full cross-section of results.

The churches that were chosen took part in two surveys and one focus group. The first survey (pre-event questionnaire) was administered online using SurveyMonkey one week prior to the start of the new worship experience. Ten persons were asked to participate in the surveys and focus groups: the senior pastor, lay leader, administrative council chair, worship team leader (if applicable), two members of the worship team implementing the transition, and four members of the congregation chosen at random.

The second survey (post-event questionnaire) was administered three months after the start of the new worship experience to the same group of people using the same format. In addition, a focus group was held with each group within a week of the post-event questionnaire with the same participants. This focus group session was video recorded and the notes transcribed.

Data Analysis

The pre-event questionnaire consisted of one open-ended question: *What factors led you to start this new worship experience?* The responses were categorized into four groupings–*practical, evangelistic, creative,* and *spiritual.*

The responses categorized as practical dealt with logistical problems. Practical reasons for starting a new worship experience are limited space, volunteers, or other resources.

Evangelistic responses were those answers that indicated a desire to reach new persons or groups of persons for Christ. The evangelistic responses were outward focused, instead of concentrating on meeting the needs of current members.

Creative responses were categorized as attempts to do something different from what the churches were currently doing in worship. Instead of being specifically evangelistic, creative responses focused on artistic enhancements.

The fourth category was spiritual responses. They tended to be more individualistic or God centered in that they sought to bring about a deeper sense of reverence to worship.

The post-event questionnaire was administered three months after the worship transition was implemented. This questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions: *What practices did you find were most helpful in building unity during the start-up of the new worship experience? What would you suggest to other churches who are anticipating a similar worship transition?* These questions were also asked at the post-event focus group, in addition to one additional question: *What would you do differently if you had this transition to do over again?*

The responses to the first question were divided into three categories. The first was *external.* The second category was *internal,* and the third category was *none.*

External resources included books and studies, focus groups, and seminars that the participants attended. While not all of the participants may have read the same books or attended the same seminars, those who answered in this way thought that the resources were beneficial.

The second category, *internal* resources, included church-wide retreats and studies that the participants attended together. Also included in this category were individual discussions with the pastor, experience on a worship team, and church meeting discussions. This category includes all of the practices and resources that were offered to those within the church that were part of the planning process.

The final category was *none.* This response indicated that the respondent had no suggestions.

The responses for the second question regarding what resources these churches would recommend to other churches anticipating a similar worship transition experience were divided into three categories–*internal, external*, and *attitude*. This data came from the post-event questionnaire and the focus group.

The *internal* category consisted of suggestions that focused on interchurch communication. The main concern was to get as many people involved in the discussion and research stages before actually starting the new worship experience. Getting people into the discussion could include church meetings, studies, or focus groups. Churches also showed some interest in getting to know the target group to be reached, which would be considered external suggestions, but that concern was secondary to getting the existing congregation to agree to the need. In terms of world systems theory, the desire is to have all persons in the existing congregation consider themselves to be core, and not periphery or semi-periphery.

The attitude category focused on encouraging churches to be true to their commitment and to give the new worship experience time to develop its own character.

The churches that gave themselves permission to work through difficulties instead of giving up at the first sign of trouble were more likely to succeed.

The answers to the additional question included in the focus group (i.e., What would you do differently if you had this transition to do over again?) was helpful in determining what pitfalls other churches should avoid. The responses were divided into three categories–*internal, external,* and *attitude*.

Internal responses focused on two areas, either on building more church unity before the process started or on seeing logistical issues come up that had not been considered. These responses related to areas within the church that could be given more consideration.

External responses dealt with concerns outside of the church. These responses could include about communication, community awareness, or advertising issues that the church recognized.

The attitude response dealt primarily with the problem of negative attitudes that came from the existing congregation. These responses are called attitude responses because they dealt with emotional and vision issues rather than logistical or target audience concerns.

Once the responses for all of the instruments were categorized and coded, I searched for patterns that could be used as a protocol for other churches to adopt that are anticipating a similar worship transition.

Ethical Procedures

The churches that participated in this study consented at the beginning of the process to having these results published. The churches were identified in this study as

Church A, Church B, and Church C. The individual respondents were not named, and the responses were not categorized in connection with the participants' roles in the church.

