

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE SENSE OF BELONGING IN SERMON-BASED SMALL GROUPS**

by

Trent Eastman

The purpose of the study was to evaluate, by means of focus groups, the use of sermon-based small groups, surveys, and post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer times as effective means of providing opportunities for repeat attenders to move from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging at New Baptist Church. The study used focus groups and congregational surveys to gather data. The research focused upon people's sense of belonging, as defined by Joseph R. Myers, to New Baptist Church. The ministry intervention included sermon-based small groups over the course of four weeks. A focus group composed of people who participated in the month-long study was conducted at the front end of the study and after its completion. A congregational survey was also given at both the beginning and ending points the study. The basic research analysis from the data centered around the question of whether the sermon-based groups have any impact upon people's sense of belonging.

The study was conducted at New Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia. New Baptist has an average Sunday attendance of four hundred. The congregation is a product of a church merger that took place in 2008 and has doubled in size since the original merger. One of the primary problems the church faces is its ability to help people connect relationally with the larger fellowship, thus the study on people's sense of belonging and the ministry intervention of sermon-based small groups.

A number of interesting and important findings were revealed through this study. Positively, the study revealed a significant statistical increase among people who participated in the sermon-based small group in the area of sensitivity towards strangers and the ability to communicate various opportunities for people to connect at New Baptist Church. Negatively, the study revealed the difficulty that new attenders have at New Baptist Church to discover and participate in the various opportunities available to them to grow in community. The primary recommendations from this study included many practical changes that the church can implement in terms of better communication of its relational opportunities as well as more strategic long-term recommendations for protecting and developing spaces of belonging.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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A Dissertation

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Introduction**

New Baptist Church came into being during the winter of 2008 with a long history. The church was a product of a merger between two local Baptist churches in the Huntington, West Virginia, community: Beverly Hills Baptist Church and 20th Street Baptist Church.

The traditional downtown Baptist Church that had a two hundred-plus-year history was 20<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church. From roughly 1980 the church began its decline due to church splits, changing neighborhood, and an aging congregation. In January 2007, the remaining seventy active members of the church sold their beloved building to Marshall University and moved down the road into a rented space, hoping for a new beginning but fearful that its doors would be closed forever. Beverly Hills Baptist Church, not nearly as old as 20th Street, was planted during the postwar boom that Huntington experienced in the 1940s. The major years of growth for Beverly Hills Baptist Church took place during the 1960s and 1970s, hitting its high water mark in the mid 1980s at the proverbial 80 percent seating capacity, averaging 165 for Sunday morning attendance. Over the next decade, that number began to slip due to economic changes and population drop in the larger Huntington community, as well as changes in the church. By 2000 the congregation was averaging below one hundred in attendance on Sundays. From the end of 2002 to 2007, the church grew back to its 80 percent capacity, roughly 165 in attendance, at which point the people of Beverly Hills Baptist began exploring options for expansion and growth. Due to both churches being at major

crossroads, they pooled their resources and merged together, becoming New Baptist Church.

The merger involved the purchase of an abandoned ice-skating rink as the future site of the new church and to provide space for activities for the two congregations to meet each other and combine all boards and committee meetings. The merger also involved the attempt to carry over the traditions of the previous churches as much as possible. Some of the carried over ministries and traditions included the continuation of the same Sunday school classes, Sunday and Wednesday evening church services, Haiti mission trips, and the community food pantry.

As of 2015, the merger would be judged as a success using the measurement of the three Bs (Bottoms, Building, Budget). The congregation has more than doubled in size, averaging four hundred on most Sundays with a strong budget that has allowed New Baptist to expand ministries as well as to purchase more land and further renovate the giant metal ice-skating building. Despite these important and often-used measurements of success, a problem at New Baptist Church exists that if not addressed will cause the church to plateau and begin its long slippage into irrelevancy.

