

ABSTRACT:

ASSESSING CONGREGATIONAL CULTURE FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

By

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A great puzzle faces many churches of various denominations around the world. Once strong and influential congregations are now stagnant and declining, and many pastors seem unequipped to lead their people into a new season of ministry and mission. The downward trends paint a bleak picture and many pastors are starting to ask these important questions. First, is there hope for revitalization in these established congregations? The Scriptures offer an emphatic “Yes!” Hope exists because the Christian God is one with a reputation for resurrecting things, tirelessly working to bring new life and wholeness to all Creation. Second, what are the causes of the sustained decline of so many local churches and how can pastors lead in this monumental revitalization task ahead? This project asserts that successful revitalization efforts require understanding church culture and practicing contextual leadership. It is imperative to know that effective leadership varies from congregation to congregation because each church possesses a distinct culture and functions uniquely. This distinctive culture is made up of unique beliefs, behaviors, attitudes and postures stemming from the collective experience of the church. In *Culture Shift, Transforming Your Church from Inside Out*, Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro and Warren Bird suggest that “culture is the most

important reality in your church” (3). The pastor seeking to lead effectively in the local church must be aware of these unique dynamics and modify leadership philosophies and practices accordingly.

The purpose of this study was to identify and utilize a church culture assessment tool to help the Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) pastoral staff and lay leadership understand the unique culture of the congregation in order that they might modify leadership philosophies and practices to promote congregational revitalization. Upon completion, the assessment process revealed that cultural education and evaluation in Kingwood Christian Church provided a revelatory, hopeful and reliable groundwork for congregational understanding. The assessment provided a foundation for truly contextual leadership strategies and practices, thus enabling Spirit-empowered efforts for resurrection and revitalization.

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CHAPTER ONE:

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Any good puzzle master knows that the first step to completing a puzzle is to construct the outside frame. Once the frame is completed, then the rest of the puzzle starts to take shape and form. These first pieces that frame my passionate puzzle appeared in the fall of 1997 after graduating from Samford University and coming on staff at Clearview Baptist Church as the Pastor for Youth and Recreation Ministries. Clearview is my childhood, home church, a congregation that my family helped plant in the early 1980s. In the fifteen years since starting the church, it had grown to average attendance of three hundred and fifty each Sunday. My coming on staff at Clearview coincided with the arrival of new young senior pastor, Dr. Bret Robbe, who came to the Clearview with an excellent track record for growing congregations in membership and ministry.

I will never forget my first meeting with Dr. Robbe. He asked me to come into his office to complete a personality inventory and skills assessment that he was giving the whole staff. In a subsequent conversation, he talked about getting the right people on the bus, terminology I now know to be that of author and leadership guru Jim Collins, and crafting a team of talented and passionate individuals to lead the congregation into a new season of growth and mission with the community and beyond. In the following months, Dr. Robbe led our ministry team to work collectively with the deacons of the church to prayerfully evaluate the Clearview's leadership dynamics and ministry programs, and then lead in the process of discerning a congregational vision and strategic plan for the next five years. Dr. Robbe boldly predicted that the church should prepare itself to double

in size over that time span. He was incorrect in his prediction as the church doubled in size in two years and has never looked back. The church and its leadership proved perfectly prepared and positioned to receive the right leaders and explode with new members and ministry. With common vision, the ministry staff, church leadership and congregation danced beautifully together in harmony with the Spirit. After those exciting two years, I moved to Waco, Texas to start at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University.

Truett provided an excellent foundation of theological, scriptural and leadership training over the following three years and I graduated in 2002 brimming with passion and a new sense of calling to the declining, local church. Sadly, many local churches nationwide are unhealthy and dying, but God dreams and works for resurrection and renewal. The foundation of the gospel is that God brings life to that which is dead or dying. God works for resurrection in the lives of people every day, and desires resurrection for struggling churches as well. God was calling me to transformational leadership within the local church, to lead in the process of resurrection and revitalization through the power of the Holy Spirit. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available and more than capable of reviving unhealthy congregations. This was the heart of my passionate puzzle. How can pastors and leaders partner with God in bringing resurrection and revitalization to the local church?

To my surprise, I encountered an unexpected new dimension to my puzzle upon joining the staff of First Baptist Church of Gaithersburg, Maryland as the associate pastor. The church was a similar size to Clearview, averaging about four hundred on

Sunday mornings. Upon talking to the senior pastor, the church seemed poised for new growth and ministry endeavors, yet something was holding it back.

The year before I arrived, Pastor Updike and a group of deacons had worked through the process of creating a new strategic plan for the future, yet many in the church resisted it. In the coming years, I learned that the church also had a conflicted past littered with failed initiatives and unhealthy leaders that misled and manipulated the congregation causing disillusionment, dissension and decline. As a result, the church leadership operated out of those scars in a spirit of scarcity and fear. This wounded culture operated like a roadblock for any new vision or mission sabotaging any progressive initiatives before they could gain traction.

Disheartened, I sought out counsel from mentors and colleagues in the area only to find that the dysfunctional culture and leadership void at my church was not the exception, but the rule. Gifted pastors all over the Washington, DC area and beyond were encountering dysfunctional culture and struggling to provide effective leadership to move their congregations forward. Pastor and author, Bill Hybels writes of this leadership deficiency.

All over the world people have never been led. They've been preached to and taught. They have been fellowshiped and bible studied. But with no one to inspire them, to mobilize them, their desire to make a difference for Christ has been completely frustrated. I believe that the great tragedy of the church in our day and time has been its failure to recognize the importance of the spiritual gift of leadership. It appears to me that only a fraction of pastors worldwide are exercising the spiritual gift of leadership. (24)

Though celebrated in the for-profit sector, the spiritual gift of leadership is rarely acknowledged and even disparaged in local church context.

I encountered this cultural dysfunction and leadership deficiency in my next church as well, but this time as the senior pastor. Nixa Christian Church, located in Nixa,

Missouri, had suffered through decades of cyclical conflict and treading water in the various currents of society with no identified vision or goals to focus ministry efforts. Shortly after arriving, we embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process, but despite our best laid plans and sustained efforts, positive results were marginal. Unseen dynamics in this one hundred and forty year old church were working against us impeding rather than enabling progress and mission.

Through my experience at Nixa Christian Church, I realized that efforts for effective leadership and revitalization must start with assessing and understanding the unique history and culture of the church. The proposition of this study is that pastors and leaders informed by reliable cultural assessment and understanding can develop congregationally, specific leadership strategy and unlock the potential for revitalization and renewed mission.

Statement of the Problem

Each local congregation has a unique story. The pages of this story record the unique experiences of that church family. It is from those experiences that a unique set of values, convictions, behaviors and language are formed. These are the components of congregational culture. “A group of people cannot regularly gather for what they feel to be religious purposes without developing a complex network of signals and symbols and conventions—in short, a Subculture - that gains its own logic and then functions in a way peculiar to that group” (Hopewell 5). The pastor seeking to lead effectively in the local church must acknowledge this unique culture, utilize helpful resources in understanding these unique cultural dynamics and formulate leadership philosophy and strategy accordingly.

Purpose of Project

The world is changing and many churches in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Houston area are stagnant or declining. The purpose of this project was to utilize a reliable, cultural assessment tool to evaluate the unique personality or culture of Kingwood Christian Church, specifically focusing on congregational identity, focus and dominant values, in order that the pastoral staff and lay leadership might modify philosophies and practices to promote renewed congregational vitality and mission.

Research Question One: How do the pastor and staff of Kingwood Christian Church currently understand the unique personality and culture of the congregation?

Many seminaries excel in preparing pastors for scriptural interpretation, theological reflection and pastoral care, but often fail to adequately educate and equip pastors for the task of leadership. In most cases, little or no attention is given to the concept of contextual leadership and church culture. “Culture is the most important reality in your church” (Cordeiro 2). The best way to understand culture is the statement: “This is who we are and how we do things around here.” Church culture is not bad or good, but rather healthy or unhealthy. Leaders must understand that an unhealthy culture eats strategy and vision for lunch (Chand 2). Leading revitalization in the church begins with understanding its unique culture. The pastor seeking to lead effectively must learn the unique values, convictions, behaviors and language that make up the church culture. Assessing the unique dynamics of church culture lays a solid foundation of understanding on which to create contextual and effective leadership strategy. These concepts must be

communicated to the pastoral staff in an educational session before administering the church culture survey.

Research Question Two: After administering the Assessment of Church Culture to the congregational leadership, what new understandings were revealed to the pastor and staff?

After a preliminary session educating the pastoral staff about the existence and unique dynamics of church culture, the Assessment of Church Culture was administered. The compilation and evaluation of the data derived from the Assessment of Church Culture provided the substance for informed evaluation and greater understanding. A primary goal of the Assessment of Church Culture was to provide reliable data pertaining to congregational identity, focus and dominant values that leads to greater cultural understanding for the pastor, pastoral staff and congregational leadership.

Research Question Three: What changes in leadership strategy and practice are deemed necessary as a result of the church culture survey?

The ultimate objective of this project was not merely to provide better cultural understanding among pastoral staff and leadership, but to yield more contextual and effective leadership strategies and practices. Just as faith without works is dead, enhanced cultural understanding unutilized and unpracticed accomplishes little for the greater mission of the church. This component of the ministry project included a retreat with the pastor, pastoral staff and lay leadership to evaluate the key findings of the survey and forecast necessary changes in leadership strategy and practice. Inevitably, changes deemed necessary and helpful by the pastoral staff and lay leadership were uniquely contextual to the Kingwood Christian Church congregation.

Research Question Four: What understandings and principles can Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) pastors gain from assessing church culture to enable more effective leadership and increased congregational vitality?

The findings of this ministry project were contextual in nature, but careful evaluation of the data produced key understandings and principles valuable to the larger Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. Additionally, subsequent steps were necessary to coach pastors to skillfully shift unhealthy components of their unique church culture. It was only after understanding and addressing the unique dynamics and challenges of church culture and congregational health that the pastoral staff and congregation could begin the process of prayerfully discerning the unique message and mission God had prepared that church to undertake for the sake of the Kingdom.

Rationale for Project

The primary reason for choosing this project was a firm theological belief that the Christian God is a God of resurrection and desires resurrection in this life for all humankind and the church. This is the very nature of God the Creator, the all-powerful life giver. God brings renewed life to the dead and dying every day. The events of Pentecost are a primary example of this hopeful truth. Pastors must reclaim and proclaim this powerful and transformative message to the numerous stagnant and declining congregations nationwide. *The global Christian church is the original church of the resurrection.*

Yet, according the 2014 Yearbook and Directory for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), over the past ten years our denomination has declined by 35 percent in total membership, 38 percent in participating membership, and 28 percent in average

worship attendance (Penwell). What role does cultural ignorance or dysfunction, and lacking contextual leadership play in the decline? In partnership with God, can the utilization of a cultural assessment at Kingwood Christian Church inform leadership strategy and contribute to a revitalization process? Can principles gleaned from this study on church culture serve as a beacon of hope and guidance for the floundering Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)? These questions compose the heart and impetus of this ministry transformation project.

Additionally, the local church is failing to reach and disciple younger generations. A common mantra of Generation X and the Millennial Generation is, “I am spiritual, but not religious.” A fascination with spirituality burns in the lives of these younger generations, but the church remains suspect in their eyes, tainted by its failures to resemble Jesus and make difference for the common good of the world. The church is brimming with thoughtful preachers and theologians to reconnect these lost masses to the faith, but is lacking equipped and gifted leaders to assess the unique culture of congregations, diagnose the cultural dysfunctions of declining congregations, prescribe effective treatment to restore health and guide transformational change.

This study topic and project tested the hypothesis that if, with God’s help, local pastors were given the right tools and training to assess, diagnose, treat and lead, a grim future for many churches can be avoided. For the sake of the church, those called and gifted to lead this needed process of evaluation, restoration and transformation must prayerfully do the work and share their insights. These key insights gleaned from healthy churches and organizations, as well as the tools to succeed, must be made available and fully utilized. The future of many local churches and faithful parishioners depends on it.

Definition of Key Terms

Revitalization is the key term of this study. According to the Webster Dictionary, vitality is defined as a lively or energetic quality, the power to thrive and succeed. When we apply this definition to the church, it communicates an assessment of health, energy, focus and passion. Admittedly, the term church revitalization infers a desire to restore what was, to reestablish something from the past. This is not the goal. Vitality is not found by looking back and wishing for what was, but rather building on the foundation of the past, looking forward and dreaming of what could be. Church revitalization is the hopeful process of reclaiming the basic identity of the church as a Spirit-empowered community of resurrection. Vital congregations are defined in various ways by different denominations. Characteristics might include Spirit led, discipleship focused, service oriented and welcoming of all.

The term transformation can replace and avoid the deficiencies of revitalization. Unavoidably, transformation is about change. The church is not an institution to be maintained, but a movement of transformation and impact for the Kingdom of God. This project did not advocate for change for the sake of change. This project was about informed, strategic change for the glory of God and for the sake of the world. Being the church is about believing and following the example of Jesus and continuing God's resurrection work in the world. The impetus for transformation comes from realizing that things have changed (and are changing) in the world and the church must wake up and pay attention.

Kennon L. Callahan says it this way:

The day of the professional minister is over.

The day of the missionary pastor has come.

The day of the church culture is over.

The day of the mission field has come.

The day of the local church is over.

The day of the mission outpost has come. (Callahan 3, 13, 22)

Though written in 1990, Callahan's prediction becomes more and more a present reality with every passing day. Spurred on by ever changing culture and the influence of postmodern thought, the church and pastoral leadership are in an involuntary, transitional season, a period of metamorphosis that many believe will leave little about the local church unchanged. The way that the local church pastor engages the leadership process during this season is of immense importance. The congregations and pastors unequipped to lead effectively through this transitional season will place the future of their churches in significant danger of decline or extinction.

Church culture is an essential term when studying and measuring vitality and health in a congregation, for the culture determines the core values of identity and how things are done. Culture—not vision or strategy—is the most powerful factor in any organization. It determines the receptivity of staff and volunteers to new ideas, unleashes or dampens creativity, builds or erodes enthusiasm, and creates a sense of pride or deep discouragement about working or being involved there. Ultimately, the culture of an organization—particularly in churches and nonprofit organizations, but also in any organization—shapes individual morale, teamwork, effectiveness, and outcomes (Chand 2).

Most often, the failure of any organization to achieve desired goals and succeed can be linked directly to unhealthy culture. The ingredients of an unhealthy church culture are unrealistic demands, blaming others, feeling threatened by other's success,

power struggles, dishonesty, creating an atmosphere of fear, using people instead of valuing people, unclear mission and goals and lack of authenticity (Chand 34). An unhealthy church culture naturally undermines mission and impedes progress. Conversely, a healthy church culture exhibits good communication skills, teamwork, optimism, freedom, healthy leadership practices and training, trust and a clear plan for progress.

Contextual leadership acknowledges that all leadership occurs within unique context. No two congregations are alike. The effective pastor leader becomes a student of his or her environment, understanding the unique visible and invisible dynamics, and crafts contextual leadership accordingly. Effective leaders need to have certain personal characteristics to be successful, but the application of those characteristics within a specific context defines great success. Leadership not only who you are, but when and where you are (Mayo). Pastors seeking to lead effectively within the local church must display contextual awareness and the ability to adapt strategies and process according to these ever-changing dynamics.

Delimitations

Inclusionary and exclusionary decisions made regarding the research parameters included the following criteria. This project focused on the pastor, staff and lay leadership of Kingwood Christian Church. I serve as the Senior Pastor of this young, growing congregation of Kingwood, Texas, a middle to upper class community of approximately 82,000 residents located 23 miles north of Houston, Texas. Kingwood Christian Church, a congregation of 270 members and 170 average attendance, is a

member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), small denomination of 3800 congregations founded in the early 1800s.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), often called the Disciples, began as a unity movement seeking to move beyond denominational disagreements and focus on the commonality of faith in Christ as savior modeled in the New Testament. Common congregational characteristics in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) include a self-governing structure that calls its own pastor, a variation of formal and informal worship styles, inclusion of lay women and men in leadership, open-minded discussion of issues and diversity of opinion is common.

Kingwood Christian Church was chosen as the sole congregation included in the study because of a discerned need, availability and timing. The congregation has recently experienced a season of stagnancy related to financial struggles, pastoral turnover, ineffective leadership and unresolved conflict in the church. These are common indicators of unhealthy cultural dynamics. For these reasons, upon the resignation of the former co-pastors, the church leadership sought a new senior pastor with skills and experience in successful conflict resolution and effective leadership. I started my ministry as senior pastor at Kingwood Christian Church in September of 2014 fully aware of these unique challenges and having discussed the nature of this doctoral project and agreed to full participation with Kingwood Christian Church leadership. Additionally, the ministry staff recently welcomed a part-time associate pastor for spiritual formation and families, and a new youth director in the summer of 2015. This transitional season of staff provides the unique opportunity to include the entire staff and lay leadership in the cultural education and assessment process.

Kingwood Christian Church is 38 years old and among the youngest, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations in the area. The age of a congregation is a significant factor when assessing church culture, specifically the identity, focus and dominant values, because the longer the lifespan of a congregation the greater the potential for engrained cultural traditions, beliefs and behaviors.

Consideration was given to including other Houston area, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations in the assessment process, but the absence of congregations of similar context and size experiencing leadership transition made a multiple site study impossible. Kingwood is a very unique community located in a distinct geographic location. Kingwood, “the liveable forest,” is a beautiful, masterplanned community of more than 14,000 acres established in 1971 on the shores of Lake Houston by the Exxon Corporation. Kingwood has grown into thriving haven for professionals seeking both seclusion from and access to the city of Houston. The community boasts an excellent school system, superior healthcare, upscale ammenities, low crime rates and 75 miles of greenbelt trails for outdoor lovers.

Review of Relevent Literature

A growing genre of literature exists on the subjects of church and organizational culture, health and vitality in the church, and leading transformational change. For this reason, performing an exhaustive survey is nearly impossible. The following represents a first attempt at gathering resources on these three subjects.

Church culture is a growing buzzword among progressive pastors and leaders. Though talk of organizational culture within the corporate and for-profit sector has been around for decades, the church is not surprisingly a little late to the party. Excellent

corporate leaders and consultants like Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, and Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Advantage*, recognized years ago that organizational health and culture is a significant factor that either enables or sabotages the mission. Culture is an enduring, slow-to-change, core characteristic of organizations; because it is based on core attitudes. Culture refers to implicit, often undiscernible aspects of organizations. Culture includes core values and consensual interpretations about how things are (K. S. Cameron loc 537).

The forerunners among church leadership circles were the Leadership Network publications. Launched in 1996 in conjunction with Jossey-Bass, Leadership Network Publications present thoroughly researched and innovative concepts from leading thinkers, practitioners and pioneering churches. Authors Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro in *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* suggests that if you change a church's culture, everything will change, including its future. When you find the keys to advancing the right culture for your church, you will unlock the reality of a transformed and revitalized church (7). Will Mancini author of *Unique Church: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* followed with an excellent and comprehensive survey of the progression of leadership theory and praxis. In the same way that each church context is unique and different, the very culture, meaning the values, thoughts, attitudes and actions, of each church is undeniably unique as well (Mancini 7). The health or dysfunction of this underlying culture will almost surely determine the fate of the health, mission and goals of the organization.

Samuel R. Chand author of *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision and Inspiration* suggests that organizational culture is stronger than any other force. Many leaders confuse culture with vision and strategy, but they are very

different. Vision and strategy usually focus on products, services, and outcomes, but culture is about the people — the most valuable asset in the organization. The way people are treated, the way they treat their peers, and their response to their leaders is the air people breathe. If that air is clean and healthy, people thrive and the organization succeeds, but to the extent that it is toxic, energy subsides, creativity lags, conflicts multiply, and production declines (4). A toxic culture ruins relationships, distorts purpose, and ruins a church's vision, but leaders can take steps to create a culture that inspires people and brings out the best in every person.

Author Stephen Blandino in *Creating Your Church's Culture: How to Uproot Mediocrity and Create a Healthy Organizational Structure* writes, “If you have ever visited another country, you bumped into its culture the moment you stepped off the plane. Language, customs, food, dress, government structures, and a hundred other things contribute to a nation’s culture. If you were to ask people from another country, “Why do you do *that*?” you would probably hear more times than you can count, “That is just the way we do things around here.” Culture is the unwritten rule of behavior (11).

All of these seasoned voices contribute a piece to the puzzle of understanding church culture. Though varying in many instances, they agree on several essential points. Soon after inception, churches begin the process of creating unique cultures. Like all organizations, churches all have culture, but not every church created their culture on purpose. Most drifted into their culture. Cultures are simply by-products of the way we do things. When we don’t think strategically about what we do, the by-product is usually a mediocre or even toxic culture (Blandino 12). Often, the longer the church or organization exists, the more engrained the culture becomes. Church culture represents

the congregational identity, “who we are,” focus, “what we do,” and dominant values, “why we do it.” The culture of a church is established over the course of time and can only be changed or shifted through thoughtful, strategic and sustained action.

Culture, not vision or strategy, is the most powerful factor in any organization (Chand 2). If the mission or vision of a church is a juicy steak, then culture is the plate it is served on. A dirty, cracked, unappealing presentation ruins the experience. Conversely, it is on the foundation of healthy culture that organizational vitality becomes possible.

Church vitality, meaning life and energy, has become another buzzword within proactive, church leadership circles. Vitality and growth in churches is the exception, not the rule in this day and age where 75% of mainline Protestant congregations are characterized by two words, “aging” and “declining.” Not only are the majority of these congregations getting older and smaller, but another worrisome pattern is evident. They ask less of people. Because so many people seem busy and stressed and pulled in multiple directions, many churches have lowered the bar. They have accommodated and adjusted themselves to fragmented lives in a culture where convenience is one of our gods (Garner 85). For many churches, decline in numbers has perpetuated a decline in stewardship, engagement and mission within the church.