Each church participant knew who else was participating in the study in his or her own church because they all came together for the focus group at the end. However, other than answers given at the focus group, none of the participants knew how any of the others had answered any of the questions from the questionnaires.

The responses to the instruments were confidential. Only I saw the responses. The coding was done by identifying the respondent as either core, periphery, or semi-periphery, and these designations remained anonymous. In addition, the video from the focus group was kept on a secure external storage medium under password protection.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

The purpose of the study was to observe three United Methodist churches of the Florida Conference who were dealing with the change of adding a new worship experience over the first three months of the new service's initiation in order to develop a protocol that other churches who will be facing a similar transition can use to maximize unity and minimize conflict.

Participants

Three churches participated in this study. All three were members of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. The churches were asked to recruit ten persons to participate in the study. These ten persons included

- The senior pastor,
- The lay leader,
- The administrative council chair,
- The worship team leader,
- Two members of the worship team,
- Two church members who attended the new worship experience, and
- Two church members who did not attend the new worship experience.

Two of the three churches participated with all three parts of the study, which were the pre-event questionnaire, the post-event questionnaire, and the post-event focus group. One church completed only the post-event questionnaire and the post-event focus group. Table 4.1 shows the churches that participated and their demographics.

Table 4.1. Church Demographics

Church	Year Chartered	Average Attendance	Current Member Demographics	Target Audience Demographics
A	1997	250+	Rural/Suburban/Urban Student/Retired Affluent/Middle-class	Rural/Suburban/Urban Student/Retired Affluent/Middle-class
B	1965	250+	Rural Retired Affluent/Middle-class	Rural Retired Affluent/Middle-class
C	1952	51-100	Rural Student/Retired Affluent	Rural Student/Retired Middle-class

Research Question #1

The first research question was designed to measure the church's core beliefs and its level of communication among its membership: *What factors led you to start this new worship experience?*

How a church answered this question revealed how much discussion and planning had gone into the decision to offer a new worship experience. Since this question was to be answered individually, I could recognize patterns within the answer that revealed a shared mind-set within the church. Table 4.2 charts the answers given by church members in the pre-event questionnaire.

Table 4.2. Pre-Event Questionnaire Similar/Dissimilar Answers (N=18)

Church	Participants in the Survey	Similar Answers %	Dissimilar Answers %
A	10	100	
B	8	50	50
C	0	n/a	n/a

Question 1 also revealed the motivation for starting a new worship experience. The members of Church A were consistent in that 100 percent of them included an almost identical statement in every answer that they "perceived a need for a service on a time other than Sunday morning because of schedule conflicts." Additional reasons were also included in their answers (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Pre-Event Questionnaire Motivation Church A (N=10)

Motivation	Answered with This Motivation (n)	%
PRACTICAL—Family/work schedule conflicts	10	100
SPIRITUAL—Mid-week spiritual lift	2	20
EVANGELISTIC—To attract more (young) people	3	30

The members of Church B gave a variety of reasons for starting the new worship experience. They gave no one consistent answer, but the majority of the answers had an evangelistic theme (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Pre-Event Questionnaire Motivation Church B (N=8)

Motivation	Answered with This Motivation (n)	%
EVANGELISTIC—For outreach, mission	5	62.5
CREATIVE —To add variety	2	25.0
SPIRITUAL—to prayerfully offer something different	1	12.5

Church C did not participate in the pre-event questionnaire. They started their new worship experience early and without following the testing protocol.

Research Question #2

The second research question measured the depth of preparation used by each church in planning for their worship transition. Three months after the start of the new worship experience, those who participated in the pre-event questionnaire were given a post-event questionnaire and became part of a focus group that included the following question: *What practices did you find were most helpful in building unity during the start-up of the new worship experience?*

Table 4.5 is a culmination of responses of all three churches. The answers are categorized as either internal, external, or other responses. Not all of the participants answered this question, either in the post-event questionnaire nor at the post-event focus group.