The problem and possibly the greatest challenge that New Baptist Church faces today is its ability to provide an authentic, welcoming, and caring community towards strangers that want to connect at a deeper level. Joseph R. Myers in his book *The Search to Belong* provides a means to understand *connectedness* in terms of spaces of belonging. According to Myers, human beings all require multiple levels of relationships for healthy lives. These necessary spaces of belonging are defined as public, social, personal, and intimate (480). Myers is not the first author to talk about the multiple levels of



relationships that people have, yet Myers is different in how he sees the importance of each group within a church. The goal for Myers is to create a church culture that provides the opportunities for people to connect (*Organic Community* 803). The public space of belonging would reflect new attenders, people who have come in through the front doors on a Sunday morning and quickly leave before anyone has a chance to greet them. The social space of belonging represents those who have a few acquaintances at New Baptist Church and feel comfortable enough to share brief details of their lives. The personal and intimate spaces of belonging represent those deeper level friendships from shared lives to deep trust. All of these spaces of belonging are present at New Baptist Church, but the most difficult space for people to transition between is moving from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging. In other words, repeat visitors are not connecting to New Baptist Church beyond what Myers calls the “Public Space” (575). According to Myers’ framework on relationships, this problem asks the question if New Baptist Church adequately provides those opportunities of moving from a public space of belonging to the social space of belonging.

New attenders have difficulty transitioning from the public to social space for a number of reasons. The primary felt reason is that the church fails to communicate a clear means of how to connect at New Baptist Church, as well as failing to provide appropriate opportunities to begin the relational work of belonging. This failure is both structural (i.e., lack of designed opportunities) and cultural (i.e., the habits of the congregants). Structurally, the only form of communication and opportunity that a new attender receives as to how to move deeper into relationship at New Baptist Church is to attend an evening service or to find a Sunday school class. Inviting people to attend a Sunday

school class is problematic because the Sunday school classes are mostly made up of members of the previous founding churches and are thus limited in how much more they can absorb in terms of literal classroom space as well as openness to new relationships. Culturally, the church lacks of sensitivity needed to embrace people who are new. This problem of providing opportunities for new attenders the ability to move beyond the public space of belonging results in New Baptist Church plateauing as a congregation and, more importantly, the failure of the church to be the community of faith necessary for people to know and experience the Triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate, by means of a focus group, the use of sermon-based small groups, surveys, and post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer times as effective means of providing opportunities for repeat attenders to move from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging at New Baptist Church.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose was accomplished through research conducted using a pre/postintervention focus group around the following three questions.

#### **Research Question #1**

Before and after the study, what were the levels of felt belonging among Sunday-morning-only repeat attenders at New Baptist Church as measured by their feelings of being welcomed and accepted, being known, and being appreciated?

#### **Research Question #2**

Before and after the study, what were the levels of perceived opportunities to relationally connect with other people among Sunday-morning-only repeat attenders as

measured by felt relational needs being met or unmet, a capacity to express structured opportunities to fellowship with other people, and a theological awareness of the importance of Christianity community?

### **Research Question #3**

Before and after the study, what other factors may have contributed to Sunday-morning-only attenders' sense of belonging or not belonging?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this paper and represent important ideas in carrying out the project's purpose.

### **Spaces of Belonging**

The concept and language with regards to *spaces of belonging* are being taken from Myers' book entitled *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy*. In Myers' system, the spaces of belonging are seen as public, social, personal, and intimate relational spaces (469). Each of these spaces of belonging represents critical areas of connection.

According to Myers, a healthy church will foster the environment necessary for the flourishing of all four spaces of belonging as well as provide opportunities for people to transition between the spaces.

### **Sermon-Based Small Groups**

Various kinds of small groups are a common fare of most churches, including New Baptist Church. Some examples of various small groups are Sunday schools, choir practices, interest-based affinity clubs, or intentional home Bible studies. The sermon-based small group is something both new and different to New Baptist Church. The concept is based upon the work of Larry W. Osborne. The sermon-based small group is

not a gathering of people to talk about the sermon. Rather, it sees the sermon as the homework necessary for a Bible study. One of the issues with regards to the format of most small groups is that they are dependent upon either reading a book or filling out a workbook in order to be prepared for the group study. This requirement presents an obstacle to those who find difficulty in preparing for the small group. Making the sermon the homework provides a more easily accessed small group experience.

### **Ministry Intervention**

The ministry intervention was the formation of sermon-based small groups with both a preministry intervention and postministry intervention focus group and congregational surveys used to measure people's sense of belonging. At the conclusion of the study, an informal gathering after Sunday morning service provided the opportunity for questions and answers. Part of the purpose of the intervention is to help new attenders feel more comfortable at New Baptist Church and to give them traction in feeling more connected to the congregation relationally.