Stephen A. Macchia suggests in his book, *Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* that like any organism can become unhealthy, sick and even die, and the church is no exception. According to Macchia, vitality can be observed in ten characteristics: (1) God’s empowering presence, (2) God-exalting worship, (3) spiritual disciplines, (4) a learning and growing community, (5) a commitment to loving and caring relationships, (6) servant leadership development, (7) an outward focus, (8) wise

administration and accountability, (9) networking with the body of Christ, and (10) stewardship and generosity.. (Macchia 23). The church can over time become unhealthy by ignoring and enabling dysfunctional ways of thinking and doing ministry, but the church can also get well, be revitalized by informed, strategic leadership and action empowered by the Spirit. *Becoming a Healthy Church* and other insightful, but prescriptive books like George Barna's *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* and Andy Stanley and Reggie Joiner's *Seven Habits of Effective Ministry* are helpful in organizational praxis, but neglect many of the important spiritual dynamics underneath the surface.

Stepping away from these pragmatic solution based resources, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* by Lois Barrett and Darrell L. Guder contends that the answer to the crisis of the North American church will not be found at the level of strategy, method and problem solving. The problem is much more deeply rooted. It has to do with who we are and what we are for. The real issues in the current crisis of the Christian church are spiritual and theological. *Missional Church* evokes the important questions, "What if the holistic vocation of the church was redefined by its missionary calling? What if the building, budget, staff, leadership, worship, discipleship, evangelism and fellowship opportunities operated in, for and through the greater, Kingdom of God mission? What if church health and vitality was evaluated and measured by a congregation's active pursuit and progress in Kingdom work?"

Barrett and Guder are correct in that defining vitality and measuring the health of a congregation must be a theological endeavor. If vitality indicators and goals are not

firmly grounded in the Scriptures and bigger calling placed upon the church, then we have surely missed the point. Some churches can become so numbers, progress and leadership driven that the greater mission of faithfulness is lost. The pendulum can swing the other way as well. When confronted with the challenges of leading declining congregations, some pastor shrug their shoulders and say, “All we are called to do is be faithful. Whatever will be will be.” This sentiment represents masses of clergy that pray fervently, only to sit on their hands and wait for God to act while the church sinks deeper into obscurity and cultural irrelevance. The modern pastor must accept the mantle of responsibility to live and lead in the uncomfortable tension between enduring trust and proactive initiative.

Leadership is the final component of the study. Upon assessing the church culture and resultant vitality levels, the important final step is synthesizing the data, discerning principles and creating tools to lead cultural change and revitalization. This leadership endeavor will likely catalyze a monumental shift in the landscape of the local church. Pastor and author Kennon Callahan describes this shift saying, “The days of the local church are over. The day of the mission outpost has come” (3, 13, 22).

Many excellent prescriptive books detail how to effectively lead change, but perhaps the best question is not what to do, but how to do it. Many good sermons have been preached, good teachings presented, good counsel offered, good vision created, good strategy discerned and good leadership given only to be shunned and fail, not because of any flaw in what was said or done, but because of how it was said or done. To lead healthy, congregational change effectively, one must learn how to lead like Jesus.

Healthy transformational leadership in the church requires the pastor/leader to be grounded in the teachings and example of Christ. Leading like Jesus is to take the posture of a servant and abandon self-interest. A heart motivated by self-interest looks at the world as a “give a little, take a lot” proposition. People with hearts motivated by self-interest put their own agenda, safety, status, and gratification ahead of that of those affected by their thoughts and actions (Blanchard 271). The heart of a servant leader is contrite and broken, for only with humble posture can anyone lead like Jesus.

To find freedom to lead like Jesus, one must also break the bonds of people pleasing and embrace an audience of one; everyone else is just the cast. Jesus was scathing in his judgment of the scribes and Pharisees, whom he called hypocrites because they did their good deeds to be seen by men: “Everything they do is done for men to see...they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats at the synagogue; they love to be greeted in the marketplace and have men call them ‘Rabbi’” (Matt. 23:5-7, NRSV).

Data Collection Method

The ultimate goal of this research is to determine the effects of congregational culture on effective leadership in revitalization efforts. If a pastor and staff were more informed about the unique, cultural dynamics of the congregation, would that enable more effective contextual leadership to occur? Measuring the relationship between culture and leadership requires several steps involving the participation of the Kingwood Christian Church pastor, staff and lay leadership. The intervention process included a qualitative, pre-intervention evaluation of the Kingwood Christian Church staff, administering the Assessment of Church Culture to Kingwood Christian Church lay

leadership and a post-intervention evaluation of the church staff, lay leadership and congregation.

Participants and Type of Research

As the pastor of Kingwood Christian Church, I asked for the voluntary participation of the staff and lay leadership for the duration of the project. The first step assessed the pre-intervention understandings about church culture maintained by the pastoral staff of Kingwood Christian Church. I wanted to discover to what degree was the staff aware that no two congregations are alike. Each local congregation has a unique personality or culture composed of distinctive values, beliefs, attitudes and practices. The second step assessed the current level of cultural understanding present in the pastoral staff pertaining to the Kingwood Christian Church congregation. What were current views of the staff concerning how the Kingwood Christian Church congregation views identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success? The pre-test for pastor and staff and Assessment of Church Culture will address these questions and established a baseline for post-test comparisons.

The third step established the Kingwood Christian Church, lay leadership participant list and administered the assessment. The Kingwood Christian Church lay leadership invited to participate in the assessment were required to meet the following criteria. Each participant served Kingwood Christian Church in the capacity of Elder, Deacon or Board member during the years of 2010-2015. Additionally, each participant was of good mental health and maintained active membership at Kingwood Christian Church. Lay leaders meeting these criteria were offered the opportunity to voluntarily

participate in the study and administered the Assessment of Church Culture evaluating the aforementioned key characteristics of church culture.

The fourth step included a post-intervention session or retreat with the church staff and lay leadership evaluating the findings of the Assessment of Church Culture and determining how these findings affected leadership strategy and practice. Demographic information collected from all participants allowed more detailed, cultural analysis of groups based on gender, age, ethnicity, education and participation levels. Ultimately, the goal of this project was partnership in God's resurrection work in the local church through informed, effective leadership. The presupposition of this project was that increased cultural understanding leads to contextual leadership and greater vitality in Kingwood Christian Church and beyond. The tools and insights gleaned through this project were shared with the Coastal Plains Area churches of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of multiple components including the pre-intervention survey for pastor and staff, the demographic survey, the Assessment of Church Culture (ACC) and the post-intervention Survey. As mentioned previously, the pre-intervention Survey measured the cultural perceptions of the pastor and staff prior to the intervention. The demographic survey recorded background information including gender, age, ethnicity and education. The demographic information allowed more detailed cultural analysis of specific segments of the congregation.

The Assessment of Church Culture chosen as the primary instrument for data collection was developed by the Practical Church Resources consultant group. This

instrument was adapted for the local church context from the book, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* and the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument developed by professors Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn of the University of Michigan. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument is a validated research instrument based the competing values framework that allows the investigator to calculate the collective organizational profile.

These assessment tools and surveys were administered during weekly staff meetings for the pastoral and program staff in June of 2015 and after morning worship for all participating elders, deacons and Board meetings in the month of August 2015. An additional session was scheduled after Sunday morning services in late August for leadership unable to participate during these scheduled sessions.

Data Analysis

The impetus for this project came from observing well-intentioned pastors, who lacked the knowledge and tools to evaluate their congregations and thus struggled to lead in effective and harmonious ways. Many pastors fail to understand that great leadership is almost always contextual leadership based in a reliable understanding of congregational culture. This qualitative project aspired to provide some cultural education and reliable tools to the newly formed pastoral staff of Kingwood Christian Church and evaluate how these resources aid in more effective and harmonious leadership. Qualitative research employs the pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention process to evaluate the effects of new, validated data on behaviors. Pre-intervention data collected by utilizing the pre-test and Assessment of Church Culture with the Kingwood Christian Church pastor and staff established a reference point for post-intervention evaluation. The

intervention employed the demographic survey and Assessment of Church Culture with the Kingwood Christian Church leadership to determine the collective cultural profile and distinctive traits observed in various segments of the congregation.

Specifically, the Assessment of Church Culture was designed to analyze the primary views of the Kingwood Christian Church congregation pertaining to identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success. The questions evaluating these six indicators revealed the natural tendency of the congregation to focus on people or tasks and emphasize inward or outward thinking. Ultimately, the data helped identify the dominant value and quadrant of influence of the KCC culture as community, flexibility, impact or structure. It is by identifying the dominant values of KCC culture pertaining to identity, “Who we are,” focus, “What we do,” and dominant values, “Why we do it,” that the staff and lay leadership can make informed choices about how to lead more effectively and harmoniously. Analysis culminated in the discussion of how leadership becomes culturally contextual, literally created from a basis of reliable data.

Generalizability

The process of assessment established in this project can be duplicated in any context. Pastors may seek cultural education and choose to undergo cultural assessment because of stagnant or declining participation, or ineffective leadership. Cultural assessment may also be utilized by lay leadership as a preparatory action during a pastoral search process. Pastoral teams might also find it useful to initiate periodic cultural assessments to evaluate the evolution of congregational identity, focus and dominant values.

Though this project provides a reproducible protocol, the findings will always differ from congregation to congregation. Kingwood Christian Church has a unique collection of people, as well as a story and context that heavily influences our values, beliefs, attitudes and practices. Churches undergoing cultural assessment will inevitably find areas of commonality, but no two congregations are identical.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this study surveys the biblical and theological foundations for congregational culture, contextual leadership and the pursuit of revitalization or resurrection as the intention of God for the local church. Chapter 3 provides detailed description of the project design and process. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this qualitative intervention at Kingwood Christian Church. Chapter 5 summarizes and interprets the findings and provides next steps for integration into leadership praxis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide cultural education and utilize a church culture assessment tool to help the Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) staff and leadership understand the unique culture of the congregation and resultantly modify leadership philosophies and practices to promote congregational revitalization and mission. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a floundering denomination hoping for resurrection and renewal. According the 2014 Yearbook and Directory for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), over the past ten years our denomination has declined by thirty five percent in total membership, thirty eight percent in participating membership, and twenty eight percent in average worship attendance (Penwell). Ultimately, the assessment tool and findings of this project were used to inform and equip local church pastors in the Coastal Plains Area of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and beyond to succeed as effective, contextual leaders for change and, with God's help, renewal.

Unlike the study of corporate culture in the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors, which continues to stimulate great interest, reliable tools for assessing a congregation's cultural characteristics are sparse and rarely utilized by pastors and lay leadership. It is a presupposition of this study that increased knowledge and understanding concerning church culture will enable a more harmonious and effective leadership technique and strategy for unhealthy congregations seeking revitalization and renewal. Chapter 2

evaluated key biblical texts and connected these texts to the larger theological doctrine guiding the identity and mission of the local church.

The identity statement of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) defines it as *“a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.”* The quest for denominational unity and wholeness within Christ's church is a central objective in this frontier movement birthed in the early 1800s in the hills of Kentucky. In response to the rigid denominationalism of that time period, forefathers Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Barton Stone sought to unify the splintering church on the common ground of faith in Christ as the Messiah.

The church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things. (Thomas Campbell, Proposition 1 of the Declaration and Address)

Though the colonial expansion originally bore the promise of religious freedom, many pastors and church leaders began recreating the same denominational structures and controls in the young United States as existed back in Europe. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began as a movement seeking to end unhealthy denominational squabbling and factions, and work to unify the divided body of Christ, the church.

I have no idea of adding to the catalogue of new sects. I labor to see sectarianism abolished and all Christians of every name united upon the one foundation upon which the apostolic church was founded. (Alexander Campbell)

The early Disciples operated under no illusion or hope that diversity within the church would disappear. The denominational forefathers believed that unity under the essential professions of the faith was not only possible, but the original intention for the church of Jesus Christ. Diversity of biblical interpretations, theological understandings

and ecclesiological practice is a natural byproduct of our multilingual, multicultural and socioeconomically divergent world. Yet despite this diversity, Stone and Campbell believed that unity amidst our diversity was possible when based in the common ground of Christ. This is why the movement chose to be the “Christian” church. The name intentionally sought to draw no line of denominational distinction and engender the hope for unity in the essentials of the faith. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) sought to embody this unifying statement often, though perhaps mistakenly, attributed to the early, church father Saint Augustine. “In the essentials unity, in the non-essentials liberty and in everything love.” This little movement that spread like wildfire across the Midwestern states, now over 3,754 congregations and 691,160 members, had the audacity to believe that the church in all its diversity could be one, unified by a common faith in Jesus Christ.

Sadly, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), once a vital movement of harmoniously diverse congregations, is now a steadily declining, mainline denomination. These aforementioned statistics paint a bleak picture and rightly stir anxiety and urgency within the Christian church. According the 2014 Yearbook and Directory for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), over the past ten years our denomination has declined by thirty five percent in total membership, thirty eight percent in participating membership, and twenty eight percent in average worship attendance (Penwell). Obviously, these numbers are extremely disconcerting for the denomination cannot expect to survive if these trends continue. It seems clear that though Disciples of Christ pastors might excel as preachers and shepherds, the struggle continues to lead and grow diverse congregations in these misguided and fragmented times.

The challenges of the always diversifying church are growing and local pastors are desperately in need of tools and training for effective, congregational leadership. Effective leadership begins by understanding that every congregation embodies a unique set of cultural characteristics. No two congregations are alike. Each gathering of people creates its own way of doing things, its own way of describing the world, its own tools and artifacts that produce its distinctive appearance. Congregations, in other words, are subcultures within a larger culture (Ammerman 78). The uniqueness of cultural can also be observed in distinct behaviors, ideas and products such as fashion, literature and music. Therefore, people of a certain cultural background can tell who is in their group and who is out of their group by the way they talk, the way they think and the way they act (Whitesel).

Once a reliable foundation of cultural awareness is established, congregation specific, strategic leadership initiative and ultimately revitalization are possible. The biblical witness speaks of a God always working to resurrect and reconcile the unhealthy, stagnant, dying and dead every day, but local pastors and leaders must engage in the vital task of assessing and understanding the increasingly diverse, congregational culture before a new resurrection story can begin.

Diversity of the Body

A dominant assumption of this project is the prominent existence of diversity within the local and global church. Though certain denominations and local congregations maintain historical resistance to the diversifying church, the theme of diversity is affirmed and celebrated throughout the Old and New Testament scriptures. The Genesis story offers affirmation in the very constitution and nature of the Creator. In

Genesis 1:26, the use of the plural, “let us” provides insight into God’s eternal existence as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The trinity is itself a model of diversity that also is the source and origin of the diversity that characterizes God’s physical creation and humanity (Menjares). The diverse nature and expression of God can be seen throughout the creation narrative, but especially in the varied faces of humanity.

The scriptures affirm the first humans as “image bearers” (Gen. 1:27) of the creator and sent forth to be “fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). The diverse image and nature of God is irrevocably imprinted on the first humans and deemed “very good (Gen. 1:31).” Genesis 1 establishes a metanarrative that spans the whole of the scriptures. It proclaims humanity to be “image bearers” of the creator and establishes innate “goodness” as the foundation on which human history unfolds.

Luke records these words of Paul to the people of Athens, “From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the place where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’” (Acts 17:26-28). In Paul’s sermon at Athens he reveals that *all the nations* (Greek, *panta ta ethne*, or *all the ethnic groups*) descended from one man to inhabit the whole earth and that it is God who determines their time and place in order that people might seek him and find him since he is near to all (Menjares). The story of humanity, the offspring of God, lives, moves and exists within a much greater story. The divine author respects the characters with enduring individual freedom

while guiding the greater narrative of history toward redemption, renewed relationship and ultimately restoration in the age to come. The scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, tell the story of God's love for all people and his supreme desire to redeem for himself individuals from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue for his eternal praise (Rev. 5:9; 7:9).

This biblical testimony affirming diversity can also be found in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:12-13) In that day and this, the church has existed as "one body," a community of diverse membership with many different forms, functions and expressions. In all its diversity, the church remains one body. "The symbol of the church as a body demonstrates that God intends the church to be simultaneously unified and diverse" (K. R. Hunter 19).

Investigating the scriptures on the topic of diversity provides a context for discussion about cultural diversity and pastoral leadership within the modern church. Understanding and respecting cultural differences is a hallmark of today's world. This should be nothing new for the church. Expansive diversity was built into the church's genetic code from its inception on the day of Pentecost.

Primary Biblical Precedent

A captivating vision for unity amidst diversity grows from the biblical text of Acts 2 describing the events of Pentecost. On this birthday of the church, two important events occurred. First, many within the diverse crowds described as "devout Jews from

every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) were unified by the proclamation of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. Secondly, after hearing the gospel message about the risen Christ, this diverse gathering was resurrected and transformed into a new community empowered by the Spirit and devoted to living together in community as followers of the Way. The event of Pentecost serves as a divine affirmation of diversity being called into unity by the power of the Spirit and sent forth as a movement to build the kingdom of God.

Background and Context

Between the years of A.D. 70 and 100, somewhere within the Mediterranean world, the Acts of the Apostles was written. Scholars do not know the exact date Acts was written, but tradition affirms the creative author to be the same as that of the third gospel, Luke (Willimon 1). When reading Acts, the reader is immediately made aware that this is a story, or better yet an assembly of stories that comprise the collective identity of the church. With creative flare, Luke weaves symbolic detail and nuanced language throughout his narrative accounts of the resurrected Christ, the Spirit and the early church.

The Pentecost event begins with a small community of disciples, not taking things into their own hands, getting organized and charging forth with banners unfurled, but rather withdrawn to wait and pray (Willimon 2). They prayed and waited in confidence that Jesus’ words of instruction would come true. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). These instructions connect this small band of disciples to the larger metanarrative of the scriptures recording God’s salvific

work and promise of blessing passed down through the line of Abraham and Sarah. The call of the Lord extended to Abraham and then passed down through the ages is to go to Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” God’s call is to go and bless all the diverse peoples of the earth. From the beginning, God’s blessing and truth were meant for all.

The larger context and significance of the Pentecost event can only be understood fully by exploring its antecedent texts in the Hebrew Scriptures and the story of Abraham. The primary question of Acts 1 addresses how God would fulfill the promise of Abraham to extend his kingdom, his saving, sovereign rule, not only in Israel but through Israel, to reach the rest of the world (Wright, *Acts for Everyone* 22-23). The Acts 1 text explores how this divine covenant of blessing and calling first offered to Abraham would be renewed in the first century context and extended to all the families of the earth. To be received and assimilated into diverse cultures through the centuries, God’s message and methods of delivery would require a diversity of expressions.

It is worthy of note that the Hebrew Scriptures record the blessing of Abraham to immediately follow the dramatic chapter in which the people of Babel, unified in language, seek to build a tower to the heavens and be like the gods. God knew that this “stairway to heaven” was a symbol of power, pride and arrogance, and would only become an idol, so he thwarted the strong unity and purpose of the people by confusing their language. The great tower celebrating the accomplishments of man and his plans of immortality would fall into ruin and the people were scattered all over the face of the earth. The modern church is not immune to these escapades of independence and self-sufficiency in which the creation rebels against its desperate need for the Creator. These

rebellious tendencies on display since the Garden of Eden sabotage God's intentions for loving relationship, divine partnership and enduring unity in the church.

Though the heart of man is easily deceived, God is faithful and diligent in his plans to bring gospel to all nations through the line of Abraham. The promise of blessing given to Abraham unified the Hebrews as the chosen of God and remained with Abraham's descendants through the rebellion, judgment and dispersion of the nation. Now, Luke is implying, at the day of Pentecost this curse of confusion that dispersed the people is itself overturned; in other words, God is dramatically signaling that his promises to Abraham are being fulfilled, and the whole human race is going to be addressed with the good news of what has happened in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (Wright, *Acts for Everyone* 29). The Spirit's coming at Pentecost signals a reversal of the curse and dispersion suffered at the tower of Babel. By faith in Jesus as the Christ, dispersion is replaced with restored community and confusion and chaos is supplanted for understanding and unity (Hull 62). Throughout the Scriptures, the God of the Hebrews labors for the healing and restoration of that which was broken and severed providing renewed unity of hope and purpose.

It was at Pentecost that God poured out the Holy Spirit forging unity of purpose among the remaining disciples and followers of Jesus, numbering around 120 (Acts 1:15) and the dispersed Jews from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5, 9-11). This small community that gathered to wait and pray was an unusual one—a fact attested by Luke's parenthetical mention in Acts 1:14 of woman who had been with Jesus since Galilee (Luke 8:2, 23:49, 55; 24:10-11) including Jesus' mother and brothers, as well as Mary and Martha. The inclusion of women in the roster of the community would not have been

missed by a second century reader, as an indication that this is a community that breaks barriers (Willimon 22-23). Those 120 counted among the disciples, both men and women, connects to the citing of Joel that men and women would prophecy (Pohill 97). The presence of women among the disciples adds yet another dimension to Jesus' already diverse group of educated and simpleton, affluent and working class, culturally clean and unclean. Without question, the group through which the early church began was complicated and diverse group.

The Pentecost event provides a powerful picture of expansive diversity being called into community. The church from conception is God's intended locale for ushering people of great diversity into unity around the common table of faith. The disciples and crowds present that day, outlined in Acts 2:9-11, provide a microcosm of this diversity. "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Thousands of devout sons and daughters dispersed by the fall of Israel in 722 BC and annihilation of Judah in 587 BC had come home to the city of the temple to dwell there (Pohill 101). They had come from all over, from countries each of which would have its own native language and local dialect. Luke gives a list of where they came from in a great sprawling sweep. The progression of people groups cited forms a regular curve from southeast to north and northwest (Pohill 102). It covers tens of thousands of square miles, from Parthia to Mesopotamia in the north and east, to Rome in west and Egypt and Arabia in the south, together with the island of Crete. The point of this extensive list that Luke offers to get a sense of the great polyglot company gathered in Jerusalem on this important day (Wright, Acts for Everyone 28-29).

The Coming of the Spirit

The Pentecost event cannot be evaluated properly apart from the miraculous power displayed by the Spirit empowering the disciples and giving birth to the church. The Greek term “pneuma” is used 68 times in the book of Acts and 345 times in the New Testament scriptures (Easton). The term pneuma is used for God as recorded in Jesus’ words to the woman at the well in the gospel of John. “God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Pneuma is also used to describe Christ, as in Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17) (Powell 386-387). It is this mysterious Spirit, scripturally equated with God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son that is poured out over the disciples in the forms of wind and fire.