Table 4.5. Question Two Responses (N=15)

What practices were most helpful in building unity?	n	%	Category
Books	6	40.0	External
Focus groups	4	26.7	External
Seminars	3	20.0	External
Prayer groups	3	20.0	Internal
Retreats	1	6.7	Internal
OTHER—Meeting with pastor	3	20.0	Internal
OTHER—Notes from former worship chairs	2	13.4	Internal
OTHER—Church meetings	2	13.4	Internal
OTHER—Bible/journaling	1	6.7	Internal
OTHER—Previous experience on worship team	1	6.7	Internal
OTHER—not very involved	1	6.7	Other

Research Question #3

The third research question uncovered the shortcomings of the process that each church followed. It also revealed whether the church was experiencing dynamics of core/periphery/semi-periphery issues. The question was asked both on the post-event questionnaire and in the post-event focus group: *What would you suggest to other churches that are anticipating a similar worship transition?*

Table 4.6 demonstrates the compiled data from all three churches and which responses came from which churches. The answers were categorized as either internal, external, or attitude dynamics.

Table 4.6. Question Three Responses (N=26)

Recommendations for Other Churches	n	Church Member	CATEGORY
Be bold/fearless	2	B, B	Attitude
Commit to the process	2	A, A	Attitude
Focus on how to apply the Scripture today	1	C	Attitude
Recognize there is more than one way to worship	1	C	Attitude
Get everyone on board	3	B, B, B	Internal
Plan for continuity between old and new	2	A, B	Internal
Don't change existing service	2	B,B	Internal
Start small	1	A	Internal
Expect criticism	1	B	Internal
Have vision for the future	1	B	Internal
Have energetic leadership	I	B	Internal
Know your existing church	1	A	Internal
Know your resources	1	A	Internal
Prayer	I	A	Internal
Know your target	3	A, C	External
Listen to focus groups	2	A, A	External
Advertise	1	A	External

The recommendations for other churches show a strong leaning toward internal communications as the key to moving through the process of adding a new worship experience. This internal focus does not discount the importance of knowing your target audience (external), but it does emphasize the need for unity before the process starts.

Research Question #4

The fourth question was designed to have the churches reflect upon what they believed were the successes and failures of the project. Self-evaluation is necessary for improvement. This question was only asked at the post-event focus group: *What would you do differently if you had this transition to do over again?*

Table 4.7 lists the insights that the churches revealed from their experience. The top concern given by the churches for things they would do differently if they were going to start over was to pay more attention to the internal communication of their churches. This concern is also seen in the category of attitude. Those churches that spent a great amount of time early on dialoging with the existing congregation about the reasons for a new service had less dissension later in the process. Clearly internal and attitude problems were a greater concern than external problems, since only one church stated that they felt limited by an external factor.

Table 4.7. Question Four Responses (N=41)

What would you do differently	n	Church Member	Category
Focus on internal communication for more church ownership	6	A, B, B, B, C, C	Internal
Get the logistics of room size, overhead font size right	4	B, B, B, B	Internal
Child care logistics	2	A, A	Internal
Make sure you have the resources to support the new service	2	B, B	Internal
Preaching schedule	I	A	Internal
Advertise more in community	2	A, A	External
Keep healthy communication going	2	A, B	Attitude
Deal with negative attitudes	7	B,B,B,B,B,B,B	Attitude
Expect healthy surprises	6	B,B,B,B,B,B	Attitude
Create equality in the service	3	C,C,C	Attitude

Summary of Major Findings

Success and failure can both teach something. The research from this project shows some key elements necessary in order to move through a worship transition or any church conflict successfully:

1. Having a clear vision and church-wide acceptance of the vision makes the process easier.

2. Teams are better than one person trying to do the job alone.

3. Time is needed not only for the new worship experience to gain its own momentum but also in the investigation stages to allow the existing congregation to see the need and take ownership.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Passion for reaching the lost has, in many churches, been overcome by a consumer mentality that favors the status quo. In a desire to maintain unity, conflict is seen as dangerous and is avoided as much as possible. Avoiding conflict is not healthy, and actually creates a false unity that prevents growth rather than enhances it.