The sermon-based small groups met on Wednesday evenings at New Baptist Church using various classrooms. Wednesday evenings have traditionally been seen as experimental night; thus, a great deal of flexibility is afforded them. Most Wednesday evenings have an open format Bible study led by a pastor and, often operating concurrently, various small groups. During the six weeks of the sermon-based small groups, all Wednesday evening attenders were a part of one of these groups.

Each sermon-based small group had a facilitator selected by the pastor. The criteria used for the selection of each group facilitator were based upon competence to lead a small group, observed spiritual maturity, and not presently leading another group

or study. Prior to the start of the sermon-based small groups, each facilitator received training on the expectation of their roles (see Appendix B) and group dynamics using the model presented by Larry Osborne.

Participants in the small groups were gathered by direct Sunday morning requests accompanied by an in-bulletin sign-up form, a sign-up sheet at the welcome center, and direct invitations given by the group facilitators. Participants were assigned to a sermon-based small group by the group facilitators and pastor. The criteria used to assign participants to various groups was to mix up the normal social groupings, make each small group as multigenerational as possible, balance out mature believers, balance out Sunday-only attenders with those who would normally come on a Wednesday night.

The sermon-based small group was anchored in the prior Sunday morning sermon. For each of the six weeks, the bulletin contained a half sheet of paper with sermon notes on one side and study questions on the other. This half-sheet from the Sunday morning bulletin became the resource the people brought with their Bible to the small group. The facilitator of each group was provided with icebreakers and other Bible study questions to assist the group in discussion. The primary purpose of these groups was to provide opportunities for repeat Sunday-morning-only attenders to transition from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging. Mixing up regular grouping of people has many secondary, important, and wonderful added benefits, such as gathering in multiple generations, studying the Bible together, and joining with another believer in prayer. Each group meeting followed the traditional serendipity Bible study model of providing times for fellowship, prayer, icebreakers, questions about the scriptural text, and the sharing of prayer concerns (Appendix A).

At the conclusion of the study, a post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer time was held. An invitation for this event was given by the group facilitators by and Sunday morning announcement. The purpose of this event was to talk about New Baptist Church and allow for questions and answers. The event was also used as a means to communicate ways to connect to various other affinity groups within the church.

### **Context**

In 2001 Robert D. Putnam, a Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University, published a book about the collapse of the sense of community in the United States. He explores the loss of community primarily through the self-isolation of property lines and technology. This loss of community, he asserts, is self-destructive. People are most happy and healthy when they enjoy multiple social connectedness (326). In other words, human beings need community. With this need for community in mind, Jesus' last public prayer prior to the cross for believers to enjoy authentic community is no surprise:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21, ESV).

The need for Jesus to pray this prayer reveals not only how important community is but also reveals people's failure to practice community.

This failure of community is not just theoretical; it is evidential as reported in such books as Putnam's and Peter Lovenheim's. Lovenheim's work begins with a murder-suicide taking place on his suburban street, shocked that not only did he and his wife not really know their neighbors but that very little of suburban life upon their street changed after the event. As Myers' observes, "The front porches are gone" (*The Search to Belong* 2182). What he means by this observation is that in past years, people would enjoy

evenings on their front porches, allowing a welcoming connectivity to neighbors. Modern climate controlled homes with automatic garage door openers have removed the front porch and, in so doing, removed the capacity of passersby to greet and fellowship with their neighbors.

This isolation and fragmentation of community is felt within the tri-state area of Huntington, West Virginia, Ashland, Kentucky, and Ironton, Ohio. The metropolitan area of the tri-state is the largest in West Virginia with a population of 365,000. The city of Huntington is the largest city in this metropolitan area with a population just under 49,000. The city has seen a continual decline in its population since the end of the 1950s from 86,000 to the current 49,000. Huntington, West Virginia, and the surrounding tri-state area consistently ranks among the nation's top poorest and unhealthy areas. Putnam argues that poor health and high mortality are a result of the lack of social connectedness (371). These factors of population decline, poverty, and issues of health have impacted the local churches. Those churches that belong to the American Baptist denomination have felt the fragmentation of community, population decline, and poverty keenly. Ten years ago the number of American Baptist churches in Huntington, West Virginia, was seven; now that number is two. New Baptist Church is one of these. Other denominations have also suffered decline in Huntington, resulting in either church closures or mergers that have caused further fragmentation of community and the creation of church refugees. People hunger for community; people hunger for a place to belong. Many people have found community at New Baptist Church but, out of fear of losing it, have locked the door behind them.