The Spirit came suddenly with a sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven and filled the house. These descriptions conjure images of God speaking to Job out of the whirlwind (Schott 406-408). The symbolism of the “blowing wind” to that of Divine Spirit of the Old and New Testament is undeniable. The Divine Spirit was thought to usher in the coming age where the life and power of God would be on full display. This wind or breath of God would bring the power of the resurrected Christ anointing the church to become a salvific movement to change the world (Keener 193). Like the wind that first blew over the waters of creation, the Spirit works to regenerate that which was broken and restore the righteous reign of God upon the earth. The wind often “blows away the chaff” acting as an agent of judgment, a divine reordering of the creation by the creator (Fernando 87).

“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3). Luke uses this terminology to try to explain a supernatural experience in natural language. He cannot describe what happened, but is reporting what the disciples heard, saw and experienced (M. W. Smith 20-21). The symbolic richness of “fire” is equal to that of “wind,” spanning the whole of the Old and New Testaments. The presence of God manifest in fire is found throughout the Scriptures, most prominently by Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), the Hebrews led by a pillar of fire through the desert (Exodus 13:21) and as Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God (Exodus 19:18) (M. W. Smith 21).

The “tongues of fire” came to rest, not upon the whole community of disciples, but on each person individually (Fernando 87). The implications of this observation are significant and far reaching in scope. Until this time, the Spirit was communal in nature resting on the Hebrew people according to their covenant with Yahweh. “I will take you as my people and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). But now, the Spirit comes to rest upon the individual anointing this diverse lot of disciples and then the crowd “from every nation under heaven.” The Pentecost event offers divine affirmation of diversity within the church, for each individual through faith is anointed with the Spirit and empowered to be a witness to the truth of the resurrected Christ.

The anointing of the Spirit allowed individual, culture-specific testimonies (O'Reilly 29) to be given and received causing the church to explode with new believers, over three thousand in number (Acts 2:41). The Spirit did not work to meld the crowds into a common tongue, culture, skin tone or socioeconomic class, but rather affirmed the beautiful diversity and sought to begin the work of crafting a new community based on a

common faith in Christ and a commitment to discipleship. “When Christians and churches are allowed to be what the unfettered Spirit makes them, where they are set free from men and placed in full dependence on Christ, there we may expect her witness to flourish” (Boer 224). In the quickly diversifying West, the local church faces the significant challenge of creating open, fertile space where the Spirit can move freely and guide diverse peoples into unified voice and expression.

The symbolic power of fire as associated with God is most often seen throughout the Scriptures as an agent of purification, consumption and judgment (Isa. 29:6). Both wind and fire are seen as divine agents of judgment by which God puts right all that has been corrupted by sin (Keener 193). Unlike modern views of judgment, it is important to note that the judgment of God was not seen in a negative, but positive light by the Hebrew people. Divine judgment was understood as the active work of God to restore the intended harmony of the Garden and to reestablish justice and righteousness on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, the people of God welcomed the prospect of the coming judgment of Christ with anticipation and the hope of divine intervention, justice and restored community under God’s sovereign rule (Wright, *Surprised by Hope* 142-145).

With the “violent wind” and “burning fire,” all of the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled to speak “in other tongues” the gospel courageously and articulately. This is the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to this diverse group of nobodies. You will receive power to be effective witnesses, prophets to the ends of the earth (Keener 200). Some scholars suggest that no real miracle occurred at Pentecost because all dispersion Jews could understand Greek and Aramaic. It is true that these were the native or common languages used every day as opposed to the higher language of

Hebrew which was reserved primarily for the Temple of formal occasions (Zerhusen 126). The miracle resided in that the disciples were lowly Galileans. Inhabitants of Jerusalem regarded Galilee as a backwards locale, peculiar first of all because of its dialect in which laryngeal sounds were swallowed (Fernando 89).

The debate continues about the miraculous nature of that day and exact language spoken, but Luke's point seems crystal clear. The Spirit enables these commoners to overcome all the barriers of culture, language and dialect, and speak in such a way that these diverse crowds heard, understood and responded to the gospel. For by the powerful testimonies of these few men and women, over 3000 believed and were added to their number that day.

It is important to note that when this new community was formed, all of the distinctive marks of diversity were not washed away. The text offers the diversity of language as another primary example. The story does not claim that there is only one language now—Luke reports that the disciples speak in a multitude of languages. Some traditions maintain that the Pentecost event included Glossolalia, inarticulate sounds under the stress of deep and overpowering religious emotion (Hull 60). It is also doubtful that Luke is describing this ecstatic speech or speaking in tongues here, the glossolalia of 1 Corinthians 14, because that sort of speech needed translation for anyone to understand (Willimon 32-33). The Spirit's coming does not wipe away the characteristics of diversity in the church, but rather enables unity of understanding to be attained amidst diversity.

The text claims that many heard the proclamation of the gospel and believed on that day, but there were exceptions. There were those present in the crowd who

presumably heard the message in their own tongue, but did not receive the gospel claiming, “They have had too much wine” (Acts 2:13b). This mocking response from “some” present that day introduces the theme of rejection to the text. Here for the first time appears a motif that runs throughout Luke and Acts—in itself, without the element of personal faith and experience, even the most profound aspects of the good news are not self-confirming, but can lead to skepticism and even rejection (Pohill 104). Even to those fortunate souls present on this extraordinary day, God maintained the personal freedom of choice to believe or reject the revelation of the Spirit’s power and truth of the resurrected Christ.

From that day to this, the gospel has been presented in various contexts with some listeners receiving it and other listeners rejecting it. What is the basis for acceptance or rejection? Missiologist Don Richardson suggests that success in gospel reception requires “concept fulfillment” and creating a contextual entry point. Richardson asserts that God has placed within every culture concepts that find their fulfillment in the gospel (Richardson 416-420). Peter identified a conceptual entry point by quoting the familiar prophecies of Joel to his Jewish listeners at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21). Paul utilized an entry point in Athens by speaking of the “Unknown God” (Acts 17:23) to his Greek audience. Both Peter and Paul understood the unique characteristics of context, crafted the gospel presentation accordingly and achieved measured success as a result.

There is no such thing as communication void of context and thus the communicator that neglects to consider contextual uniqueness will often fail to connect with the audience. Content should include the understanding of contextual issues of faith and search for meaning in life, the urgent issues of human development and social justice,

and the tensions between that pertaining to global civilization and local cultural and religious situations. Proper contextualization also involves open mindedness providing a way of dealing with diversity. It does not conform to predetermined agendas and emphasizes responsiveness avoiding judgment (Chamberlin 241).

In order to identify the right entry points, pastors must open mindedly evaluate and understand the unique characteristics and perspectives of this modern context. For many decades, the church has offered responses to the same questions about heaven, hell, judgment and forgiveness. What if the cultural questions have changed? It is only by investigating and discerning the underlying, contextual questions and yearnings embedded within the layers of modern culture that the church might discover new and effective entry points for the gospel.

As Paul would later remind the church in Corinth, the mysterious truths and ways of God will always be seen as foolishness to some, but to those able to receive and believe, they are the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:21). For those observing, but unable or unwilling to accept the seemingly foolish message, the disciples looked to have drunk too much wine. Perhaps they were intoxicated on the wine of the Holy Spirit (Oursler 58). Intentional or not, the gospel theme of new wine (John 2) and new wineskins (Luke 5) hold a prominent, symbolic place in the teaching ministry of Jesus. Exploring this theme of new wine provides additional context to understand more fully the connection between the Pentecost event and the larger mission of Jesus to proclaim the good news to the world.

While attending a wedding banquet at Cana in Galilee, Jesus' mother approached him and informed him of a problem. "They have no more wine" (John 2:3). After

momentary resistance, Jesus instructs the servants to fill six stone jars with water. These jars, each holding twenty to thirty gallons, were customarily used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. “Fill the jars to the brim,” Jesus said. “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet” (John 2:7-8). Jesus had transformed ceremonial bathwater into the choicest of wines. Scholars suggest that this first, seemingly insignificant miracle established a guiding theme for the whole of Jesus’ ministry. In his own unorthodox, surprising and peculiar way, Jesus had come to make all things new. Jesus came to bring new wine, a new yoke of teachings meant to lighten the burden of unhealthy religion and bring rest for weary souls (Matt. 11:28-30). Jesus came to bring new wine, a new covenant of relationship with God built securely on an unwavering foundation of love and grace, and the promise of new life here and in the age to come.

The new wine that Jesus uncorked was symbolic of a new age breaking in, an age of mercy and forgiveness. That is what God had always promised. This is the new covenant promised by the prophets; forgiveness is here, walking down the street, and when people repent it is theirs. Never mind if it upsets the tidy classifications and rituals of the old system (Wright, *Luke for Everyone* 63-64). The salvific message and sacrifice of Jesus established a new way of receiving salvation and relationship with God based on a covenant of grace, the unmerited favor of God given to anyone who would receive it.

Remember the revolutionary nature of this new covenant of grace is important. The movement from law to grace represented a holistic paradigm shift for the Jewish people. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:26b). The theological and ecclesiological ramifications of this shift cannot be overestimated. Through this selfless act of sacrificial

love, God provides for a new dynamic of relationship based on grace alone, not works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:9). The teachings and actions of Jesus ignited and unavoidable transformation within the religious establishment, one that would not be accepted without resistance.

In Luke 5:39, Jesus offers this word of caution. “And nobody who drinks old wine wants new.” Though many were drawn to this new wine, others saw it as a threat to the established ways of believing and following Yahweh. Unlike Matthew and Mark, the gospel according to Luke offers the solemn warning—don’t expect the people who have given their lives to the old movements to be happy about switching allegiance. They are likely to stay with what they know. They have gotten used to the old wine and are frightened they won’t like the new (Wright, *Luke for Everyone* 63-64). The old adage, “That is not the way we have always done it around here” was alive and well in the church of Jesus’ day. In that day and this, fear of that which is unfamiliar and unknown plagues the church inhibiting its creative vision and scope of influence.

This natural resistance is a common challenge faced by those bearing a new message with new implications. Perhaps this resistance is what Luke is referring to when he recounts how some in the crowds of Pentecost questioned whether the apostles were drunk on wine. It is important to note that Jesus is not advocating that every new whim, fad, interpretation or idea be embraced and enacted in the local church. Any wise leader must realize that the new wine that Jesus brought still serves as the foundation for the modern Christianity. Thus, modern, pastor reformers should employ caution and prayerful discernment when evaluating new interpretations that could shape the message and ministries of the church.

Just as any new computer program requires a new operating system, Jesus proclaims it impossible for this new, covenant wine to be kept in old wineskins. To the chagrin of the establishment, new wine requires new wineskins. New skins are alive, changing, not fixed in any set form or size, and therefore should not be treated as though they were dead and unchanging. Christian rituals of worship and forms of activities must always be appropriate to the liveliness of the new age (Craddock 80-81). Jesus claims that the new message of grace necessitates new forms and expressions. The Temple centric sacrificial system could no longer house the expansive implications of Jesus' new covenant. This necessary evolution of ecclesiastical form or methodology, requiring the exchange of old wineskins (or methods) for new, would not be welcomed either by the antagonist, religious establishment.

The idea of trading old wineskins for new often meets opposition when the message is connected a new method or form. Many who heard Jesus' message likely found it very difficult to abandon the old ways of Judaism—respected, traditional, confirmed with Scripture—and take up the new, which was still finding its way, its voice, its shape and own identity (Craddock 81). Resistance to methodological change is not a new phenomenon of the modern church. Often, this opposition to change occurs for the most honorable of reasons, like maintaining identity and defending meaningful traditions and rituals established over time. The leadership task of the local pastor is to discern where engrained methodology compromises or even sabotages the larger message and mission of the church. The message must always dictate to the method, never the contrary. It is only when the message and method dance together in harmony that the

local church truly finds its unique voice within the community. This is the leadership task at hand for the local pastor.

Theological Foundation: Resurrection

The Church of Jesus Christ is the original Church of the resurrection. It was under the banner and lordship of the resurrected messiah, Jesus Christ that a remnant of the Hebrew diaspora, from every corner of the region, was revived and transformed into a new body, the church. By the power of the Spirit and a common faith in the resurrected savior, the church was unified and commissioned as the new wineskins from which the new wine of Christ's teaching would flow freely for all people.

From the beginning, God the Creator was in the business of resurrecting broken and dysfunctional things-elements, people, families, tribes, institutions and communities. Just as God's wind, the Spirit, swept over the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2) as a precursor of God's formative work to come, God's wind blows over the modern world and, for those who are receptive, new life springs forth. Ultimately, the possibility and power of resurrection is the driving force behind all pursuits of the divine. The hope of healing, restorative change and a new tomorrow still draws the sinner's heart to consider God. The local church must avail itself again to the Spirit and reclaim its true identity as God's chosen locale for personal and communal resurrection to take place. Through this violent, surprising wind of the Spirit, the local church is energized, transformed and equipped to be the hope of the world for today and tomorrow.

Sadly, many believers do not know what the ultimate Christian hope really is. Many are especially void of hope for this present life and world. For far too many, hope is found solely in the promise of heaven, another realm where the faithful go to be with

God after death. These are a sampling of the presuppositions addressed by N.T. Wright in his significant book, *Surprised by Hope*. At the heart of this sizable volume is an exploration of the resurrection of Jesus, both the historical event and theological implications, and the mission of the church. He tackles the wayward theologies of escapism and describes nothing short of a Jesus revolution of hope for today and tomorrow.

Wright claims that “many” Christians cannot imagine how hope in the hereafter can intersect with a hope for the here and now. Yet, a survey of the Scriptures reveals that these two themes of hope are inseparably connected. Hope is at once about that which lies ahead and is promised by a God who loves to bring hope to each one of us, and about the Kingdom of God breaking into our present-day realities spilling forth in hope for the world (Wright, *Surprised by Hope* 5). For Wright, hope for today and tomorrow reside in the Christian doctrine and theological ramifications of the resurrection of Jesus. Establishing reliable historical and theological footing for the resurrection is essential for the modern church to understand, seek revitalization and actualize its mission of hope.

The resurrection event overflows with implications and applications for the local church. Modern scholarship presents many different characteristics and perspectives of interpretation that reveal the significance of the resurrection. A survey of commentators on this historically divisive doctrine yields a variety of analyses ranging from the polar extremes of historical literalism to unsubstantiated mythology. Though most recognize the centrality of the resurrection for Christianity, the solid majority of scholars find its ultimate significance to be elusive and hard to pin down. Theologian Anthony Kelly claims that the resurrection provides the broadest horizon within which we can recognize

what human life ultimately means, how we should live and what we should expect from the God who raised Jesus from the dead. If Christians ever stop believing in, and living from, his resurrection, that will be when the church stops being the church of Jesus Christ (Kelly 1). Kelly and other biblical scholars suggest that some of life's greatest, philosophical and theological questions are influenced by our understandings of the resurrection.

For many Christians, the truth of the resurrection was the starting point of faith and the mission of the church. Jürgen Moltmann asserts that "Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God. In the New Testament there is no faith that does not start *a priori* with the resurrection of Jesus" (165). The apostle Paul wrote that: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Cor. 15:13-14, 17). Though the resurrection of Jesus remains almost universally accepted as a fundamental tenant of the Christian faith, debate continues concerning the historicity and meaning of the resurrection.

One significant point of contention among the academy and church is whether the resurrection was physical (bodily) or spiritual in nature. N.T. Wright, a church historian and biblical scholar, suggests that the bodily resurrection is the historical foundation for the early church and sets apart followers of the Way from other messianic movements of that day. From the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus were uniform in their affirmation and confidence that Jesus was raised, bodily, from the dead. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is more than a belief that his body was dead and came to life again.

Wright describes belief in the resurrection as a cosmic explosion of endless power that radiates through the ages to our day and into eternity. From the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus were uniformed in their affirmation and confidence that Jesus was raised, bodily, from the dead (Wright, *Surprised by Hope* 36-37). Wright uses modern scholarship to substantiate a historically orthodox position on the resurrection, but adds cosmic implications of empowerment for this life, a topic to be addressed later.

Conversely, scholar John Dominic Crossan, co-founder of the Jesus Seminar and author of *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* suggests that the resurrection, though of great importance to the Christian faith, was not bodily in nature, but metaphorical. Crossan claims that Jesus didn't rise bodily from the dead and that the first Christians told Jesus' resurrection story as a parable, not as a fact (Stewart 1-2). Wright and Crossan, amiable colleagues and personal friends, represent the polar extremes of scholarly work, and yet find some common ground as the conversation turns to the meaning behind resurrection.

For Crossan, the importance of the resurrection does not hinge on its literal or metaphorical historicity, but rather in its meaning. The crucifixion of Jesus meant that imperial power had won. But the resurrection meant that divine justice had prevailed and God is on the side of the crucified one. The miracle of Jesus can be found in how he lived, not how he died or was raised (Blake). He asserts that the ramifications of Jesus' life and the resurrection are deeply social, political and ideological, an assertion affirmed whole-heartedly by Wright. Other critics hold an obstinate position claiming that Crossan is trying to remove any supernatural element from the life of Jesus and the Bible. The doctrine of the resurrection remains a paramount topic of debate among pastors and

theologians, for the implications of the affirmative stance significantly influence how the church understands its mission and participates with God in welcoming the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The Mission of the Church

Wright writes extensively on the topic of missiology claiming that if the resurrection is true, then there is new way of telling the story of the bible and the story of creation. If the resurrection is true, then the promise of blessing given to Abraham is accomplished, the promise of David's unshakeable kingdom is fulfilled and the promise of Israel's triumphant return from exile is realized. If Jesus is raised from the dead, the stories of the Scriptures have reached their goal in him (Wright, *Surprised by Hope* 236). The Word through whom all things were made (John 1) is the Word through whom all things are remade. The resurrection of Jesus serves notice of the coming of the new world.

Ultimately, the product of all research, query and debate must lead to substantive understanding, meaning and action. People want to know how the resurrection changes things here in this life. The heart of resurrection theology is not theoretical, but experiential. It involves an encounter with the living Christ, followed by the voluntary choice to believe and follow. There is likely no better account of such a faith encounter than that of the man born blind (John 9:1-41). It synthesizes the challenge of seeing the risen Christ with eyes of faith and committing oneself to him. Encounters such as this move beyond the past and give voice to the timeless questions, "Do you here and now experience in Jesus the One who is utterly true and good and brings us to the face of

God? If so, are you willing to become his disciple and so have life in his name”
(O'Collins 8-9).

Sandra Schneiders, author of *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, challenges the person of faith to recognize that the resurrection is much more than a matter of historical query or discussion. The resurrection involves an existential issue, a spiritual challenge and a personal relationship. If the resurrection is true, then the identity and mission of the church is renewed and transformed by the power of God. This is sage advice for the mainline masses that often dwell in the comfy confines of theory and philosophical debate, but rarely consider the everyday implications of resurrection truth. Through this kind of intentional, experiential encounter with Christ, the church is prepared for the inevitability of change.

The resurrection and Pentecost texts must serve as anchors for pastors during these challenging times when uncertainty abounds. For the story of Yahweh, Israel, Jesus Christ and the church is a resurrection story. The church finds hope in the unchanging nature and character of God seen from the beginning of time. The God that calls and empowers the church is the God of creation, a God of infinite power who brings life and purpose out of death and chaos. The church of Jesus Christ is not a glorified, civic club, but a divinely empowered movement called to proclaim the resurrected Christ and change the world. God provides for this great, global mission by sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to pour out upon the church providing comfort, guidance and strength. This is why Easter and Pentecost belong together. Easter commissions Jesus' followers for a task; Pentecost gives them the necessary equipment to accomplish it (Wright, *Surprised*

by Hope 239). Local pastors must partner with this God of resurrection and in turn experience congregational revitalization.

God desires to lead all congregations in the hopeful process of resurrection and renewal. Though many churches have fallen into disillusionment and decline, God plots for hope, a resurrection story yet to be written. To the dispersed remnants of Israel, God sent the Spirit on Pentecost to unite, empower and commission the church to take the gospel of the resurrected Christ to the ends of the earth. The same transforming Spirit that birthed the church in Acts 2 is available to the splintered and floundering church of today. Through the work of the Spirit, God is resurrecting stagnant and dying congregations, and pastors are learning that revitalization is possible. Once stagnant and declining churches all across North America are now experiencing revitalization and growth.

No easy answers or guaranteed formulas for leading revitalization exist, though many church and secular leaders suggest as much. Many churches are convinced that the key to revitalization resides in finding the right charismatic, motivational leader. We need amplifiers—those leaders who can reduce fear and replace it with confidence, and reduce confusion and replace it with clarity, mobilizing the organization for a better future (Church XII). But inspiration only goes so far when lasting results do not follow. Other leaders claim that revitalization is about doing things differently, watching the changing trends of culture and keeping expressions relevant. Yet many of these same churches are struggling to maintain credibility in a culture in which there are more spiritual seekers than any time in living memory. In the laudable efforts of church leaders to understand and respond to what is going on in culture, churches are not only failing to make any

discernable difference in society, but also losing a clear sense of calling, message and mission (Drane 2).

Still other leaders suggest that a brighter future can only be attained through the methodical process of strategic leadership. Any organization succeeds only by the critical work of setting, implementing, reviewing and updating strategy with passion, skill and commitment (Freedman 14-15). The importance of strategic thinking and intentional process cannot be discounted in revitalization efforts, but often the organizational culture resists the identified mission. The combined effect of organizational culture, meaning the behaviors, values, heritage, thinking and relational dynamics, significantly influences performance and effectiveness. This is surely true of many local congregations still utilizing the tools of modernity while seeking to reach and assimilate increasingly postmodern generations.

Some pastors ask, “What if the mission is as straight forward as evangelism?” Evangelism is surely a central tenant of the Christian faith. Some pastors suggest that church revitalization is as simple as turning up the evangelistic temperature, equipping the faithful and sending them out to reach the lost. The reaching, contagious church only happens on purpose. A carefully developed plan, along with the supporting values and actions steps, must be in place for a church to become truly effective in reaching lost people for Christ (Mittelberg 13).

The call to evangelize and how to do it remains a widely debated topic especially in the mainline church. According to Martha Grace Reece, author of *Unbinding the Gospel*, evangelism has become the unspeakable “E” word in many moderate to liberal congregations. In the recent Duke Clergy Survey of over 25,000 members of 262

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations, the ministry of greatest disappointment and ineffectiveness was reaching the unchurched and sharing the gospel (4). Reece suggests that revisiting, not just the how to(s), but the why(s) of evangelism are essential for restoring church growth and vitality.