The purpose of the study was to observe three United Methodist churches of the Florida Conference that were dealing with the change of adding a new worship experiences over the first three months of the new services' initiation in order to develop a protocol that other churches who will be facing a similar transition can use to maximize unity and minimize conflict. The process of starting a new worship experience is a good example of how churches deal with conflict, so this study has broader-reaching implications than just a change of worship styles. The information gained through this particular project can be extrapolated to other arenas of the church where conflict exists. The underlying dynamics will always be the same.

Clear Vision

In my study of three churches going through a worship transition, I found clear indicators for which of these three churches were experiencing unity and that were still dealing with a lot of conflict. Leadership styles impact the transition process.

If this study had included nothing but the pre-event questionnaire and I was asked to predict which church would be experiencing the least amount of turmoil, I could have easily told you what would happen with the churches. Church A was absolutely in

agreement as to their purpose for starting this new worship experience. Every single respondent included the same statement concerning the need for a non-Sunday morning service. While they may have added other reasons in addition to this one, no one questioned why the new worship experience was offered.

The post-event focus group reinforced Church A's uniformity. Their focus was based upon consensus-building, not voting or top-down decision making. The members of Church A were proud of the fact that they had never taken a vote and never will. Every decision was made by the church gathering to study, to dialogue, and to come up with a solution, rather than by taking a vote. Even if a decision was not universally agreed upon, at least no one objected to it. In other words, even those who were not quite sure about the decision did not think that the decision would be detrimental to the church.

Church B had a mix of opinions but tried to work for the greatest good of the majority. The participants of the post-event focus group were not uniform in their opinions as to the value of the new worship experience. While a great deal of effort went into including as many people as possible in the decision making (and not to make the pastor the lead decision maker), Church B did not share a common vision of what the business of the church should be. This lack of shared goals does not mean that Church B's new worship experience is going to fail or that their attempts at unity will be unsuccessful. It just means that Church B will experience more conflict than Church A.

Church C's new worship experience has been discontinued. This particular church began their new worship experience without taking part in the pre-event questionnaire. The responses for what they learned through the process on their post-event questionnaire

and the post-event focus group indicate that they did not have an agreed-upon reason for starting the new worship experience or for its continued support.

The literature review for this study was consistent in its assertion that shared vision and community-wide acceptance of the vision will make for an easier journey through conflicting times. Lora Ellen-McKinney describes "incompatible activity" as the basis for much conflict, which arises when groups believe that they are competing for resources, beliefs, or ideologies (4). World systems theory recognizes that disagreements between parties that see themselves as equals will deal openly with each other. Church A strove to make the entire congregation see themselves as part of the core, which accounts for their smoothness in making the process happen.

Further support of the literature review comes from the family systems theory. The focus group at Church B exhibited signs of parenting and rigid boundaries. I thought at times that persons who were not in the room were speaking through those who were there. As long as direct dialogue is avoided, the conflict at Church B will be a struggle rather than a growing experience.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). A shared vision is essential to a healthy church. When a leader or a group of leaders, no matter how well intentioned, proceeds with plans for the good of the church without giving adequate time for those whom they are leading to understand the reasoning behind the vision, the result is rebellion and unnecessary conflict. Dialogue is not a leader commanding others and telling them what to do. True dialogue involves a leader listening and being able to state back to others what their opinion is to their satisfaction, so that leadership is really listening (Covey 239).

Forcing opinions upon people does not change their minds. Spending time with people and getting to know them better makes them more receptive to new ideas. Paul sought to understand and appreciate his audience before he presented them with a different interpretation of the Scriptures. Paul looked for that point of contact that would put him and his audience on common ground before disrupting their worldview. The Incarnation is the ultimate example of God coming to share his vision personally with humanity, rather than imposing his will upon them. The experience of this study reaffirms the Bible's emphasis upon vision as central to progressing as the body of Christ.

Working through Teams

The leadership dynamics among the three churches in this study reveal an interesting difference. The transition at Church C appeared to be pastor led. Although the pastor had others who joined him at times in the process, for the most part he was planning, recruiting, and leading the new worship experience. Granted, a few people did join him at different points in the process, but their involvement was as support and not in leadership. The greatest portion of keeping this new worship experience alive fell upon the pastor, and the decision to close it fell proportionally upon him.