## **Methodology**

The study conducted was primarily qualitative, using a pre- and postintervention focus group to measure felt perceptions of belonging. The study also used pre- and postintervention congregational surveys as tools to measure various aspects of felt belonging at New Baptist Church.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were those who came to the Wednesday evening sermon-based small groups. The invitation was universally given to all on a Sunday morning, with sign-up sheets both in the bulletin and at the welcome center. Private invitations were also given directly by group facilitators to those who attend only on a Sunday morning at New Baptist Church.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation used included a focus group led by myself. The purpose of the focus group was to measure people's sense of belonging using the research questions. The people who connected with the church only at a public level communicated such things as "being new" and "not knowing anyone," while those who communicated that they were known, appreciated, and cared for were seen to have a felt sense of belonging at the social level or deeper. The postintervention focus group asked questions with regards to any felt changes to the sense of belonging after the four-week small group experience. Throughout the month-long study, attendance sheets were kept as well as interviews with the facilitators to measure any positive or negative impact of the intervention. Facilitators were also asked to send a short, written paragraph after each meeting with regards to their reflections (see Appendix C).



The instrumentation also included a congregational survey taken at both the start of the sermon-based small groups and at the completion of the sermon-based small groups (see Appendix E). The surveys were provided to the entire congregation on the Sundays that flanked the Wednesday evening small groups. The survey consisted of ten questions divided among three themes: (1) theological understanding of community, (2) their personal sense of belonging at New Baptist Church, and (3) their personal initiative in building the sense of belonging at New Baptist Church. Each church survey requested the last four digits of the takers' social security numbers as identifiers in order to compare any before and after changes among individuals taking the survey. In addition, the second survey included the added question that asked if the respondent had participated in any of the Wednesday sermon-based small groups.

### **Variables**

This study sought to understand, measure, and move people's sense of belonging at New Baptist Church. The dependent variable was the people's felt sense of belonging to New Baptist Church. The goal of the ministry intervention was to shift this variable from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging. To achieve this purpose, the primary independent variables used were the Sunday morning sermon, the notes taken to the small groups, and the quality of the group facilitators.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection occurred at the beginning of the study and at its end with the use of congregational surveys and a focus group. A focus group was created from the people who signed up for the sermon-based small groups. The group's conversation was around the primary themes as identified in the research questions. These themes were (1)

having people define their sense of belonging as measured by feelings of being welcomed and accepted, being known, and being appreciated; and, (2) their awareness of even knowing how to transition to a deeper space of belonging if so desired. These conversations were recorded and transcribed with private interviews used as follow-up to provide greater detail or clarity.

The group facilitators provided notes on group interactions during the month-long study that included observations of interest levels, any signs of deeper connections, and other themes they thought were important. While the study was conducted, various participants of the sermon-based small groups also shared observations and personal feelings with regard to their own experiences.

At the end of the study, a focus group was conducted using similar questions as for the first focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to measure participants' felt sense of belonging and their capacity to transition to a deeper level of belonging. The capacity to transition was measured by expressed awareness of opportunities to connect at New Baptist Church, a felt desire for deeper relationships, and expressed recognition of the importance of community. The focus group conversations were recorded and transcribed with private interviews used as follow-up to provide greater detail or clarity.

The pre- and postintervention survey consisted of ten questions divided among three basic categories: theological understanding of community, personal sense of belonging at New Baptist Church, and personal initiative in building the sense of belonging at New Baptist Church. Those attending the Sunday morning services at the start or at the end of the study were invited to complete the anonymous survey.