Western culture is changing faster than ever before and thus churches, as contextual organizations, must learn to evolve and thrive in the midst of diversity. When the future looks unpredictable and ambiguous, and change seems inevitable, the anxiety levels spike especially within established congregations. Guiding the evolution of the church is a significant leadership endeavor requiring a steady hand. Few people have difficulty with the basics of leadership in stable and predictable environments, but the leaders of today must master the art of change (Boast 14). These masters of change excel in the art transformational leadership. Blending many of these aforementioned characteristics, transformational leaders motivate others to be and do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. Transformational leaders are charismatic role models, inspirational motivators, intellectual stimulators and personally considerate of his/her colleagues (Bass 5). These leaders transcend transactional leadership, a praxis founded on rewards or disciplines based on performance, and create an expectation and culture that over-achieves.

Understanding and Assessing Church Culture

Though these various disciplines and initiatives might be part of the equation, health and revitalization in the church requires more than inspiration, cultural relevance, leadership strategy and turning up the evangelistic temperature. As many of the aforementioned authors noted, it begins with digging beneath the surface and

understanding the unique dynamics of organizational culture. The culture, not vision or strategy, is the most important force in any organization. Culture is the sum of the attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguish one group of people from another. The root meaning of culture is shared with the word agriculture, referring to the soil that has been tilled, and by extension a set of traits that have been plowed into a group's way of life (Cordeiro 12).

On most computers, everything that happens is filtered through Microsoft Windows. Those "windows" are the lenses through which everything on the computer is translated. This is the function of culture. Almost all human groups develop cultures, and they exist on multiple levels. Some aspects of human culture are universal; other dimensions are particular to a group (Nye Jr 91).

Church culture is not bad or good, but can be healthy or unhealthy. Organizational culture is like the air breathed within an organization. It influences the way people are treated, the way people treat their peers and their response to their leaders. If the air is clean and healthy, people thrive and the organization succeeds, but to the extent that it is toxic, energy subsides, creativity lags, conflicts multiply and production declines (Chand 7). The culture of a group or organization sets the framework for leaders: "Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin in that leaders first create culture when they create groups and organizations. Once cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will and who will not be a leader." Assessing, understanding and managing culture is one of the most important things leaders do. "If leaders do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them" (Schein, Defining Organizational Culture 281).

Examples of culture-unique leadership can be found in the charismatic, but differing styles of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohammad Gandhi. Though significantly influenced by Gandhi, King's style was very American and Gandhi's very Indian (Nye Jr 92). Both men possessed a very high cultural intelligence that allowed them to understand unique, contextual dynamics, create culture-specific, leadership strategy and exert significant influence for the cause. Conversely, the leadership styles and strategies of King and Gandhi would require alteration if transplanted to a different cultural context. Cultural intelligence enables leaders to communicate and engage their organization in terms familiar to them. For preachers, contextual thinking enables effective communication allowing the Christian message to become relevant and meaningful (Hesselgrave 82). Nigerian theologian Byang H. Kato takes this concept a step further claiming, "Since the gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the mode of expression is not only right but necessary" (Kato 217). The same principle applies for pastors and laypersons trying to offer effective leadership in the beautifully diverse, local church.

The first step in leading effective, revitalization efforts in the local church is cultural education. Pastors must acknowledge that no two churches are alike, but operate as a unique culture. Culture announces itself in everything a church does, but can mostly easily be identified in the values. The values of church culture—stated and unstated, thought out or unintentional—shape the feel, behavior and attitude of a congregation more than anything else (Cordeiro 41). Groups communicate these shared, cultural values in different ways.

In the Alaskan culture they display symbols of culture on totem poles with enormous and colorful carved heads of eagles and salmon and bears. Each animal carved is a “totem”—an animal that embodies the skills and values the tribe if it is to overcome and thrive in this hostile and challenging environment: “We must be wise as an owl, cunning as a fox, strong as a bear, resourceful as a badger and persevering as a salmon that swims up the river.” The totem pole, planted prominently in a village, announces to residents and strangers alike, “This is our culture. This is who we are” (Cordeiro 42). These symbols provide needed reminders of cultural identity, who “we” are and what “we” value most.

Cultural makeup and function can be broken down into the following six components adapted from the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument and *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* by Kim Cameron and Robert E. Quinn. These six items merely describe some of the fundamental manifestations of organizational culture. These dimensions are not comprehensive, of course, but they address basic assumptions (dominant characteristics, organizational glue), interactional patterns (leadership, management of employees), and organizational direction (strategic emphases, criteria for success) that typify the fundamentals of culture (K. S. Cameron 42).

These dimensions include identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success. By breaking down the congregational culture into these components, a leadership team can evaluate the collective value placed on community, flexibility, structure and impact. This assessment can also identify the congregation’s natural tendencies for inward or outward focus, as well as task or people centered ministry. The

breadth of reliable information and resultant understanding available through cultural assessment is foundational for developing informed leadership strategy and planning effective revitalization efforts.

Removal of reliable cultural evaluation and assessment from the leadership equation opens the door for all kinds of miscommunication, strategic blunders and damage to the church. God desires a much different future for the church, a future where the church dances in health and renewed vitality (Mallory 25). Eugene Peterson offers this picturesque paraphrase and exciting vision of healthy, effective church.

He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christians in skilled servant work, working with Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13, Message)

As seen throughout the Scriptures, God desires to partner with any willing servant to bring renewal to faith communities and continue the dance of effective gospel ministry. The pastor seeking to lead effective revitalization must learn these unique values, convictions, behaviors and language that make up the church culture. Assessing the unique characteristics and dynamics of church culture enables the leader to evaluate the unique organizational landscape and lays a solid foundation of familiarity and understanding on which to create contextual and effective leadership strategy.

Conclusion

The central objective of this ministry project is to introduce and assess congregational culture, and establish a solid foundation of understanding on which to build healthy, vibrant congregations within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The biblical foundation consists of the aforementioned implications of Pentecost and the

resurrection of Jesus for the modern church, and the resultant theology of hope and renewal that must guide the future of the church. Resting on these promises of renewal, pastors must embark on effectively leading congregational revitalization by the power of the Holy Spirit. As established in this review, understanding and assessing church culture provides a reliable starting place in a long succession of steps toward effective leadership and revitalization. Substantive and reliable understanding utilized fully can lead to prayerful visioning, strategic planning and effective actions that move the congregation forward into greater vitality and mission. Christ has these hopeful plans for the church. For these reasons, it is monumentally important for leaders and churches to embrace a resurrection faith, a belief that God is making all things new, moving history toward a hopeful culmination where heaven and earth will come together and the Kingdom will be fully realized. At Pentecost, God commissioned the church to actively participate in this resurrection story of hope for the world.

What Christians believe and say about the direction of history gives shape and color to everything else. The mission of the church is inseparably connected to God's ultimate intentions for this world. Sadly, millions of Christians believe that this world will devolve back into dark chaos (Genesis 1) and ultimately be discarded into some cosmic wastebasket. Thus, the mission of the church becomes about getting people to heaven and an escapist mentality emerges. God has greater visions for the church filled with hope and the restoration of all things. For this reason we pray, "Your Kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Clarity on these fundamental issues of identity must be forged for the church to be efficient and effective in its mission.

The source of hope for the here and now, and the hereafter lies in this truth. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are saved from sin and death. But there is more to the story, for God is saving and restoring all creation and invites the church to be the divinely empowered instrument of resurrection and healing. This is a great metanarrative seen throughout the scriptures. God the Creator works tirelessly to restore the first garden, to bring healing wholeness back to the broken creation. In Christ, the gardener of John 20:15, the church is saved from sin by grace, restored in strength and set apart for good works. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph. 2:8-10). At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls those who believe the light of the world. “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

The good deeds of the saved are not offered in hope of exiting this world to take up residence in heavenly realms, but “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Paul affirms that God has plans to bring salvation to all creation. The present hope of the church is that God’s Kingdom breaks into this world, into our everyday journey of faith as we do justice, extend mercy, express love, offer compassion, and celebrate beauty in the name of Jesus. It is humbling to ponder the faith that the Creator must have in humanity to entrust us with such an extraordinary task.

A resurrection theology is not fatalistic, believing that world is doomed, but rather hopeful, expectant that God is moving history toward a good culmination. The church of the resurrection is one that lives in perpetual hope that God made and continues to make all things new. God invites all people of faith to join in sacred partnership with the Holy Spirit experiencing and extending the hope of resurrection to the world.

The challenges of local church ministry have never been greater. Social, cultural, political, religious, economic and philosophical diversity abounds as Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour of the week. That Western culture is moving away from organized religion and many church leaders watch a steady decline in attendance, engagement, contributions and community influence is not wonder. To say that the future looks bleak is an understatement and many pastors and church leaders are already preparing the eulogy for the established church as we know it.

But the story of the Scriptures tells of a God who delights in bringing new life and power to diminished and dying things. Just as the women burst through the door on Easter morning proclaiming to the disciples that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive, the risen Savior still reigns and sends his church out in resurrection power to proclaim the good news to all. Just as the disciples at Pentecost waited and prayed fearful of what was to come, the wind and fire of the Spirit still rest upon the church giving it all it needs to complete this given commission. These are unchanging realities based on the faithful promises of our God and creator as recorded in the Scriptures.

And Jesus said to the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Jesus sends out his followers to be ambassadors of the new Kingdom, but not without the right provisions. This same Spirit poured out at Pentecost remains with the

church as a sign of God's faithfulness, power and provision. By the power of the Spirit, Peter spoke to the crowds saying, "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. This transforming message that welcomed thousands into the faith at Pentecost endures today as the one true hope of the world.

This same divine power that raised Jesus from that dead is available for the struggling local congregations of today. The same surprising wind of the Spirit, promised by Christ, blows today wanting to unify and equip the church for a new chapter in the sacred story. The time to act is now for the church stands at a precipice of crucial importance, a hopeful opportunity to be reaffirmed and reformed into something new by the loving creator of all things. The church, like its ancestors Abraham and Sarah, must venture again into the unknown to a destination that God will make known.

The church leadership must faithfully walk trusting God for the directions and provisions needed each step of the way. The journey will undoubtedly be full of challenges, times when resolve grows faint and hope seems gone, for the process of transformation is never easy. Author and activist, Brian McLaren, offers this insight in his book *A New Kind of Christianity*. "It is time for a new quest, launched by new questions, a quest across denominations around the world, a quest for new ways to

believe and new ways to live and serve faithfully in the way of Jesus, a quest for a new kind of Christian faith” (18).

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR:
ASSESSING CONGREGATIONAL CULTURE FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Introduction:

No two churches are alike. Each local congregation has a unique personality or culture composed of distinctive values, beliefs, attitudes and practices stemming from the collective experience and history of the church. Assessing and understanding a congregation's unique culture is an extremely helpful finding for pastoral staff seeking to lead effectively in the local church. Though some pastors receive basic leadership training in seminary, many remain unaware of differing cultural characteristics and unequipped for the contextual nature of local church leadership. This problem translates to ineffective, pastoral leadership and contributes to the stagnancy and decline of many local congregations.

The purpose of this study was to utilize a church culture assessment tool to help the Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) staff and leadership understand the unique culture of the congregation and resultantly modify leadership philosophies and practices to promote congregational revitalization and mission. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a foundering denomination hoping for resurrection and renewal. As stated previously, according the 2014 Yearbook and Directory for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), over the past ten years our denomination has declined by thirty five percent in total membership, thirty eight percent in participating membership, and twenty eight percent in average worship attendance (Penwell). Ultimately, the assessment tool and findings of this project will be used to better inform and equip pastors in the Coastal Plains Area of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and

beyond to succeed as effective, contextual leaders for change and, with God's help, renewal.

Research Questions

Question One: How well do the pastor and staff of Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) currently understanding of the unique personality and culture of the congregation?

Many seminaries excel in preparing pastors for Scriptural interpretation, theological reflection and pastoral care, but often fail to adequately educate and equip pastors for the task of leadership. In most cases, little or no attention is given to the concept of contextual leadership and church culture. The culture is the most important force in any organization. The best way to understand culture is the statement: "This is who we are and how we do things around here." Leaders must understand that an unhealthy culture eats strategy and vision for lunch (Chand 2).

Many different characteristics combine to compose the unique, collective culture of a local church. The focus of this project concentrates on evaluating the distinct identity, focus and dominant values of Kingwood Christian Church. At the end of this assessment, the pastor, staff and lay leadership will be able to offer informed responses to the following questions. First, who is Kingwood Christian Church? This question speaks to congregational identity or the governing beliefs and priorities of the congregation. Secondly, how does Kingwood Christian Church function or do ministry? This question addresses how the identity or core values find expression in the ministry of the church. Thirdly, why does Kingwood Christian Church operate as it does? This question

addresses the underlying values that govern motivations for the church and sustain the ministry for the future.

The research phase of this project began by sending the pastor, staff and Kingwood Christian Church leadership a series of communicative letters. First, a letter of invitation was sent describing the Assessment of Church Culture project and process as well asking for full, voluntary participation. Second, a letter of informed consent, based on the Asbury Theological Seminary informed consent template, was sent to obtain mandatory consensual participation for human research to take place. The leaders asked to participate met the following predetermined criteria. Each participant either currently serves or previously served Kingwood Christian Church in the capacity of Elder, Deacon or Board member during the years of 2010-2015. Additionally, each participant must be of good mental health and maintain active membership at the Kingwood Christian Church.

Third, a pre-assessment was administered during the month of June 2015 to the pastor and staff of Kingwood Christian Church to establish a necessary pre-intervention baseline for evaluation. In qualitative research, it is essential to evaluate and establish the pre-intervention levels of understanding among the pastor and staff of Kingwood Christian Church pertaining to contextual leadership and church culture. This pre-assessment questionnaire offered an additional, brief description of the project as well as questions evaluating six, key cultural components of Kingwood Christian Church. These cultural components include congregational identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success. From congregation to congregation, each of these components are defined and expressed differently. In this pre-assessment, each staff member was asked to evaluate

the unique definition and function of these components within the context of Kingwood Christian Church.

After administering the pre-assessment and establishing a reliable baseline, the staff given the Assessment of Church Culture. The Assessment of Church Culture is an instrument developed by the Practical Church Resources consultant group. This instrument was adapted for the local church context from the book, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* and the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument developed by professors Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn of the University of Michigan. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument is a validated research method based the Competing Values Framework. This framework consists of four competing values that correspond with four types of organizational culture. This reliable assessment instrument for organizational culture has been used by over 10,000 companies worldwide.

Question Two: After administering the Assessment of Church Culture to the Kingwood Christian Church leadership, what new data and understandings were revealed to the pastor and staff?

After a pre-assessment of the pastor and staff, the Kingwood Christian Church lay leadership meeting the aforementioned criteria was administered the Assessment of Church Culture. This survey process occurred during the months of July and August of 2015 and was completed in two phases. Phase one utilized the first thirty minutes of the monthly deacon, elder and board meetings to circulate and overview the Assessment of Church Culture Instruction Sheet, answer any questions and administer the assessment. Phase Two required designating two additional days for assessment. I asked former and

present leadership absent from the monthly leadership meeting to attend one of two addition assessment sessions after the worship service on Sunday morning. In each session, I followed the same protocol for consistent and reliable assessment results. I gave the leaders the Assessment of Church Culture instruction sheet, the informed consent letter and the demographic survey. After I answered all questions, I administered the assessment. The total number of leadership participating in the study was fifty five.

The Assessment of Church Culture requires the participant to evaluate six key components of congregational culture. These aforementioned components include identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success. As seen in the example below, under each component are four descriptive statements designated a., b., c. and d. The participant must assign a percent value to each statement estimating which statement best describes how that component is defined or functions at Kingwood Christian Church. The four scores in each area must total 100%.

Table 3.1 Church Identity

a. Our church is a very personal place. Members are very close and share a large portion of their lives with each other.	
b. Our church is a very flexible organization. Members are willing to try new things and take risks.	
c. Our church is very organized. Policies and procedures govern what we typically do.	
d. Our church is very focused on results. Getting the job done and seeing the effect of our activity is important.	

Total four scores = 100%

Scoring for the Assessment of Church Culture is explained in detail on the attached Church Culture Scoring Sheet (Appendix F). After assigning percent values for each section, transfer each value to its appropriate box on the Church Culture Assessment Scoring Sheet. Total all the a., b., c. and d. answers and divide by six to obtain the average score.

Table 3.2 Church Culture Scoring Sheet

1a.		1b.		1c.		1d.	
2a.		2b.		2c.		2d.	
3a.		3b.		3c.		3d.	
4a.		4b.		4c.		4d.	
5a.		5b.		5c.		5d.	
6a.		6b.		6c.		6d.	
Total		Total		Total		Total	
Average		Average		Average		Average	

Plot the average a., b., c. and d. score

The final step in the assessment process is to plot the average scores for each cultural component on the Church Culture Scoring Grid (Appendix F). This grid is designed reveal the natural tendency of the congregation to focus on people or tasks and emphasize inward or outward thinking. The grid also helps identify the dominant value and quadrant of influence of the KCC culture as community, flexibility, impact or structure.

The assessment process was illuminating to the pastoral staff in many ways. The survey provided reliable data describing the distinct cultural makeup of Kingwood Christian Church. General observations included how the church defines and expresses identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success. These are invaluable discoveries for the pastor seeking to understand the core values and focus of a congregation.

The demographic information collected from all participants allows this data to be broken down to describe subgroups. These discoveries allow a pastor and staff to customize philosophies and strategies making leadership truly contextual.

Question Three: What changes in leadership practices are deemed necessary as a result of the church culture survey?

The ultimate goal of this project was not merely to provide better cultural understanding among pastoral staff and leadership, but to yield more informed and effective leadership strategy and practice. Just as faith without works is dead, so knowledge unutilized accomplishes little for the greater mission of the church. This component of the ministry project included a retreat with the pastor, pastoral staff and lay leadership to evaluate the key findings of the survey and forecast necessary changes in leadership strategy and practice. Inevitably, changes deemed necessary and helpful by the pastor or pastoral staff were uniquely contextual to that congregation.

Question Four: What understandings and principles can Christian Church (DOC) pastors gain from church culture awareness to enable greater congregational health?

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a declining denomination and many pastors seek to solve the puzzle as to why. The findings of this ministry project outlined in chapter four were contextual in nature, but careful evaluation of the data produced key understandings and principles valuable to the larger Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. Additionally, subsequent steps were needed in many congregations to train pastors to skillfully address unhealthy components of their unique church culture. These steps included a coaching component, training in family systems theory and conflict management.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Review of the Problem and Purpose

No two churches are alike. Each local congregation has a unique personality or culture composed of distinctive values, beliefs, attitudes and practices stemming from the collective experience and history of the church. Assessing and understanding a congregation's unique culture is a vital discovery for pastoral staff seeking to lead effectively in the local church. Though some pastors receive basic leadership training, many remain unaware of church culture dynamics and unequipped for the contextual nature of local church leadership. This problem often translates to ineffective, pastoral leadership and contributes to the stagnancy and decline of many local congregations.

The purpose of this study was to utilize the Assessment of Church Culture to help the Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) staff and leadership understand the unique culture of the congregation and resultantly modify leadership philosophies and practices to promote congregational revitalization and mission. In June of 2015, the pastor and staff of Kingwood Christian Church were administered a Church Culture Pre-Assessment Test and the Assessment of Church Culture to establish a reliable starting point for post-assessment comparison. This pre-test provides reliable data to answer research question number one. How do the pastor and staff of Kingwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) rate their understanding of the unique personality and culture of the congregation? During July and August of 2015, the Kingwood Christian Church leaders meeting the predetermined criteria were administered the Assessment of Church Culture. The findings of the Assessment of Church Culture will provide the

substantive data to answer research question number two. After administering the Assessment of Church Culture to the congregational leadership, what new findings or understandings were revealed to the pastor and staff?

Profile of Participants

The pastoral and program staff of Kingwood Christian Church is composed of senior pastor, part-time associate pastor of spiritual formation and families (25 hrs/wk), part-time youth director (20hrs/wk), part-time choir director (20hrs/wk), part-time music director (20 hrs/wk) and administrative assistant. My ministry as senior pastor of Kingwood Christian Church started 1 September, 2014. The associate pastor began ministry at Kingwood Christian Church on 1 July, 2015. The youth director started ministry at Kingwood Christian Church on 1 June, 2015. Both the choir director and music director have served Kingwood Christian Church for over twelve years. Our administrative assistant started her fourth year at Kingwood Christian Church in June of 2015. The addition of a new pastoral staffers and an additional program staffer within the last calendar year presents both advantages and disadvantages. Pre-assessment of the staff regarding cultural understanding will be very limited because of the lack of tenure. Understanding the underlying dynamics of congregational culture requires time. The benefits of cultural assessment for bolstering increased understanding and establishing effective leadership strategy are timely and significant.

The sixty-five leaders invited to voluntarily participate in the Assessment of Church Culture met the following predetermined criteria. Each participant served Kingwood Christian Church in the capacity of Elder, Deacon or Board member during

the years of 2010-2015. Additionally, each participant must be of good mental health and maintain active membership at Kingwood Christian Church.

Fifty-five leaders meeting the aforementioned criteria voluntarily accepted the invitation to participate in the Assessment of Church Culture. Each participant completed a demographic survey prior to taking the assessment. This demographic survey included name, gender, age, ethnic origin, education, occupation, congregational outlook, duration of membership and level of participation. This list of demographic questions was designed to create subgroups for multiple layers of evaluation and comparison. As a result of the demographic breakdown, the pastor and staff can assess the congregation collectively, as well as gain insight into the unique viewpoint of subgroups within the congregation. This additional information allowed opportunity for deeper levels of understanding and the development of customized strategies to bolster effective leadership.

Gender

Thirty-one females and twenty-four males participated in the assessment. This participation ratio representative the overall church leadership as Kingwood Christian Church affirms all people regardless of gender to offer their gifts in serving the mission of the church. Strong, influential, female clergy and lay leadership is a tradition that can be traced all the way back to the founding members in 1977.