In contrast, Church B spent time not only spreading vision but developing teams. They recognized that in order for the new worship experience to be accepted, it needed to have more faces associated with it than just the pastor's face. As one person at the focus group said, "It would be nice to have someone really lead when there are new songs–NOT THE PASTOR–to express a few personal words or Scripture and really lead it." This statement reflects an understanding of the need for team involvement.

Church A had not only teams but staff members specifically assigned to leadership with the new worship experience. Many volunteers assisted with the service each week, but the fact that the church body as a whole values the service enough to hire persons to attain the highest quality possible speaks to the dedication that they have to this transition.

The literature review supports the spreading of leadership throughout the organization. Both Wallerstein and Black indicate that when core nations try to impose their will upon periphery and semi-periphery nations, resentment and rebellion occur. Leadership by coercion only lasts as long as the coercion can be maintained, and the peace is false. A better plan is to seek a true peace based upon mutual respect and appreciation for each other's gifts.

As a family system, dominant parents with rigid boundaries may seem like effective leaders but in essence are tyrants. Kale and McCullough suggest that healthy relationships among the family members in which each are valued leads to greater gains for the whole family. A parent who listens to others parents and even to the children will find more creative solutions than he or she would come up with individually.

Scripture supports the idea that many are better than one. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up (NIV)." The thought is completed a few verses later in verse 12, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken." The value of shared leadership cannot be overstated.

Jesus emphasized the importance of groups and teams. When he sent out his disciples, he sent them out in teams of two (Mark 6:7). He gathered twelve persons into whom he invested his life and his teachings, so that they would continue after he was gone. Jesus also said that the power of God would be found in groups when he said, "Where two or more gather in my name, there I am with you" (Matt. 18:20). The Christian church is built upon communal structure.

In addition, Paul speaks of the Church as a body (1 Cor. 12). Each person has been given special gifts and talents that are to be used for the building up of the whole body (Eph. 4:12). Human beings were created for God and for each other, so that our shared ministry might bring glory to God and unity to believers worldwide.

Organizational change led by only one person is self-defeating. A pastor who attempts to change a worship experience or to start a new one alone will find that he or she is soon walking alone. People do not just want to experience God. They want to experience God in community, and they want to give their lives to something that helps change the lives of others. If pastors (or any other persons) take the whole job upon themselves, they will not only create a core/periphery dynamic but will also cheat the other parts of the body out of the role that God has intended for them to play.

Giving the Process Time to Work

One of the worst things that a church can do is to rush through any kind of transition. Churches and individuals need time to process new ideas and styles. This study has shown that the more time spent in preparation and vision building ahead of time, the more grace and unity are seen in the church through the actual transition.

All three churches talked about the value of spending time in conversation with the existing church. Some of the churches spoke about it as a bonus for them; others wished they had spent more time in preparation. Regardless of whether they were looking back at time spent in preparation with satisfaction or regret, all three stated that it was important.

One of the members of Church B spoke to the value of pre-transition conversations at the post-event focus group. She said, "You can make changes if you get everyone to think that there really isn't a change or if you can get them to take ownership or part in it." I interpret this statement to mean that the conversation that takes place ahead of time should involve people who may be resistant, so that they can see that what is happening is not changing the essence of the church or the gospel, just the way God is presented to people who do not know him yet.

The emphasis upon allowing enough time for the two churches that have continued their new worship experience is a recommendation to be patient and not to judge the success or the failure of the service without a full picture of the events. Both churches recognized that dynamics are at play that can skew the results. Seasonal attendance patterns were of concern, as was the recognition that some people will attend the new worship experience just to get it started but may not make it their regular service.

The literature review complements the idea of waiting and listening. For example, Williams indicates that the acceptance of organs as suitable for church worship use took over 1,400 years. Even though organs have been accepted for centuries now as appropriate music instruments, they were slow to be accepted because of the cultural connotations with which they were associated for most of their existence.

World systems theory also recommends using time as a buffer in international negotiations. Trust takes time to build, with repeated gestures of good will and consistency needed to overcome years of prejudice or abuse. The best strategy is to present a consistent face over many years rather than to switch tactics frequently. Such rapid flip-flopping of opinions or politics leads to insecurity, not confidence.