Age

Over the past five years, thirty-five (63.6 percent) participating leaders reported being between the age of 39 and 67. Twenty-one leaders (38.1 percent) reported being between the ages of 39-54 and fourteen (25.4 percent) reported being between the ages of

55-67. Only two leaders (3.6 percent) reported being between the ages of 29 and 38, while eleven leaders (20 percent) were between the ages of 68 and 75. Only 7 leaders (12.7 percent) reported being over seventy-five years of age.

Education

Kingwood is a highly educated community boasting excellent public schools recognized statewide in Texas. The Humble public school district has created a culture of rigorous expectations for academic excellence. Our leadership at Kingwood Christian Church is reflective of this highly educated culture. Sixteen leaders participating in the assessment process completed graduate work and seven continued on to complete postgraduate work. Additionally, twenty six leaders completed an undergraduate, college degree, five completed some college and only one did not continue school after receiving a high school diploma. With 41.8 percent of the leadership holding graduate and postgraduate degrees, the intellectual capacities and expectations of excellence at Kingwood Christian Church are significant.

Occupation

The prominence of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate translates directly into occupations and socioeconomics of our leaders. Thirty-three or 60 percent of our participating leadership hold professional level positions, eight work in sales, six in administration, five in management and three in education. The majority of Kingwood Christian Church leaders are accustomed to an efficient, organized and professional environment common in the white-collar, corporate workplace.

Congregational Outlook

Forty-five (81.8 percent) of the leaders participating in the assessment describe themselves as enthusiastic and blessed to be a part of Kingwood Christian Church. Eight other leaders describe themselves as satisfied. One leader reported being concerned and one reported being disappointed with the present state of the congregation.

Membership

Almost 71 percent of the survey participants are longtime members of the congregation, twenty-seven having been members between 11-20 years and twelve more holding membership over 20 years. Seven additional leaders (12.7 percent) joined in the last 6-10 years and seven (12.7 percent) more joined in the last 3-5 years. Only two survey participants (3.6 percent) joined within the last two years.

Participation

Participation levels vary throughout the leadership including one female leader (1.8 percent) reported zero weekly hours of service, eleven (20 percent), seven male and four female, leaders reported 1-2 weekly hours of service, twenty-two (40 percent), eight male and fourteen female, leaders reported 2-3 weekly hours of service, eight (14.5 percent), four male and four female, leaders reported 3-4 weekly hours of service and thirteen (23.6 percent), five male and eight female, leaders reported five or more weekly hours of service.

Data Collection

Data collection among Kingwood Christian Church pastoral and program staff took place on 4 August, 2015 during the weekly staff meeting. Each staff member received the Assessment of Church Culture Packet, including the pre-test for pastors and

staff, instruction letter, informed consent letter, demographic survey and Assessment of Church Culture. After giving all instruction and answering questions, the assessment began.

Data collection among Kingwood Christian Church lay leadership took place on the dates of 9, 16, 23 August, 2015. After morning worship, all leaders meeting the required criteria gathered in the fellowship hall. In each assembly, all participants received assessment packets including the instruction letter, informed consent letter, demographic survey and Assessment of Church Culture. I gave instructions and all answered all questions before the assessment began.

I encouraged the participant to respond to the statements on the assessment as unbiased evaluators, not expressing personal views but reporting on the collective attitudes, beliefs and practices of the congregation. Additionally, I instructed the participants to evaluate the present state of the congregation, not hopes or aspirations for the future. Below are the instructions provided for completing the Assessment of Church Culture.

- 1) Assign a percent value to each a., b., c., and d. question in each area: church identity, church leadership, church personality, church unity, church focus and church success.

The four scores in each area must total 100%. Below is an example from the assessment.

Table 4.1 Church Identity

a. Our church is a very personal place. Members are very close and share a large portion of their lives with each other.	
b. Our church is a very flexible organization. Members are willing to try new things and take risks.	
c. Our church is very organized. Policies and procedures govern what we typically do.	
d. Our church is very focused on results. Getting the job done and seeing the effect of our activity is important.	

Total four scores = 100%

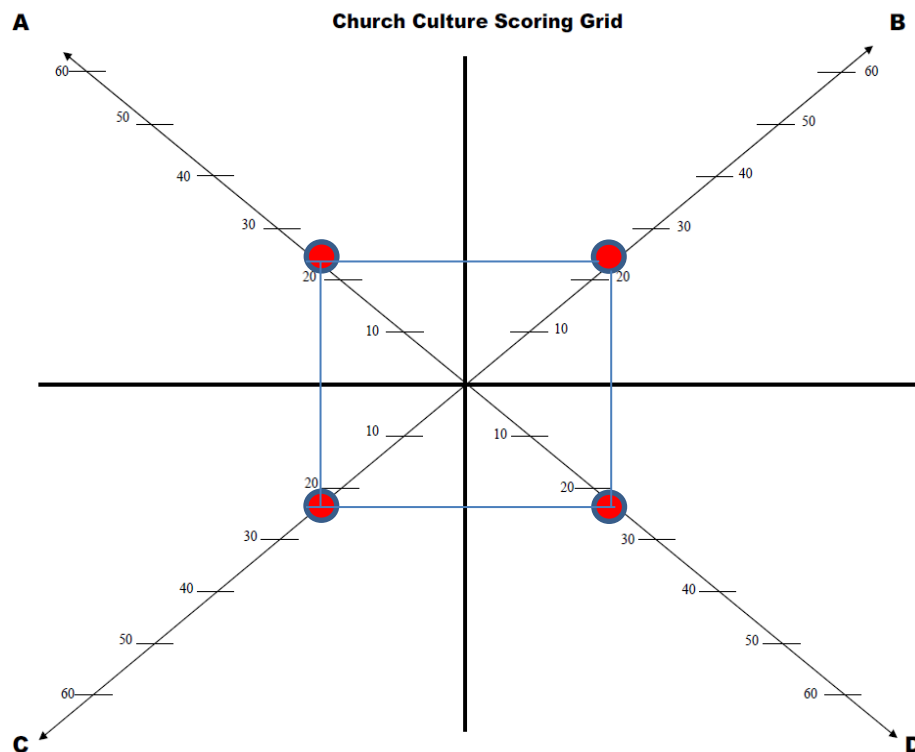
- 2) Transfer each value to its appropriate box on the Church Culture Assessment scoring sheet (seen below). Total all the a., b., c., and d. answers and divide by six for an average score.

Table 4.2 Church Culture Scoring Sheet

1a.		1b.		1c.		1d.	
2a.		2b.		2c.		2d.	
3a.		3b.		3c.		3d.	
4a.		4b.		4c.		4d.	
5a.		5b.		5c.		5d.	
6a.		6b.		6c.		6d.	
Total		Total		Total		Total	
Average		Average		Average		Average	

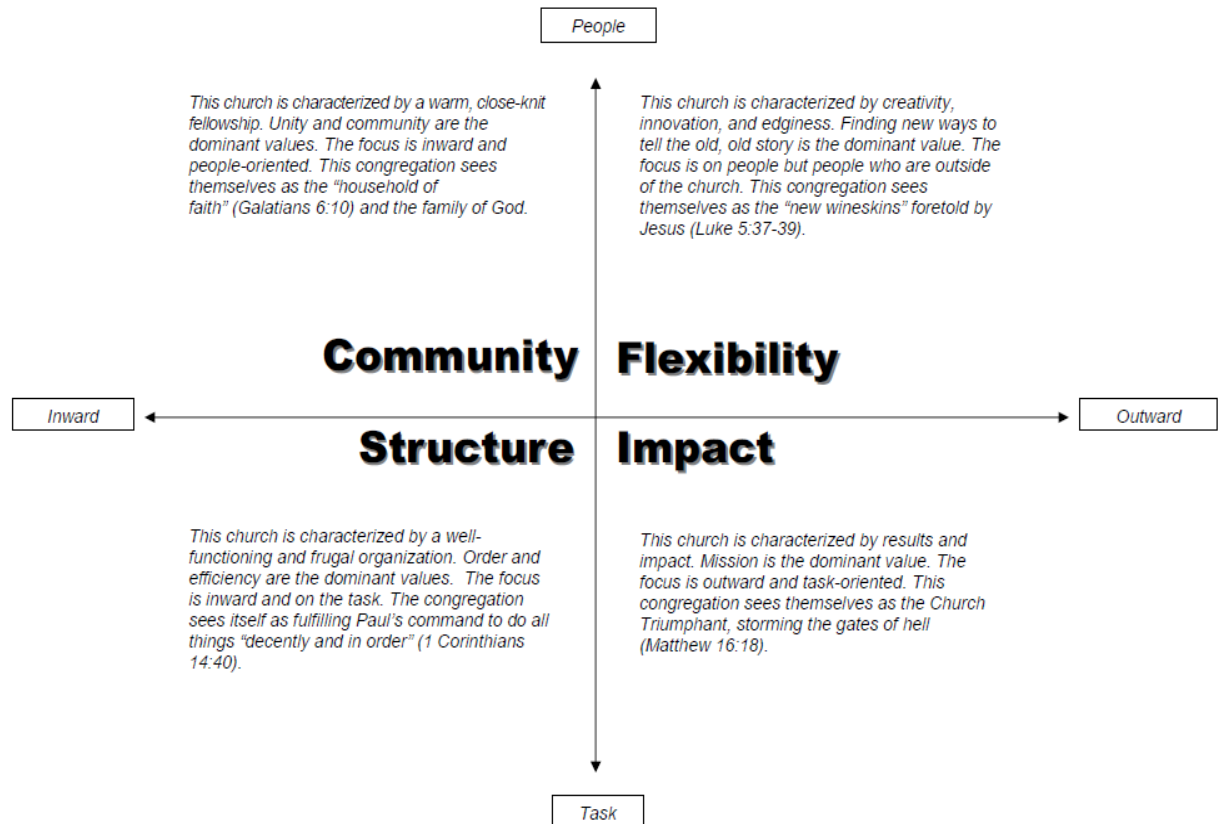
- 3) Plot the average a., b., c., and d. score on its respective axis on the Church Culture scoring grid. Plot each average as a dot and connect the dots on each axis to form a polygon figure. Shade the figure in.

Figure 4.1. Church Culture Scoring Grid



Notice which quadrant is most heavily shaded. Please turn the page and notice the quadrant descriptions. These quadrants identify the congregational tendency to focus inward or outward, on people or tasks, as well as value community or impact, flexibility or structure. The polygon created by connecting the dots locates the central identity, focus and dominant value of the Kingwood Christian Church culture.

Figure 4.2. Congregational Identity, Focus, and Dominant Value



In these three, aforementioned sessions, fifty-five Kingwood Christian Church leaders voluntarily completed the assessment packet. The following data and analysis is based on the responses of those participants.

Data Analysis

The first level of data analysis consists of the pre-test information obtained from the pastors and staff of Kingwood Christian Church. The pre-test contained six questions evaluating the central characteristics of congregational culture. Below are the questions and answers obtained from the survey.

What are the primary characteristics of the Kingwood Christian Church identity? What components most influence who we are as a congregation? Responses included

community, unity, being together, welcoming all people and opinions, making sure everyone feels valued and loved, love for God and serving neighbors in need.

How does the Kingwood Christian Church congregation evaluate effectiveness in leadership? What are the most valued accomplishments of an effective pastoral leader?

Effective leadership is involving everyone in the process, being an effective facilitator of discussions and decision making, playing a consistent pastoral role for the leadership and larger congregation, managing multiple projects and motivating others to serve the church according to their gifts.

What are the dominant personality traits of Kingwood Christian Church? What traits best describe how we function as a congregation? The Kingwood Christian Church personality functions to involve everyone in the process, be conscientious to everyone's feelings and needs and accomplish goals within structural parameters. Other comments included disorganized, laborious, tradition bound and inefficient.

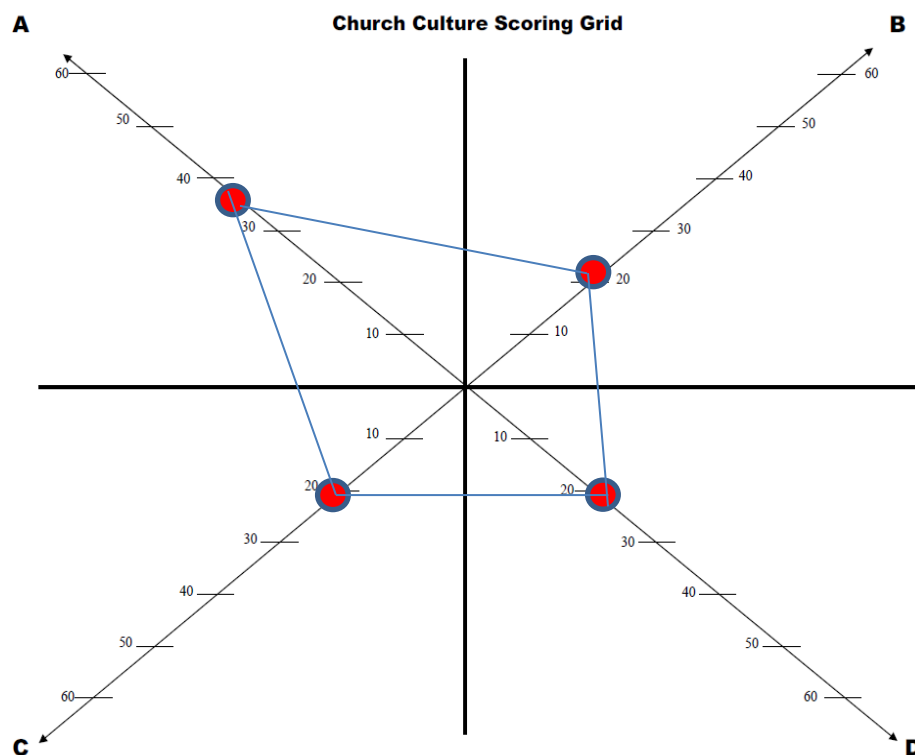
What holds the Kingwood Christian Church congregation together? What is the most significant, unifying factor? Kingwood Christian Church's unifying factors include loving and welcoming each other without judgment, supporting each other's passions and ideas, serving others in the community, making a difference, respecting each other's differences and believing in Jesus.

What is the primary focus or emphasis for the Kingwood Christian Church congregation? The primary focus of Kingwood Christian Church is caring for each other, serving others, loving and following Jesus, practicing our faith, unity in the congregation, shared leadership and advocating for those in greatest need.

How does KCC define success? KCC is succeeding when we are accomplishing what objective(s)? Success of KCC is when everyone is heard and everyone is involved in the mission of the church, busyness, lots of programming, a full calendar, when needs are being met, when the church is stable and unified, and when we are growing.

After completing the pre-test, the pastors and staff were asked to complete the Assessment of Church Culture (ACC). Below are the average ACC scores for the pastors and staff located on the Church Culture Scoring Grid.

Figure 4.3. Pastoral Staff Scoring Results

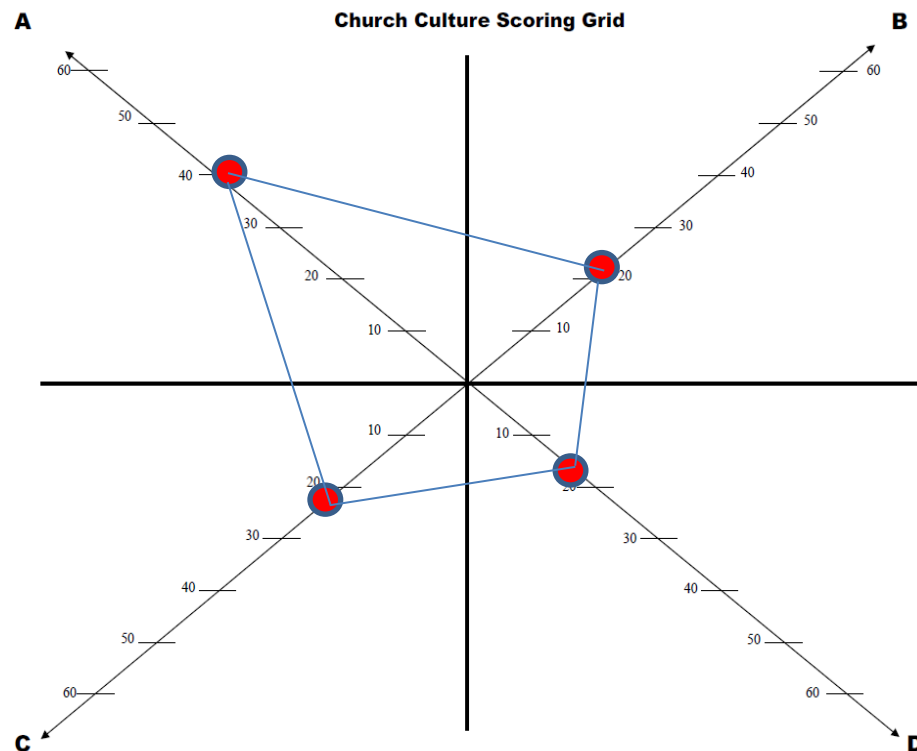


Axis A – 35.3
 Axis B – 20.2
 Axis C – 21.3
 Axis D – 22.4

The second level of a data analysis focuses on the information obtained from the Kingwood Christian Church lay leadership through the Assessment of Church Culture. The following analysis measures and separates the data from the Assessment of Church Culture according to multiple variables. Like an onion, the congregational culture is first evaluated as a whole highlighting the macro level findings and then broken apart into layers or subgroupings for more focused and concentrated micro level analysis.

The Scoring Grid below represents the macro level findings of the Assessment of Church Culture. The dots on each axis reflect the average response of all the Kingwood Christian Church leadership participants.

Figure 4.4. Kingwood Christian Church Leadership Scoring Result



Axis A – 39
Axis B – 21
Axis C – 22
Axis D – 18

The bar graphs below break down the data received from the Assessment of Church Culture applying demographic variables to highlight the responses of specific leadership subgroups. These bar graphs are only a sampling of multiple, possible combinations for in depth analysis.

Figure 4.5 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to gender.

Figure 4.5. Gender

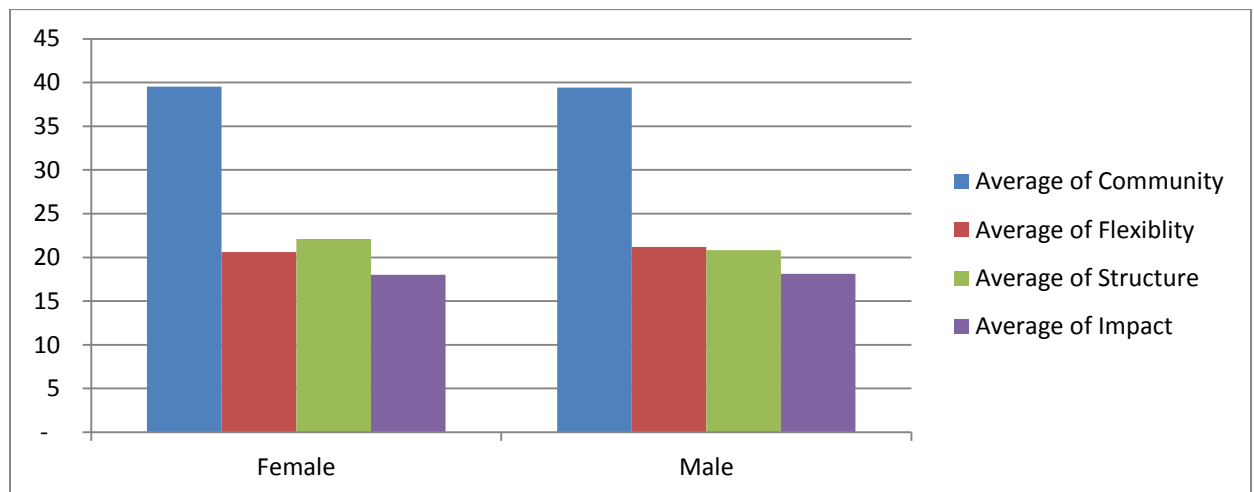


Figure 4.6 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to age demographic.

Figure 4.6. Age

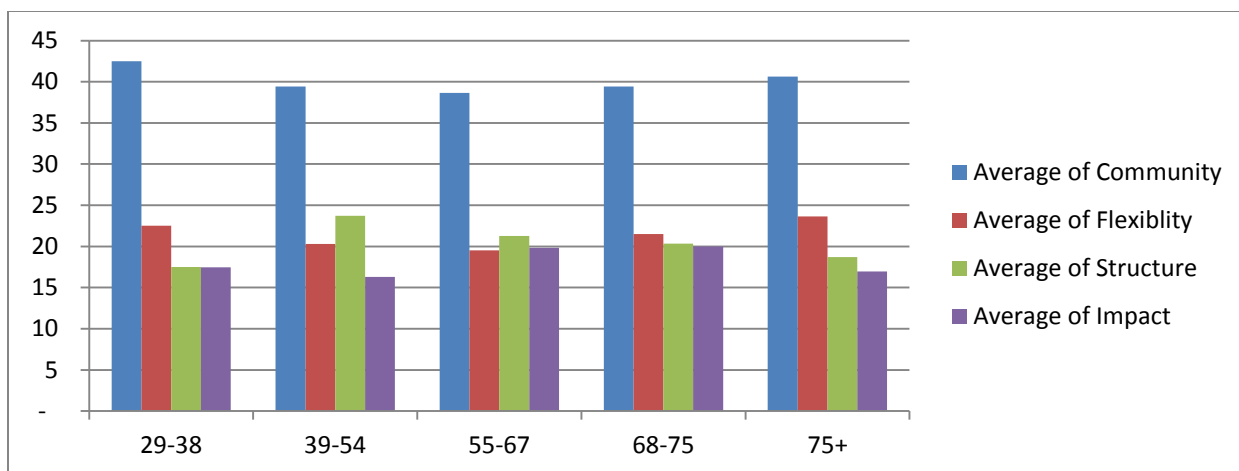


Figure 4.7 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to ethnic origin.

Figure 4.7. Ethnic Origin

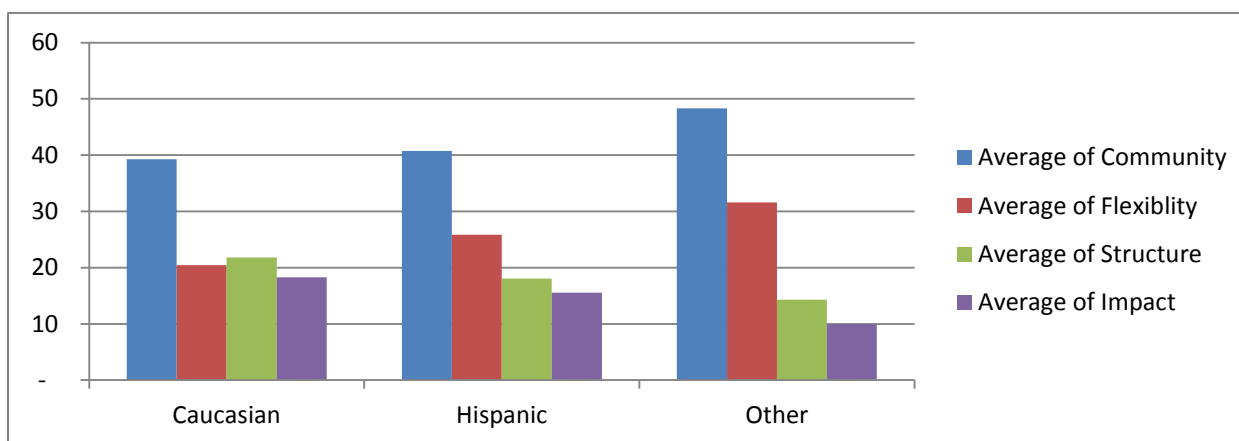


Figure 4.8 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to education levels.

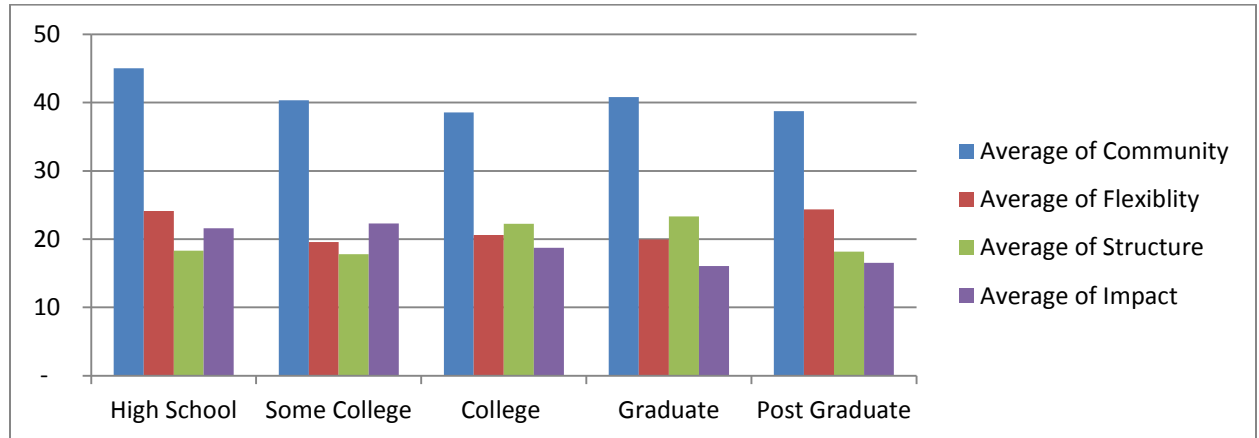
Figure 4.8. Education

Figure 4.9 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to occupation.

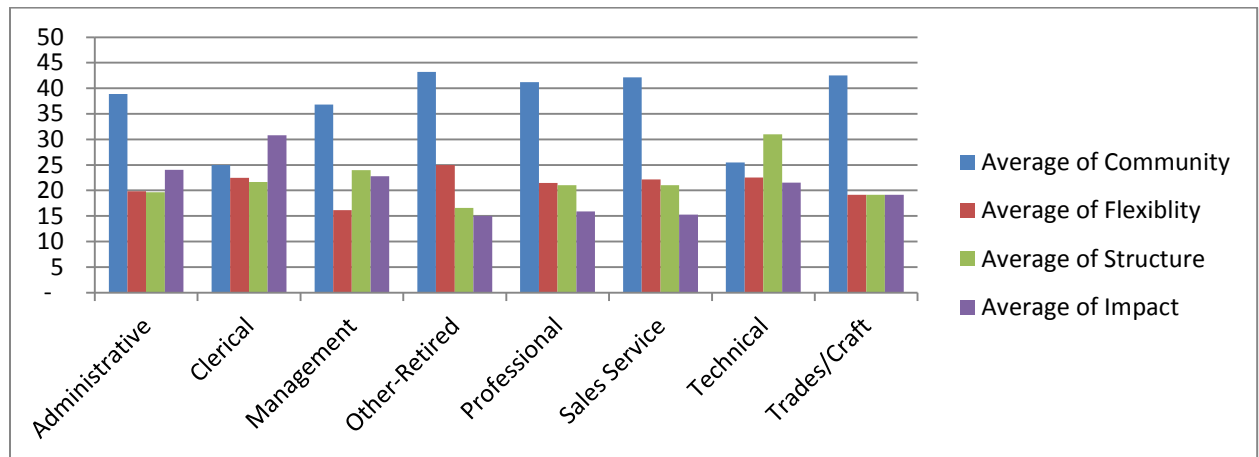
Figure 4.9. Occupation

Figure 4.10 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to congregational outlook.

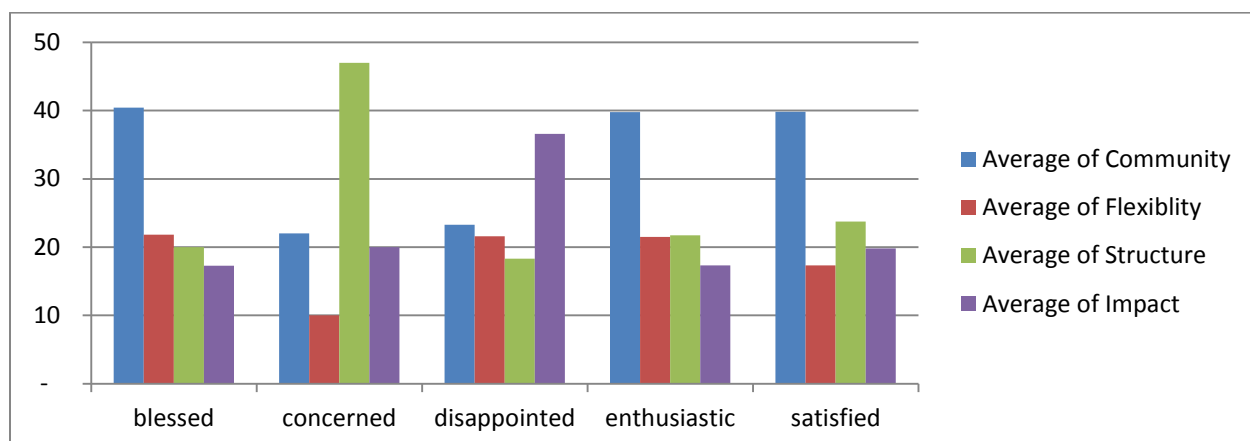
Figure 4.10. Congregational Outlook

Figure 4.11 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to duration of membership.

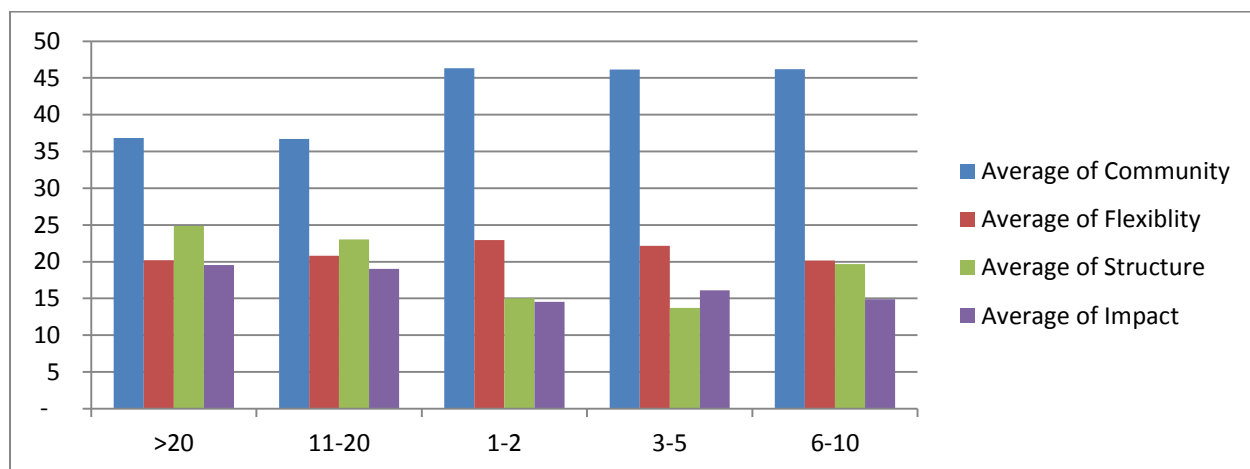
Figure 4.11. Duration of Membership

Figure 4.12 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to participation.

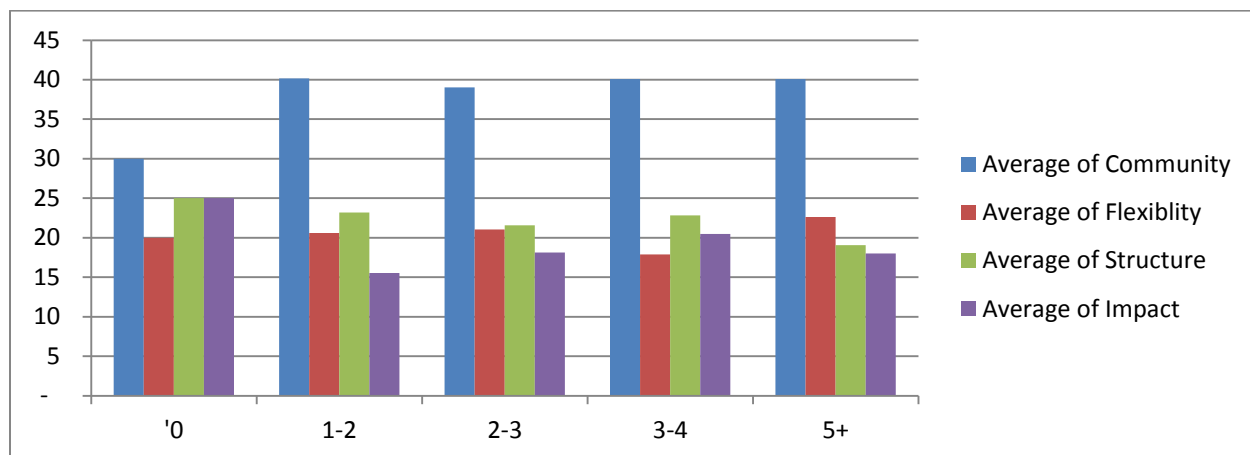
Figure 4.12. Participation

Figure 4.13 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to both gender and age.

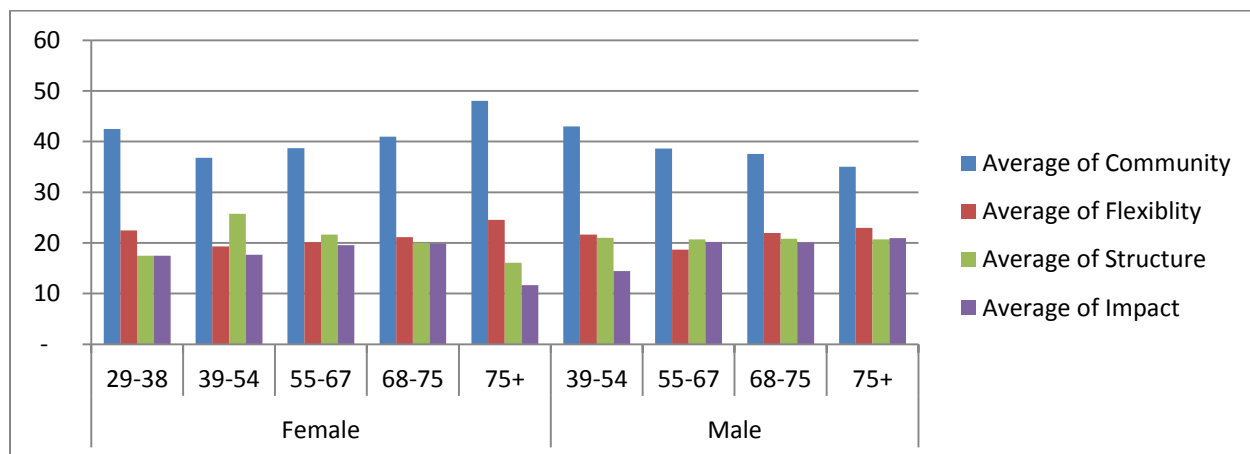
Figure 4.13. Additional Demographic Combinations: Gender and Age

Figure 4.14 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to both gender and education levels.

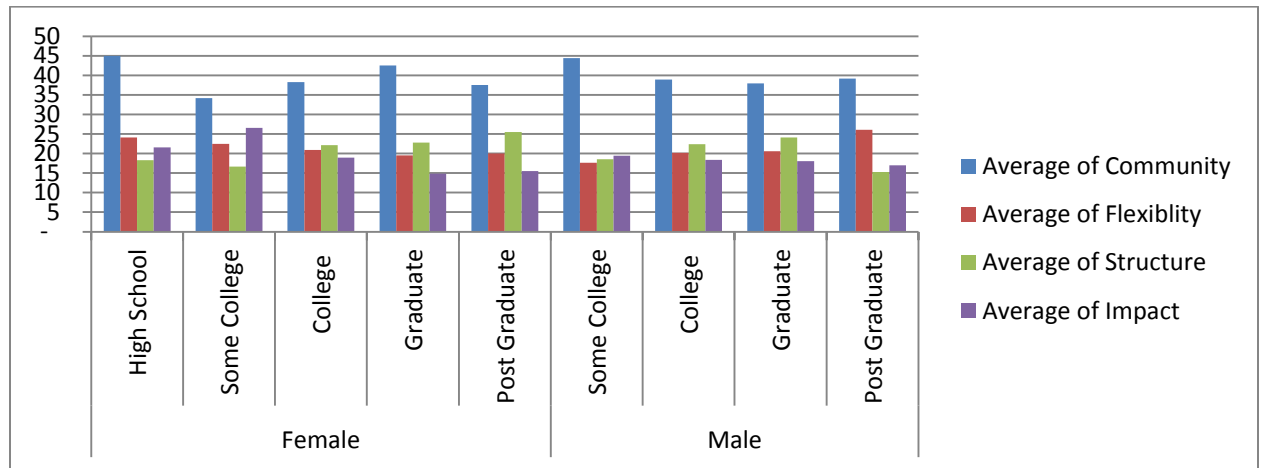
Figure 4.14. Gender and Education:

Figure 4.15 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to both gender and congregational outlook.

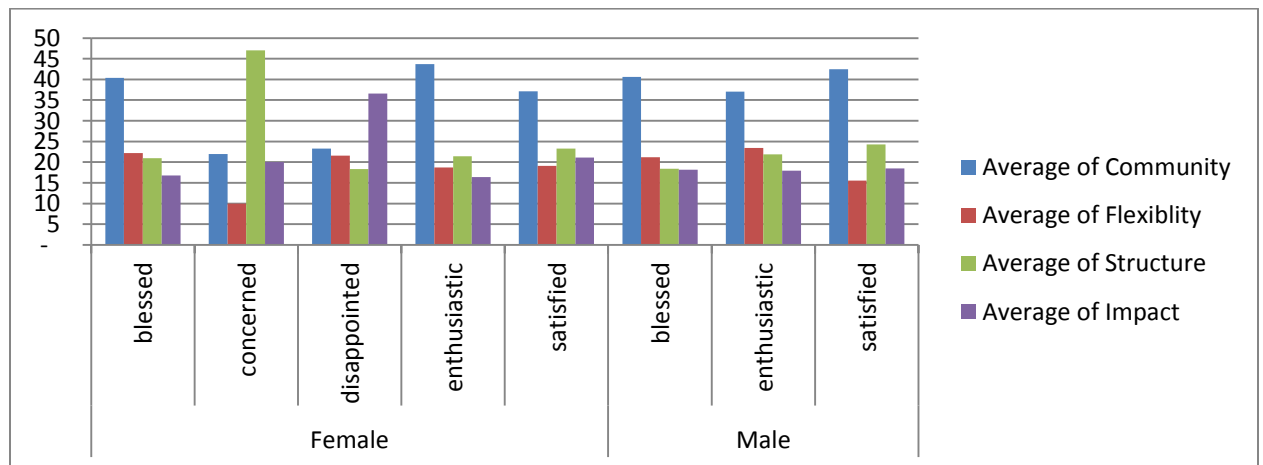
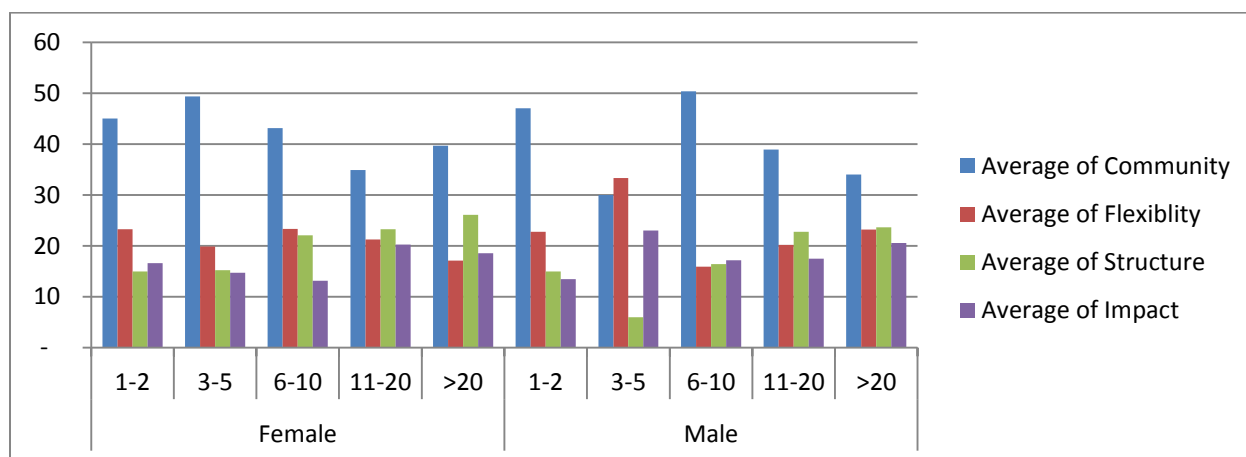
Figure 4.15. Gender and Congregational Outlook

Figure 4.16 displays the similar and different values of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership according to gender and duration of membership.

Figure 4.16. Gender and Duration of Membership

Intervening Variables

Accurate data analysis requires the investigation of intervening variables that potentially compromise clear interpretation and implementation. Such variables for this study include age, ethnicity, congregational outlook and duration of membership. Participating leadership only included two individuals (3.6 percent) between the ages of 29-38. Both of these individuals are female. Thus, comparisons with larger age demographics must involve due consideration of this disparity. Additionally, while fifty-two (94.5 percent) participating leaders reported Caucasian ethnicity, only three (5.5 percent), two female and one male, reported Hispanic ethnicity. Again, informed comparisons and conclusions must take this important variable into account. Congregational outlook includes fifty-three leaders (96.3 percent) reporting an enthusiastic, blessed or satisfied viewpoint, while two (3.6 percent) reported being disappointed and concerned. The small sample size of those reporting disappointment or concern cannot be weighed equally with the attitude of the much more positive majority. Data comparisons involving the duration of membership demographic variable can also

be misleading considering only two participants (3.6 percent) joined within the last two years. The vast majority of leaders participating in the survey have maintained membership for more than ten years (70.9 percent).

Summary of Major Findings

Research Question Number Two seeks the following information. After administering the Assessment of Church Culture to the Kingwood Christian Church leadership, what new data and understandings were revealed to the pastor and staff? The following summary represents the major findings of the Assessment of Church Culture for Kingwood Christian Church.

- 1) The most significant finding was the unique location of the Kingwood Christian Church congregation on the Church Culture Scoring Grid. With an average score of thirty-nine (40 among females and 39 among males), the overwhelming focus of the Kingwood Christian Church congregation is community. This dominant value is consistent regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, education, duration of membership and participation. With only a few exceptions, community was also the dominant value reported when considering the occupation and congregational outlook variables. A community focused church is characterized by a warm, close-knit fellowship. Unity and community are the dominant values. The focus is inward and people-oriented. The congregation seems themselves as the “household of faith” (Gal. 6:10) and the family of God.
- 2) Conversely, with few exceptions, impact was consistently rated the lowest priority of the Kingwood Christian Church congregation. With an average score of eighteen among males and females, impact is not a priority in the congregational culture and identity. Impact is defined as the church characterized by results and effect. Mission is the

dominant value. The focus is outward and task oriented. This church sees themselves as the church triumphant (Matt. 16:18).

- 3) Among males and females, the congregation affirms equal priority to flexibility (21 average score) and structure (22 average score). This data reveals that the congregation operates with a balanced praxis realizing the need for both flexibility and structure in leadership. Flexibility is defined as the church characterized by creativity, innovation and edginess. Finding new ways to tell the old, old story is the dominant value. The focus is on people, but people who are outside of the church. This congregation sees themselves as the “new wineskins” foretold by Jesus (Luke 5:37-39). Structure is defined as the church characterized by well-functioning and frugal organization. Order and efficiency are the dominant values. The focus is inward and on the task. The congregation sees itself as fulfilling Paul’s instruction to do all things “decently and in order” (1Cor. 14:40).
- 4) The data reveals little disparity of response according to gender. Male and female leaders assess the identity, focus and dominant values of Kingwood Christian Church almost identically.
- 5) Generational differences wield little impact on the responses of the Kingwood Christian Church leadership. The only noticeable discrepancy was that among females the importance of community grew with age from thirty-seven to forty-eight, while among males the importance of community decreased with age from forty-three to thirty-five. This observation excludes the two female participants between 29 and 38 years of age.
- 6) The most significant disparity revealed in comparing the Assessment of Church Culture average scores of the pastors and staff, and the Assessment of Church Culture average scores of the lay leadership was the markedly different perceptions of emphasis on

community and impact. The pastors and staff scored community at 35.2 and impact at 22.5, while the lay leadership scored community at 39 and impact at 18.