Family systems theory also resonates with the concept of giving adequate time for relationships to heal and mature. Most of the time in churches the opposing groups are not necessarily on different pages; they will have a common goal. The wise leader seeks for the common ground upon which all parties will agree so that the church sees itself as having a shared vision, and this process takes time and skill (Ellen-McKinney 8).

God's timing is very rarely human timing. Human beings are impetuous, anxious, and limited in understanding of how God is working out the kingdom. Since the church is made up of human beings, it shares the same faults. The Scriptures says many times to "wait upon the Lord" (Ps. 27:14; Prov. 16:32; Isa. 40:31). Paul reminds his friends in Rome, Ephesus, and Thessalonica to be patient.

Impatience is usually a sign of mistrust of the process or of doubt about God's involvement in the process. Rushing through a transition can also indicate that not enough time was spent in preparation. Insecure pastors and churches often look for immediate success so that no one can argue with decisions, as if this success validates their decisions. If too much emphasis is placed upon whether or not a venture succeeds, the overall vision of what God may be doing through the struggle can be lost.

For instance, Church C no longer has their new worship experience meeting. Hasty analysis says that it was a failure. What I found in the post-event focus group,

however, was a group of people who were disappointed that their service did not continue but wise enough to learn from it. The participants told me of several things that they had learned from the experience that they were integrating into other parts of their church. While their venture was not entirely successful, it was not a complete failure.

Implications of the Findings

Although this study was specifically about the guidelines that can be used to help a church to go through a worship transition, the overall concept of conflict resolution is the important issue. Since the biblical foundation, the literature review, and the study itself agree with the major findings, underlying themes apply to all church conflict situations.

Shared vision is primary for church unity. While a pastor or a group may be able to force through a certain agenda or legislation, without a shared vision the church will not maintain unity for long. In fact, a church that does not agree on its vision will not be able to do much except maintain itself for a limited time. As Wallerstein says, nations or organizations cannot continue to exist with more than one class (233). Unity is essential or conflict will develop into unhealthy patterns. Ellen-McKinney suggests that while church conflicts are inevitable, when people like each other, conflicts become more rare (5). The sense of trust and willingness to go the distance for each other rises and the more the group is willing to do what is best for the organization (Kale and McCullough 45).

Unity is important. Where information is lacking trust takes over. Most people do not resist change as much as they resist not knowing about the change (Southerland 85). To be in the dark is embarrassing as a leader, but shared experience and trust allow people to give others the benefit of the doubt in difficult situations.

The emphasis upon multiple teams instead of just the pastor or a leadership team instituting the change is another key. Not only does having multiple teams spread ownership around, but also provides a greater chance for shared vision. As long as the teams meet together regularly and are consistent about stating the reason for this change, all teams feel assured that they can give their best and that the other teams have their back.

The final emphasis is upon allowing time for the process to work. Time not only allows new leadership to develop, it also creates stability for those who are unsure to observe and to develop informed opinions. Allowing time also builds trust in the community. If the leadership is quick to close a new worship experience because it did not develop in a certain time period, this action makes it harder for people to want to volunteer for such endeavors in the future.

Limitations of the Study

This study took place in Florida over a ten month period with three United Methodist churches. Because of the seasonal population of Florida (high church attendance in the winter, lower in the summer), resources limitations occur here that may not affect churches with a more stable population.

One of the churches studied reflected that it actually had three separate times of having to state the vision all over again, since they had three waves of northern residents who came in and did not know what was going on. Each new wave brought a reaction of suspicion and loss (since "their service" was taken away). The church hopes that this dynamic will not continue in the coming years.

This study also included one small church and two large churches. There were no mid-sized churches (up to 150 average in worship) and no megachurches (over 1,200 in worship) included. The strategy of building church unity and shared vision will be the same for all sized churches, but the tactics (how to go about building the unity) will be different.

One other limitation to this study is that the church that showed the greatest sense of shared vision was co-pastored by an ordained clergy couple. This couple has reserves of strength in each other that would not be present for a pastor who does not have such a close ally on his or her immediate team.