- 7) Both the staff and lay leadership agree on the levels of emphasis placed on flexibility and structure. The staff scored flexibility at 20.2 and the lay leadership scored it at 21. The staff scored structure at 21.25 while the lay leadership scored it at 22.
- 8) The newest and most tenured staff members assessed the congregational culture through micro lenses. The often reclusive, choir director of twelve years gave the highest scores to flexibility (31). The new youth director scored structure (27.5) as the second highest priority within the congregation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

What does the future hold for the local church? This is the question being asked by many Christian clergy and lay leadership in established congregations of all denominations. Once strong and influential congregations are now experiencing stagnancy, decline and even death, struggling with the significant challenges of being the church for today and tomorrow. The downward trends paint a bleak picture and many pastors are starting to ask these important questions. First, is there hope for revitalization in these established congregations? The Scriptures offer an emphatic “Yes!” There is hope because the Christian God is one with a reputation for resurrection, tirelessly working to bring new life and wholeness to all Creation. Embracing this foundational belief about God’s character and intentions for the church is essential for clergy and congregations in these challenging times. Second, what insights and tools can equip pastors to lead effectively in the monumental revitalization task ahead? This project asserts that successful revitalization efforts require employing reliable tools to assess and understand the unique dynamics of church culture, thus enabling effective contextual leadership to occur.

Though commonplace within the for-profit sector, the concept and study of organizational culture remains relatively new within local church leadership circles. Authors writing on the subject of church culture utilize various terms and images that blend the worlds of sociology and spirituality. In his book, *The Soul of the Congregation*, Thomas Edward Frank describes church culture as a congregational soul birthed from the

collective “stories, symbols, rituals and practices that have evolved over generations of experience” (23). James Hopewell, in his book *Congregations*, agrees, but uses different terminology claiming, “A group of people cannot regularly gather for what they feel to be religious purposes without developing a complex network of signals and symbols and conventions—in short, a Subculture - that gains its own logic and then functions in a way peculiar to that group” (5). The challenge of understanding this congregational logic and function only grows as the local church becomes more ethnically diverse. With over 13 percent being immigrants, the United States continues to explode with diversity. In the near future if a church is not multicultural it probably won’t be growing (Easum 20). The pastor seeking to lead effectively in the local church must acknowledge this unique soul or culture, utilize resources helpful in understanding these cultural dynamics and formulate leadership philosophy and strategy accordingly.

There are no quick fixes for the decline of the local church. Despite the claims of various, popular booksellers, there are not seven easy steps for revitalizing your church. Each local church has a unique story and a resultant culture that significantly influences congregational identity, focus and dominant values. This project utilized a cultural assessment tool to reveal key characteristics of the Kingwood Christian Church culture. These unique characteristics found in the cultural survey provide helpful insight into the collective soul of Kingwood Christian Church and a reliable starting point for developing effective leadership strategy.

It is important to note that this study did not perform an exhaustive evaluation of Kingwood Christian Church culture, but relied heavily on scholarship and organizational leadership experts to identify the best tools and characteristics for evaluation.

Experienced pastors will attest that the various dimensions of congregational culture are vast and only discovered with time and tenure. Additionally, cultural understanding, though important, is only one piece of the formidable puzzle facing many local church pastors and lay leadership. Exploring church culture is a long term commitment that embraces a proactive, not reactive, approach to leadership. The proactive approach seeks to foster long term, congregational health by evaluating the underlying cultural dynamics that enable health and mission, or perpetuate dysfunction and conflict.

The biblical and theological basis for this study, as outlined in Chapter 2, can be found at the Pentecost event recorded in Acts 1-2. By the surprising power of the Spirit, the dispersed people of God, from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5), were resurrected and unified under the lordship of Jesus Christ. On that day, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead poured out over the diverse crowds forging unity among the people and giving birth to Christ's church. The Pentecost event is not the end of the church's resurrection story, but only the beginning. This is a great, hopeful metanarrative of the scriptures. The same resurrection power that anointed the early church is made available for the local church today. God desires to write new resurrection stories in and through the local church. Resurrection is God's will and dream for all things, but it is not forced upon the church. Pastors and leaders must join in partnership with God by availing God's people once again to the Spirit that labors to unify and restore vitality to the local church. The ability of pastors to sew resurrection theology and lead contextually for revitalization will significantly influence the future of the local church.

Reflections

In a plenary address on the subject of “Congregational Vitality” at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Assembly in 2015, Hope Partnership Vice President Rick Morse stated that the starting point for any congregational vitality assessment is “Defining the Why.” Many congregations seeking revitalization are quick to look around for new, charismatic leadership, helpful insights and creative initiatives to spark renewal and growth. Yet experts, like Morse and his colleagues, have found that the most effective revitalization efforts start by looking within. Churches must ask and answer the questions, “Who are we and why are we here? What is meaningful to us? What core beliefs and values define and motivate us?” These are questions that explore and reveal the unique characteristics of congregational culture. In *Culture Shift, Transforming Your Church from Inside Out*, Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro and Warren Bird suggest that “culture is the most important reality in your church” (3). In most congregations, taking the time to ask these helpful questions and engage the self-assessment process can reveal both healthy and unhealthy realities.

The resultant questions become, “Should pastors and lay leadership endeavor to mold or shift congregational culture? If so, how can congregational culture be shifted to promote health?” Admittedly, the term “health” or “healthy” is a subjective term defined differently by various pastors and congregations. One congregation might define health as the ability to pay the bills and another congregation might define healthy as recording over 100 baptisms annually. Some congregations might evaluate congregational health according to service hours offered to the poor, while others define health by how the church cares for the homebound and elderly. Ultimately, healthy congregations have a

Christ-centered mission that contributes in various ways to the larger, Kingdom work entrusted to the church.

Yet, in some congregations, the underlying cultural dynamics are imbalanced or unhealthy, and sabotage this missional identity. Sadly, it is common to hear it said within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), “This is not how the Disciples of Christ worship. Or that is not how Disciples of Christ churches are structured. Or that is not what we have always used that room for.” These statements stem from a much maligned predecessor, “We have never done it like that before.” These statements indicate that mission and meaning have become subservient to methodology, a symptom of unhealthy culture.

For this reason, cultural assessment must start and focus on defining the why. In healthy congregations, methods, the “what” or “how,” must never take precedent over meanings and mission, the “why.” Allowing methods to dictate mission is like putting the proverbial cart before the horse. Defining the why or meaning behind a church or organization provides an anchor, a unifying point of identity and motivation for all methodology. When methods take priority over meanings, the church has lost its missional identity as a movement proclaiming the loving Kingdom of our resurrected Savior. This project seeks to identify and define the why, the greater values and meanings driving the methods of Kingwood Christian Church, so that the staff can better understand the congregation’s methods and function, and thus lead with greater effectiveness.

Limitations of the Study

The extensive research and interviews required for this dissertation produced many new insights and tools outside the defined limits of the project. One significant limitation discovered at the Kingwood Christian Church leadership retreat was the alarming absence of any established theology of resurrection. These are challenging times for the local church, times where the hope of resurrection and restored vitality are hard to find. Resultantly, many weary and discouraged church leaders are increasingly resigned to finding hope for resurrection in the age to come. Any effective assessment process or revitalization effort must begin by echoing the hopeful, resurrection narrative of the scriptures. The Christian church is the original church of the resurrection, raised to life and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring resurrection hope to the world. Fundamentally, this is the God given identity of Christ's church. Thus, a strong resurrection theology of hope must be preached from the pulpits, discussed within the classrooms and affirmed by the people. Hope based in the expectation of resurrection can blot out defeatism and heavenly escapism, and fuel the church on the long road of revitalization.

Upon surveying many potential, cultural assessment tools, it became apparent early in the dissertation process that the Assessment of Church Culture represented only one piece of the puzzle. As stated previously, the reasons for stagnancy and decline in the local church are diverse, complex and unique to the context. The Assessment of Church Culture, adapted from the *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* by Kim Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, though a helpful and respected resource, evaluates a defined, but uncomprehensive set of cultural characteristics.

The culture of the local church is not static, but dynamic, always evolving and changing with new experiences. Each congregation is always adding new characters and developing new plotlines that give birth to new chapters in the ongoing story. These new chapters and experiences, both positive and negative, inevitably influence the larger congregational culture. Significant cultural shifts do not happen overnight, but seasons marked by dysfunctional structures, visionless staff, unresolved conflict and entrenched leaders can leave lasting wounds on congregations for years to come. Resultantly, cultural assessment must be an ongoing process that occurs periodically throughout the lifecycle of a congregation. The effective pastoral leader must continue to monitor the effects of changing culture, especially as it influences the development of leadership strategy and mission.

Orange Leadership consultant Pat Rowland suggests four, additional elements that should precede utilizing any assessment tool. Rowland recommends a team approach, strategically recruiting a team to assess church culture from different perspectives. This evaluation process is a long term commitment, truly a labor of love, thus leaders should slow down and take the necessary time to adequately evaluate the complex cultural landscape of a congregation. According to Rowland, the most fruitful assessments involve asking good questions to people inside and outside the congregation, and being an active listener. Finally, the primary influencers of the congregation must be identified. People follow influence, not titles of authority. Investing in the primary influencers of the congregation will allow the pastoral team to shape culture more effectively (Rowland). These elements emphasize the intentionality and patience required for successful cultural exploration and modification.

Wayne Cordeiro and Robert Lewis suggest four additional ingredients to consider when assessing church culture. First, *leadership and values* suggest that leaders set the cultural climate of the church via transference through their lifestyles. Evaluate what is most important to the leadership and that will be a good indicator about the values of the congregation. Second, the *vision statement* communicates a lot about culture. It must be accessible and communicate what the church really believes and lives out, allowing the lay people to connect to the larger goals of the church. Third, the *symbols, ceremonies and celebrations* of the church are significant indicators of culture. The things you honor, remember and cheer for are the things you most value. Finally, the *lead pastor or senior leader* highly influences the culture of the church by consciously and unconsciously aligning congregational objectives with personal values (Cordeiro 48). Honest self-assessment for the lead pastor is important, especially as it probes and reveals underlying motives that might not contribute to a Kingdom culture. These authors and propositions represent only a small sampling of perspective resources on the topic of culture. The addition of multiple evaluation tools and methods could provide a needed supplement to illuminate the broader landscape of congregational culture.

Fifty-five out of sixty-five leaders meeting the predetermined criteria were able to participate in the assessment. This portion of the study, including two primary dates and one alternative date, was completed during the month of August of 2015. For this reason, several leaders were unable to participate for health reasons or unavailability due to summer vacation schedules. It was also suggested that the assessment be uploaded to an online, survey format for reasons of convenience. Making these concessions might have increased participation, but could potentially compromise the controlled environment and

ability to answer questions posed by participants before the assessment. Online formats also present additional challenges for those unaccustomed to computers and navigating the internet.

Suggestions for Further Study

One primary discovery revealed early in the assessment process was the beautiful diversity of the local church. Each church truly has its own unique fingerprint and DNA that is just its own. This revelation added to the challenge and complexity of conducting a successful organizational assessment. Many significant choices between differing philosophies and tools of assessment bore major impact on the data collected. This assessment focusing on congregational identity, focus and dominant values only evaluated one small portion of church culture. A survey of additional resources, as referenced previously, is essential for a more comprehensive assessment.

These potential resources could also be extended into the for-profit sector as well. Though some organizational dynamics and motivators differ from the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, commonalities are numerous. Authors like Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great and the Social Sector*, bridge the gap offering great insight about effective leadership within the unique dynamics of the not-for-profit sector. The exploration of organizational culture within the for-profit sector also spans many decades and thus has much wisdom to share. Any pastoral leader seeking to go deeper in studying organizational culture would be wise to access this larger pool of information and time-tested tools.

Additionally, it became abundantly clear that the value of the data collected will only be determined by how it informs and influences leadership strategy and practice.

Ultimately, the pastor or leadership team must be able to translate and utilize it in day to day, contextual ministry. Many pastors are unequipped for this formidable process. Thus, an additional component to explore is organizational coaching.

Pastor David Emery of Middletown Christian Church led his congregation to contract with Will Mancini, author of *Unique Church* and founder of the Auxano Consulting Group. Auxano works with traditional and emerging churches and ministries of all types around the United States. These consultants led through the cultural assessment process, but then followed up with a year-long, coaching component to guide the re-visioning process. Pastor Emery describes the coaching component as well worth the investment. “Understanding and shifting congregational culture is a delicate and time intensive process, one that often requires a level of expertise present in few, local church pastors. Utilizing a wealth of knowledge and experience, our coach was able to guide this multifaceted process, redirect our team away from landmines and rookie mistakes, and equip our team with tools to sustain effective leadership for years to come.”

If the greater objective of investing in the cultural assessment process is effective leadership and progress in revitalization, then adding a coaching component that guides the practical, next steps might be the most impactful component. Middletown Christian Church is one of the flagship Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations for effective leadership and innovation. Pastor Emery and the Middletown team realize that sustaining this vibrant culture requires great intentionality and investment in all available resources.

Unexpected Observations

The most unexpected observations surfaced while conducting the staff assessment about church culture. Upon asking the staff to describe any preconceptions about church culture, the staff could only comprehend culture as expresses in ethnicity. They were aware the Kingwood Christian Church did not have a significant ethnic diversity. It was a new revelation to most staff members that the congregational culture involved the dominant attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Church culture can best be equated to congregational personality, assessing identity, “who we are,” focus, “what we do” and dominant values, “why we do it.” The concept that an underlying culture was influencing and motivating the church was foreign to most of the staff.

After a lengthy discussion, the pre-test for pastor and staff assessed congregational definitions of identity, leadership, personality, unity, focus and success. By breaking the concept of culture into these accessible characteristics, the ministry staff was able to accurately assess the congregation.

While comparing the average scores of the pastoral staff and congregational leadership, it is surprising to find that, with only a few exceptions, the staff and congregational leadership identified the same characteristics and scores to describe the culture of the church. With an average score of thirty-nine (40 among females and 39 among males), the overwhelming focus of the Kingwood Christian Church congregation is community. This dominant value is consistent regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, education, duration of membership and participation. With only a few exceptions, community was also the dominant value reported when considering the occupation and congregational outlook variables.

I observed that this inclination toward community remained consistent regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, education or participation levels. The congregational preference for community remained consistent throughout the survey. The only exception was the focus on community rose in women from thirty-seven to forty-eight and dropped in men from forty-three to thirty-five with age. This data seems to indicate that the ladies of the church are more concerned about outliving their spouses and managing their final years alone without the support of the church community.

Another unexpected finding was the lack of priority among lay leadership for making an impact in the community. Kingwood Christian Church maintains partnerships with multiple social organizations and ministries. Significant percentages of financial resources are given through the budget, special offerings and other collections. Hundreds of hours are donated every month to local and regional ministries serving the homeless, impoverished, unemployed, hungry and recently released convicts. Compassionate service is in the DNA of Kingwood Christian Church, yet the motivation to serve is not impact. This must be reconciled with the mission Christ entrusted to the church to pray for, proclaim openly and labor for the Kingdom of God to be realized on earth as it is in heaven. By the power of the Spirit, the church is commissioned to be a revolution of love that transforms culture and changes the world.

Finally, both the staff and lay leadership agree that congregation operates with a healthy balance of flexibility and structure. This is a surprise considering that only three years ago the church was in significant financial hardship due to overly flexible procedures and mismanagement of funds. This contributed to the dismissal of the pastor and upheaval in the governing board. Though congregational trust had been diminished, a

strong core of leadership resisted the urge to overreact with extreme structural mandates and reestablish a healthy balance between flexibility and structure. This is a sign of strong, core leadership, committed congregants and a healthy, resilient culture that does not break down amidst adversity. Many congregations could not navigate rough waters such as these without a major fallout, decline or church split. Yet, Kingwood Christian Church has not just rebounded to restore necessary structural order and fiscal responsibility, but has flourished with renewed commitment to stewardship, innovative leadership and mission.

Implications and Contributions of Findings

The ultimate goal of this project was to equip pastors to be more informed and effective leaders within the unique, cultural landscape of the local church. The aforementioned research questions state the primary components and objectives necessary to achieve this end. Church staff members must understand the presence of congregational culture, that no two churches are alike. Each local congregation has a unique personality or culture composed of distinctive values, beliefs, attitudes and practices. Assessing and discerning this unique culture is a vital discovery that allows the pastoral staff to amend and modify leadership strategy for greater effectiveness. Ultimately, the understandings and principles gleaned from this study will be shared for the benefit of other churches in the Coastal Plains Area of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

After administering the Assessment of Church Culture to the Kingwood Christian Church leadership meeting the required criteria, the pastoral staff observed one primary finding and several secondary findings. First and foremost, the assessment revealed the

dominant cultural priority and predisposition for community. This priority is consistently observed throughout the congregation regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, education or participation levels. Kingwood Christian Church operates in what authors Kim Cameron and Robert E. Quinn call a clan culture. “Shared values and goals, cohesion, participativeness, individuality, and sense of ‘we-ness’ permeate clan firms” (K. S. Cameron 868). Clan cultures operate like extended families inviting teamwork, involvement and loyalty. Community is a cultural priority that significantly influences many facets of the church including structure, policy, procedures, mission and leadership.

The “clan” or community-based culture of Kingwood Christian Church is manifested in a structure that accommodates and perpetuates its priorities. The church maintains a congregational leadership structure where power and influence are distributed over the governing board, elders, deacons and pastoral staff. This structure functions well to protect the community priority and unanimity of the church, but does so at the expense of responsiveness. This structure invites participation and works well to ensure accord, but repels leaders who value nimble, decisive action.

Policies are established methodically taking into account all perspectives and inviting all interested parties to participate in the decision making process.

Congregational churches are often hesitant to move forward in creating or amending policies where consensus is not achieved. Procedures always bare the fingerprints and input of staff, board, elders and committees and highly prioritize congregational involvement and unity over agility and expediency. The community priority ensures that change, whether minor or significant, is a very difficult and time consuming process.

As a result, the long process of laboring for unified action can take its toll, enthusiasm for new initiatives can be squelched and the status quo often prevails. This is one of the significant challenges facing Kingwood Christian Church. The church has existed for almost forty years and established a structure, policies and procedures that protect and ensure the priority of community. While seeking unanimity and participation is admirable in many ways, it inadvertently devalues and even sabotages creativity and impact. The community focus protecting unanimity has also ensured that the church has changed very little through the years. When new directions or initiatives were proposed and met any semblance of opposition, the church leadership tabled discussions or rejected the proposal for fear of conflict.

One critique of the congregational model of church polity is that it is slow and laborious often maintaining harmony and accord at the expense of mission and impact. It creates a people focused, inward thinking culture that struggles to look beyond the church walls and make significant impact in the larger community. The congregation that over-prioritizes community often struggles with stagnancy and settles for status quo leadership. It is as though this great attribute of community, engrained throughout the church, is holding the congregation hostage for fear of conflict or disharmony.

According to the assessment, successful leadership at Kingwood Christian Church is defined by 53 percent of the congregation as encouraging a sense of family and providing care and support for members. The second priority rated at 24 percent is a smooth and efficient structure. The third and fourth priorities were flexibility or risk-taking (12 percent) and impact or achieving results (11 percent). The survey reveals that 77 percent of successful leadership is inward focused, concerned with taking care of the

congregational function and needs. These percentages identify a noteworthy attribute of Kingwood Christian Church culture and resultantly must impact how a pastor or staff seeks to teach and lead.

Good pastoral leadership always starts with genuine love and care for the people. Pastors eager to begin revitalization efforts must bear this in mind. First and foremost, the congregation needs to know that the pastor is trustworthy and cares for the church. Pastors earn the trust of the people in small and big ways every day by working hard, showing up at the hospital, stopping to talk, listening to people's cares, writing notes of encouragement and many other things. The congregation must trust the loving heart of their pastor long before they are asked to follow him/her.

Once trust is earned in the larger congregation and leadership, the delicate process of re-creating or shifting culture can begin. In Kingwood Christian Church, this process began by identifying the real influencers and leaders within the congregation. These people are not always in formal roles of leadership, but undeniably all major decisions directly or indirectly flow through them. In this context, these influencers are primarily founding or long-term members. The initiatives to shift and re-shape culture began through informal channels and conversations with these key leaders. Harnessing the support and influence of these key leaders can determine the success or failure of any potential shift in culture.

With the support of these leaders, formal conversations began at the annual leadership retreat by reporting and exploring the unique dynamics of the Kingwood Christian Church culture. In this gathering of Board members, elders, deacons and staff, the results of the Assessment of Church Culture were presented highlighting the unique

cultural characteristics and their implications on the congregation. The community priority revealed by the survey was extremely enlightening to the leadership. Quickly, the leadership realized how the over-prioritization of community was impacting the church. It was preventing the healthy evolution of the church, especially pertaining to new initiatives, methodology changes and missional impact. Church leaders also observed that the community priority created a sense of stagnancy within the congregation and leadership. The leaders decided to bring this information to the congregation as an impetus for further discussions and next steps.

In January of 2016, the staff and elders hosted a Dreaming for the Future Banquet for all congregation members. The meal was catered so all congregation members would be able to participate without the distraction of other responsibilities. With an elder host at each table, the findings of the Assessment of Church Culture were presented to the congregation. The presentation made sure to highlight the positive and admirable characteristics that are a part of the Kingwood Christian Church culture, but also present the challenges of an unbalanced culture that over-prioritizes community. After the presentation, the elders facilitated candid conversations about the past, present and future implications of these findings. Many extremely helpful conversations took place that night, the effects of which are still forthcoming.

This new information provides an opportunity for Kingwood Christian Church. It can incite the church to further insulate and institutionalize for the sake of community. Or it can inspire the church to reexamine its calling and reimagine a new and unknown future. It is the honor of the pastor, staff and leadership to walk alongside the congregation in this reevaluation process. For many pastors, navigating these uncharted

waters is a daunting task, one few pastors feel equipped to guide. It might be wise to seek out a trusted mentor or organizational coach who has the knowledge and experience to be a helpful sounding board and assist when needed.

Many questions remain unanswered. Will the congregation accept or resist this cultural diagnosis? How will this revealing information impact the identity, focus and values of the congregation moving forward? How will the pastor and staff lead differently? How can the congregation shift culturally and move toward a healthy balance of inward care and outward reach? Can congregational unity be maintained through the inevitable process of change? Experts maintain that successful culture shifts are possible, but require skilled and committed leaders to guide the process.

The implications of locating the cultural footprint of a congregation are boundless because culture influences everything in the life of the church. For a pastor to know how a congregation defines its identity, determines its priorities and motivates itself is a strategic advantage of immense potential. Add reliable information explaining how the congregation receives leadership, operates interpersonally and perceives success, and the pastoral team is equipped for the first steps of effective leadership. This is what the assessment process yields for the pastor leader, a reliable place to begin the process. The knowledge of culture should inform and influence how a pastor teaches, preaches, chooses staff, invests in leaders, provides pastoral care, creates vision and leads the congregation forward. If utilized fully, it can be an important piece in the puzzle of renewal and revitalization.

Specifically, the implications of the survey have caused the Kingwood Christian Church pastoral team and lay leadership to intentionally work to shift culture in strategic

ways. The natural tendencies of the church to be people centered and inward focused must be balanced with initiatives to think on behalf of the outsider and make an impact in the community. This has led to a healthy evaluation process of corporate worship, youth worship, small group ministry, outreach and connection efforts, and leadership development. This cultural shift is not a passing program or emphasis. Author Kim Cameron writes, “It is not a temporary change to the climate of the church, but a slow paced, holistic, paradigm shift that has the potential to change the trajectory of the church for decades to come” (Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture 20).

Healthy cultural shifts start with the pastor and staff, and slowly filter out in the lay leadership and congregation. The pastor and staff must live the shift genuinely, embodying these new values in front of the congregation. Effective biblical teaching must anchor the shift, bleeding into every sermon and public message. The shift must be linked clearly to the mission statement and unique calling of the church. The shift must also be visible in the worship space, classrooms and parking lot for all to see. Finally, leaders must be held accountable to sustained progress in actualizing the shift (Cordeiro 120).

No two congregations are alike and so the transference of helpful information and principles from this study to sister churches in the Houston area is limited. Initially, pastors must be educated as to the presence and influence of culture within all congregations. “Culture is the most important reality in your church” (Cordeiro 3). There is nothing in congregational life and leadership uninfluenced by the power of culture. This revelation opens the door for ongoing, helpful discussions about culture and effective leadership.

The process and tools utilized in this study are being packaged into a workshop format to offer sister churches in the Coastal Plains Area, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The workshop will include the education component, the Assessment of Church Culture tool, results and evaluation, and an optional coaching component. The importance and contribution of this study will ultimately be determined, not merely by the positive impact it wields on Kingwood Christian Church, but by the pastors and congregations educated and inspired.

Cultural education, assessment and coaching are just pieces of the puzzle facing the declining, local church. At best, these are helpful insights and resources, new information for the formidable leadership task ahead. The study offered no “quick fixes” or “how to” formulas for resurrection and revitalization in the local church, only hopeful promises of what is to come. The hope of Christ’s church resides in an empty tomb and the promise of divine power able to bring life out of death. The same power that raised Christ from the tomb is available and eager to stir resurrection in the life of the local church. Yearning for a new Pentecost revival, the local church must avail herself again to this life-giving power. This is the heart of the gospel, that God is the life-giver and sustainer of all things, intent on writing a resurrection story for the church and all creation. God’s creation story does not end in death and destruction, but resurrection and healing, a coming together of heaven and earth in the age to come. This is our hope and fervent prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

APPENDIX A

PRE-TEST FOR PASTOR AND STAFF

No two churches are alike. Each local congregation has a unique personality or culture composed of distinctive values, beliefs, attitudes and practices. Assessing and discerning a congregation's unique culture is a vital discovery for pastoral staff seeking to lead effectively in the local church.

As you respond to the questions below, please respond as an unbiased evaluator. Do not reflect your own personal views but report on the collective attitudes, beliefs and practices of the KCC congregation. We are looking for "what is," not for what you would like our church to become. Therefore, describe how you see our congregation at the present time. Do not spend too much time on any one question and remember there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Simply, answer honestly describing who we are and how we do things as a congregation.

Identity: What are the primary characteristics of the KCC identity? What components most influence who we are as a congregation?

Leadership: How does the KCC congregation evaluate effectiveness in leadership? What are the most valued accomplishments of an effective pastoral leader?

Personality: What are the dominant personality traits of KCC? What traits best describe how we function as a congregation?

Unity: What holds the KCC congregation together? What is the most significant, unifying factor?

Focus: What is the primary focus or emphasis for the KCC congregation?

Success: How does KCC define success? KCC is succeeding when we are accomplishing what objective(s)?

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

Church Culture Assessment

I am currently a student of Asbury Theological Seminary working on a doctoral thesis on church culture and leadership. My study includes utilizing a cultural assessment tool that will help me better understand our congregation in some key ways.

No two congregations are alike. Every congregation resides in a unique context and represents a unique culture shaped by a unique group of people. Kingwood Christian Church is no different. Thus, discovering the unique characteristics of our culture has various applications for effective leadership and ministry. It is a presupposition of my study that increased knowledge and understanding concerning our church culture will enable more informed leadership and effective ministry.

With your help, our congregation will be in a better position to answer the question: who are we really? As you respond to the statements on the survey, please respond as an unbiased evaluator. Do not reflect your own personal views but report on the collective attitudes, beliefs and practices of our congregation. We are looking for “what is,” not for what you would like our church to become. Therefore, describe how you see your congregation at the present time. Do not spend too much time on any one question and remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Simply, answer honestly about how we see things and do things as a church.

Below are some basic instructions for using the Church Culture Assessment.

- 1) Assign a percent value to each a., b., c., and d. question in each area: church identity, church leadership, church personality, church unity, church focus and church success. The four scores in each area must total 100%.
- 2) Transfer each value to its appropriate box on the Church Culture Assessment scoring sheet. Total all the a., b., c., and d. answers and divide by six for an average score.
- 3) Plot the average a., b., c., and d. score on its respective axis on the Church Culture scoring grid. Plot each average as a dot and connect the dots on each axis to form a polygon figure. Shade the figure in.
- 4) Notice which quadrant is most heavily shaded. This is the dominant value in your church culture.

Remember, your participation in this survey is voluntary and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. With your help, I will be able to take the next step toward the completion of my doctoral project. More importantly, however, through your participation, pastors and lay leaders may be better equipped to discover their cultural uniqueness leading to more effective leadership for God’s Kingdom. If you have any comments, please feel free to contact me at 417-773-9812.

Sincerely, Chad Mattingly

APPENDIX C

ATS INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Assessing Congregational Culture for Pastoral Leadership

You are invited to be in a research study being done by **Chad Mattingly** from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are current or former lay board member, elder or deacon, and current member of Kingwood Christian Church between the years of 2010-2015.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete the Church Culture Assessment during the months of July or August 2015 and participate in a leadership debriefing session with Chad Mattingly during the month of September of 2015.

Your family will know that you are in the study. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name.

If something makes you feel bad while you are in the study, please tell **Chad Mattingly**. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want.

You can ask Chad Mattingly questions any time about anything in this study.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX D
ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTION LETTER

Dear Kingwood Christian Church Leaders,

First and foremost, thank you for being a part of this important study in the life of Kingwood Christian Church. In a few moments, I will introduce the Church Culture Assessment, a tool designed to help answer the question: who is Kingwood Christian Church?

Of course, your participation also allows me to take the next step in my doctoral project that researches church culture and effective leadership. The greater goal of this project is to help pastors and lay leaders in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) better understand their congregations and in turn provide more effective leadership for congregational vitality.

As you respond to the statements on the assessment, please respond as an unbiased evaluator. Do not reflect your own personal views but report on the collective attitudes, beliefs and practices of our congregation. We are looking for “what is,” not for what you would like our church to become. Therefore, describe how you see our congregation at the present time. Do not spend too much time on any one question and remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Simply, answer honestly about how we see things and do things as a church.

Below are some basic instructions for using the Church Culture Assessment.

- 1) Assign a percent value to each a., b., c., and d. question in each area: church identity, church leadership, church personality, church unity, church focus and church success. The four scores in each area must total 100%.
- 2) Transfer each value to its appropriate box on the Church Culture Assessment scoring sheet. Total all the a., b., c., and d. answers and divide by six for an average score.
- 3) Plot the average a., b., c., and d. score on its respective axis on the Church Culture scoring grid. Plot each average as a dot and connect the dots on each axis to form a polygon figure. Shade the figure in.
- 4) Notice which quadrant is most heavily shaded. This is the dominant value in your church culture.

Please take time to review these instructions and do not hesitate to ask clarifying questions along the way. The test should not take any longer than 20 minutes to complete and score.

Thanks again for your kind participation and leadership at Kingwood Christian Church.

Sincerely,

Chad Mattingly

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Background Information about yourself:

1. Name: _____

2. Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female

3. Age ☐ 29-38 ☐ 39-54 ☐ 55-67 ☐ 68-75 ☐ 75 or over

4. Ethnic origin ☐ Caucasian/American ☐ Black/American
☐ Native American ☐ Hispanic
☐ Asian ☐ Black/African
☐ Caucasian/European ☐ Other _____

5. Education

What is your highest level of formal education? (mark only one)

☐ Some High School ☐ college degree
☐ High School diploma ☐ graduate degree
☐ Some College ☐ post-graduate degree

6. Occupation

What best describes the nature of your vocation? (or was your vocation, if retired)

☐ Home maker ☐ Professional ☐ Agricultural
☐ Labor ☐ Management ☐ Technical
☐ Sales/Service ☐ Student ☐ Trades/Craft
☐ Clerical ☐ Administrative ☐ other _____

7. Congregational outlook

What adjective best describes your attitude toward Kingwood Christian Church?

☐ enthusiastic ☐ blessed ☐ satisfied
☐ indifferent ☐ concerned ☐ burdened
☐ disappointed

8. Duration of membership

How long have you been attending Kingwood Christian Church?

☐ less than one year ☐ 1 - 2 years ☐ 3 - 5 years
☐ 6 - 10 years ☐ 11 - 20 years ☐ more than 20 years

9. Participation

How many hours on average per week, do you spend serving Kingwood Christian Church (including worship, programs, committees, teaching, service, etc.)?

☐ none ☐ 1 - 2 ☐ 2 - 3 ☐ 3 - 4 ☐ 5 or more

APPENDIX F

ASSESSMENT OF CHURCH CULTURE

ASSESSMENT OF CHURCH CULTURE¹

1. Church Identity		
a. Our church is a very personal place. Members are very close and share a large portion of their lives with one another.		
b. Our church is a very flexible organization. Members are willing to try new things and take risks.		
c. Our church is very organized. Policies and procedures govern what we typically do.		
d. Our church is very focused on results. Getting the job done and seeing the effect of our activity is important.		
Total four scores		= 100%
2. Church Leadership		
a. Church leadership ² encourages our sense of family. They provide care and support for the members.		
b. Church leadership frequently leads the church to take risks, stretch themselves, and try new approaches.		
c. Church leadership promotes the smooth and efficient operation of the organization. Coordination and organization are evident.		
d. Church leadership typically demonstrates a results-oriented approach to ministry. The bottom line is important.		
Total four scores		= 100%
3. Church Personality		
a. Our church's personality is marked by teamwork, consensus, and fellowship.		
b. Our church's personality is marked by freedom, risk-taking, and creativity.		
c. Our church's personality is predictability, stability, and uniformity.		
d. Our church's personality is marked by a commitment to excellence and measurable achievement.		
Total four scores		= 100%
4. Church Unity		
a. Our church is held together by loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to each other is high.		
b. Our church is held together by a commitment to creativity and new approaches. Being on the cutting edge is highly valued.		
c. Our church is held together by our structure and policies. Maintaining a smooth running organization is important.		
d. Our church is held together by an emphasis on accomplishing goals and achieving results. We relish successes and victories.		
Total four scores		= 100%
5. Church Focus		
a. Our church emphasizes the care and support of the members.		
b. Our church emphasizes new approaches and ideas for ministry.		
c. Our church emphasizes permanence, stability, efficiency, and order.		
d. Our church emphasizes achievement and excellence.		
Total four scores		= 100%

¹ Adapted from *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* by Kim Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, Addison Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1999

² Including but not restricted to our pastor and paid staff

6. Church Success

a. Our church defines success on the basis of the membership, their development, and their level of satisfaction.	
b. Our church defines success on the basis of having new ideas and creative approaches to ministry.	
c. Our church defines success on the basis of efficiency, order, and smooth operations.	
d. Our church defines success on the basis of results and achieving measurable goals.	
Total four scores = 100%	

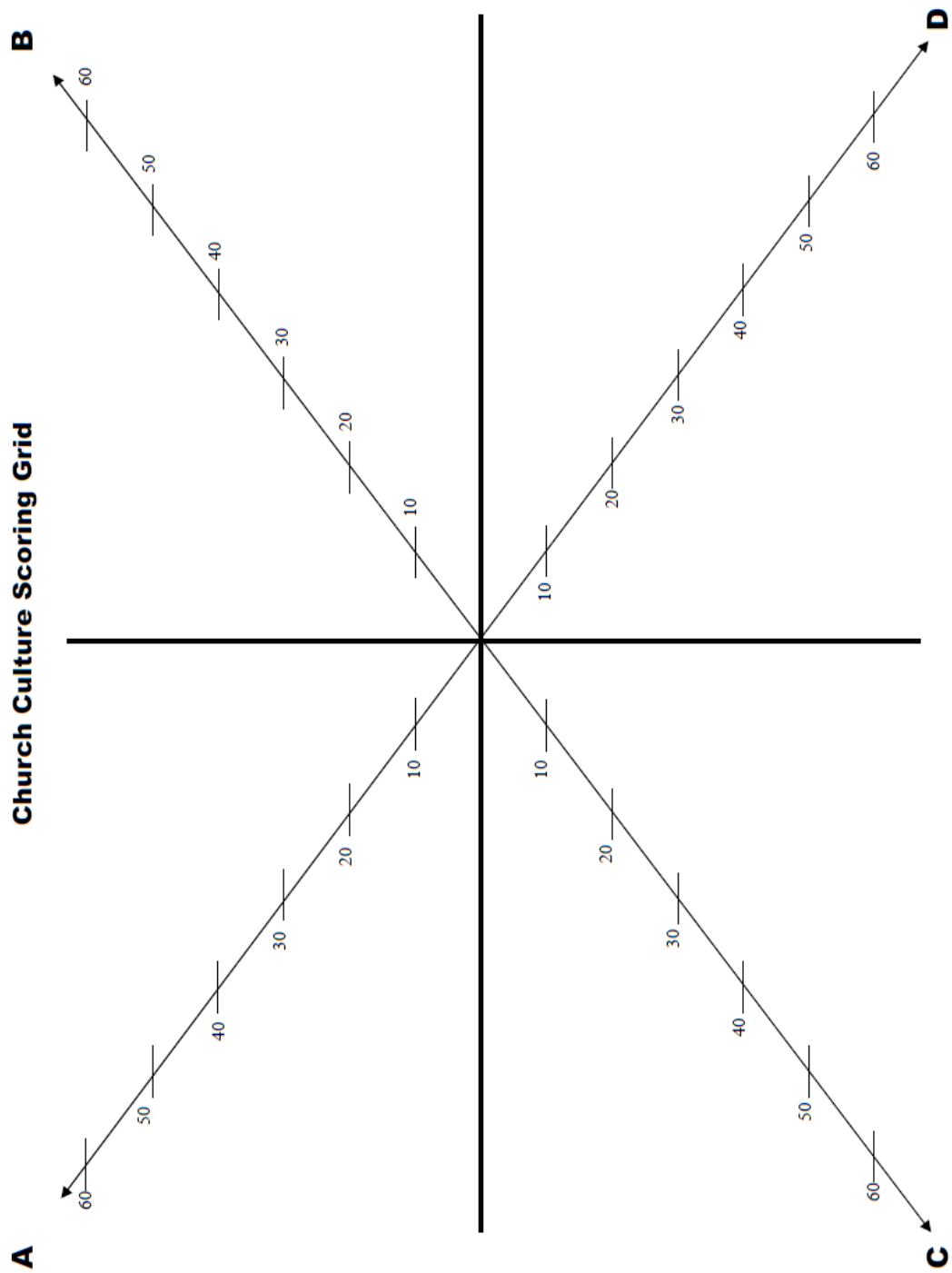
Using the Church Culture Assessment

1. Assign a percent value to each a., b., c., and d. question in each area: church identity, church leadership, church personality, church unity, church focus and church success. The four scores in each area must total 100%
2. Transfer each value to its appropriate box on the Church Culture Assessment Scoring Sheet. Total all of the a., b., c., and d. answers and divide by 6 for an average score.
3. Plot the average a., b., c., and d. score on its respective axis on the Church Culture Scoring Grid. Plot each average as a dot and connect the dots on each axis to form a polygon figure. Shade the figure in.
4. Notice which quadrant is most heavily shaded. This is the dominant value in your church culture.

Church Culture Scoring Sheet

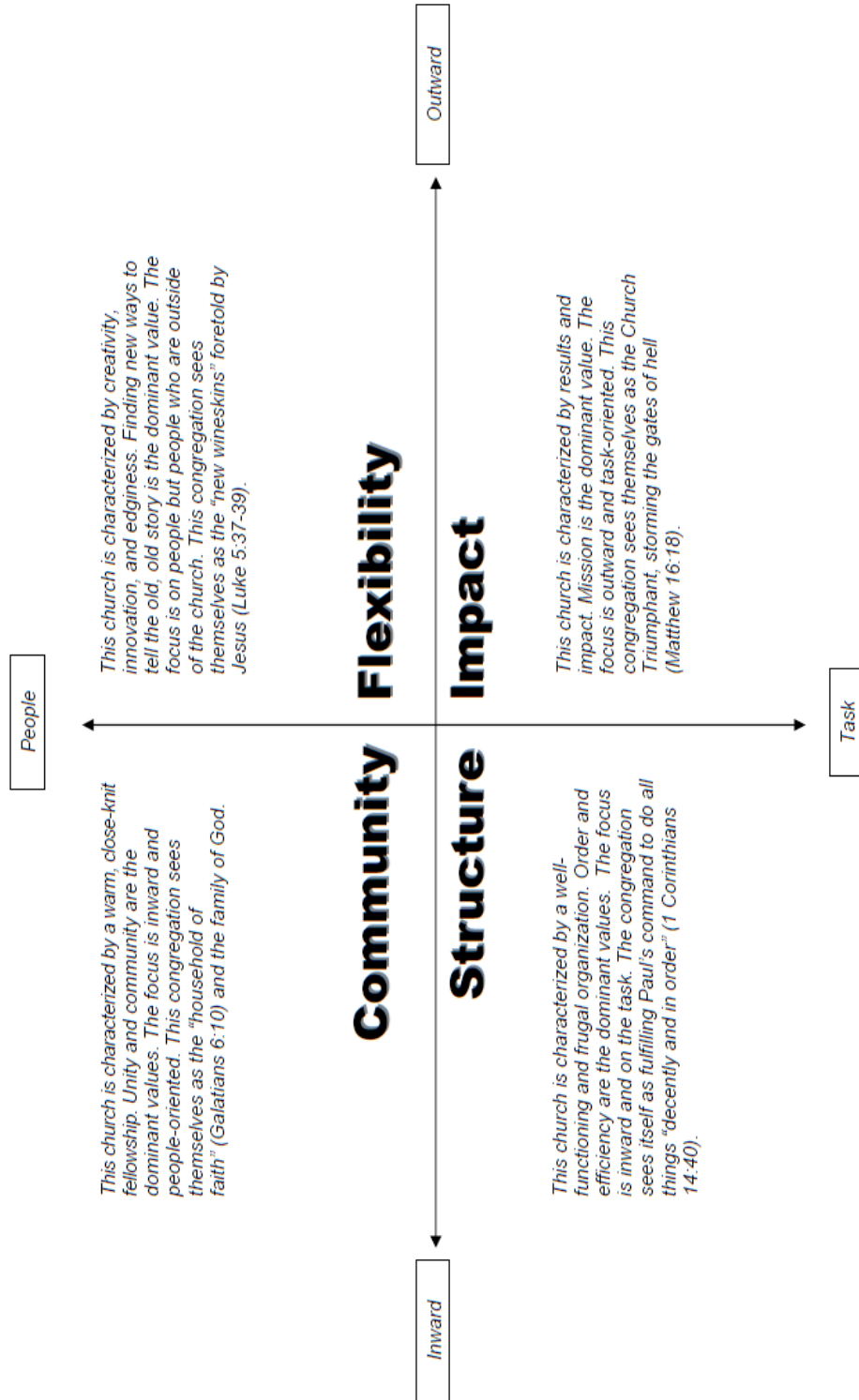
1a.		1b.		1c.		1d.	
2a.		2b.		2c.		2d.	
3a.		3b.		3c.		3d.	
4a.		4b.		4c.		4d.	
5a.		5b.		5c.		5d.	
6a.		6b.		6c.		6d.	

Total		Total		Total		Total	
Average		Average		Average		Average	
Plot this score on Axis A, Church Culture Scoring Grid		Plot this score on Axis B, Church Culture Scoring Grid		Plot this score on Axis C, Church Culture Scoring Grid		Plot this score on Axis D, Church Culture Scoring Grid	



Church Culture

Congregational Identity, Focus, and Dominant Value



APPENDIX G**POST-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

The following debriefing questions are designed for the pastor and staff of the Kingwood Christian Church. These questions seek to begin the process of synthesizing the findings of the Assessment of Church Culture (ACC) for the KCC congregation so that informed and effective leadership strategy and practice can occur.

- 1) How has this study impacted your awareness of church culture and contextual leadership?

- 2) What key insights did the ACC reveal about the Kingwood Christian Church identity, meaning “Who we are?”

- 3) What key insights did the ACC reveal about the Kingwood Christian Church focus, meaning “What are our priorities?”

- 4) What key insights did the ACC reveal about the Kingwood Christian Church dominant values, meaning “How do we function of get things done at KCC?”

- 5) What findings revealed by the ACC surprised you about the Kingwood Christian Church culture?

- 6) How do you anticipate leadership philosophies and practices to change in light of understanding the unique culture of Kingwood Christian Church?

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