Unexpected Observations

I was amazed and thrilled when the pre-event questionnaires came back with all ten participants of Church A stating the same purpose for their decision to start a new worship experience. I felt at that moment that I found something important, that if a church is so unified in its response to a simple question and everyone believes the same way, nothing is unachievable to them.

My visit to the church's campus reinforced this impression. I was able to participate in a gathering of the new worship experience and then met with the post-event focus group afterwards. The sense of shared purpose was among them. They were all from different backgrounds, socioeconomic classes, education, and other human-made distinctions, but they were united in hope and purpose.

I was pleasantly surprised with Church C's reflection that, even though they had discontinued their new worship experience, they were able to learn from it and to use their gleanings to strengthen their other ministries. When a church takes time to reflect

and does not judge its experiences too quickly that church can learn from what may have been the right idea coming at the wrong time.

Church B had the greatest variety of opinions and disagreements of all of the churches that I visited, but they also have key leaders who are committed to following what they believe to be God's will. Their reflections on the changes they had seen in people and the willingness to open themselves up to criticism confirms their faith in the direction God is leading them. I was also impressed with their recognition that God was surprising them. People they had assumed would be against the whole process were actually in favor of it, and those who were originally against the change began to see the transformation God was providing.

Recommendations

Community vision is vital. While some things are easier to do by command decision, having people involved helps in the long run. If the average person in the congregation does not share the vision of why a change is needed, the church opens itself up to needless pain and conflict.

The process takes time. It takes energy. Much of the time is necessary for people to even realize that a problem exists. The recommendation is that the more time a church spends at the beginning to get people to see the vision and to accept it as their own, the greater chance of smooth and unified transition.

My recommendation for churches is to go slow until time to go fast. Church leaders should spend lots of time in meetings and prayer and discussion groups and focus groups to find out where God is calling, and when that calling is clear and all are in agreement the church should get to work and make it happen. The people then get

together and share their gifts so that the entire congregation can say that they are ministers in this endeavor.

If a person were to replicate this study, I would recommend that he or she include a midsize church (75 to 150 in average attendance). I would also suggest that more churches be included in the study. Older churches (over one hundred years worshiping together) may have different skills sets for facing worship conflicts.

The next step of this project is to return to the churches after one year and study how the members of the different worship experiences view each other. I found in my own church that dissension began to arise when the members of the new service began to take more leadership positions and outnumbered those from the traditional services. The test of unity needs to be evaluated again over many years.

Postscript

I began this study expecting to find an author, a study, or a seminar that helped a church to overcome divisiveness and focus on unity. What I found was that while no one author or book or study helped to bring community, the process of studying any book or having any preliminary discussions was the greatest thing that a church could do.

As I look back, I find no real surprises. The disciplines of building church unity through shared vision discussions, working together through teams, and being patient with the process are not new ideas. What is surprising is that more churches and pastors do not follow these steps.

I am glad that Dr. Daryl Smith suggested that I expand my study from simply worship conflict to church conflict in general. This suggestion led me to study a greater volume of literature that gave a broader understanding of what was happening and what could be done.

Another insight gained came from Dr. Verna Lowe. She was adamant about the need for accurate, critical research. Dr. Lowe made me aware of the amount of opinion in the world disguising itself as research, and I resolved in my own preaching and writing to take the extra steps of investigating any claims that I make in order to validate their accuracy. I am grateful to Dr. Lowe and the leadership of Asbury Seminary for their patience with me through this process.

APPENDIX A

PRE-EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This instrument was administered one week before the new worship experience was to start. It had one question.

What factors led your church to start this new worship experience?

APPENDIX B

POST-EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This instrument was administered three months into the worship transition. It consisted of two questions.

1. What practices did you find most helpful in building unity during the start-up of this new worship experience?

2. What would you suggest to other churches who are anticipating a similar worship transition?

APPENDIX C

POST-EVENT FOCUS GROUP

This instrument was administered at least three months after the start of the new worship experience. It consisted of three open-ended questions.

1. What practices did you find most helpful in building unity during the start-up of this new worship experience?

2. What would you suggest to other churches who are anticipating a similar worship transition?

3. What would you do differently if you had this transition to do over again?

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