## **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected, a narrative analysis helped to sort through the various themes that emerged from the focus group and reflections from the group leaders. The narrative pattern sought for in this study was stories of felt change in people's connectedness to New Baptist Church. Included in the narrative analysis were themes of a continuation of God's involvement within the lives of people in how he draws the participants into community. A *t*-test compared the prestudy congregational survey responses with both those of the poststudy sermon-based small group attenders, and another *t*-test measured the prestudy survey data with that of those who did not attend the Wednesday evening small groups.

## **Generalizability**

A possible problem faced by many churches may not be a structural flaw, or a missing program, or bad preaching, or even a lack of congregational discipleship. While not meaning to minimize any of these things, possibly the lack of spiritual vitality in any given church across all denominational, geographical, and demographical lines is simply too much dependence on trying to structure spirituality. The alternative is not an ejection of structure, for God is against chaos (see 1 Cor. 14:33), but seeing structure as simply a way of creating a space for people to encounter God and each other.

Therefore, this study should not be seen as a small group ministry intervention that tries to get Sunday-only attenders to become more involved at church but one that uses sermon-based small groups as a means of providing a flexible structure that allows people to explore the meaning of pursuing a life in Christ as part of a community of faith. The central theological premise of this study is that God himself exists in community as

Father, Son and Spirit, and his work of salvation is about bringing people into that community. Therefore, the best way to know and experience God is through community. This study is an exploration of this relational understanding of God lived out in community. Churches that would benefit most from this study would be ones that believe they are stuck, spinning the proverbial wheels and are in need of reenvisioning how the community of faith can be a place for people to understand and experience life lived in relationship with each other and God.

### **Theological Foundation**

The Bible begins not with an account of creation, but with an account of God:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. (Gen. 1:1-3)

The very first verses about God in Scripture reveal him to be the Originator (“In the beginning, God”), Spirit (“the Spirit of God was hovering”), and the spoken Word (“And God said”). The seeds of understanding God as Father, Son, and Spirit are planted in the first three verses of the Bible, and through the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit these seeds are watered and grown into the theological structure that gives Christianity its shape. The consequence of understanding God as existing in this Triune community impacts every facet of people’s lives. Most importantly, people’s salvation experience originates with God the Father is worked out by God the Son and is completed by God the Spirit. He does all from beginning to end, inviting people to share in the glory of Christ, which is the sharing of community of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Grasping what God has done and is doing in the church means that the body of Christ is more than God’s ordained vessel of clay to fulfill God’s redemptive purposes of healing.

The church itself is to be a reflection of the very community that exists within the Triune God, by which God in his full glory is made known to this world.

One of the images that Paul uses to talk about the church in Ephesians is that the church is a holy temple in the Lord:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)

This image of the church being the holy temple is a powerful message that shows the community of the Trinity (household of God, Jesus as Cornerstone, held together by the Spirit) incorporating Christians into the very dwelling of God. This Trinitarian-filled image of the church also provides a glimpse of the spaces of belonging, the places where people connect and are connected to this holy temple of God.

### **Overview of Study**

Chapter 2 contains a selected literature review focused upon the Triune nature of God and how God's very being calls people into community. The selected literature review also includes a look at church community and the importance of that community within the context of Huntington, West Virginia. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides the analysis and discusses the results of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

#### **Problem**

New Baptist Church is a product of a church merger that has successfully grown beyond its combined number. Despite New Baptist's success the church is plateauing in part because of its inability to connect with repeat attenders on a relational level. The deeper problem is not simply lacking the right program or mechanics to incorporate new attenders but of having a church culture that has closed in on itself. The need of this study is to explore people's sense of belonging and to find ways to provide opportunities for those who want to connect relationally at New Baptist Church.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate, by means of a focus group, the use of sermon-based small groups, surveys, and post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer times as effective means of providing opportunities for repeat attenders to move from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging at New Baptist Church.

#### **Biblical and Theological Foundations**

The core theological premise of this study is that God has created according to his nature. Thus a logical conclusion from this premise is that a greater understanding of God's nature will grant a greater understanding of his creation. This movement from studying God's nature in order to understand his creation is the structure this study takes in its Biblical and theological discussions. The very Triune nature of God shapes the nature of the people he has created.

## **The Triune Image of God and Relational Belonging**

The theological premise of this study is that God is relational. God, in his very being, is three in one: Father, Son, and Spirit. For most Christians today, the doctrine of the Trinity is no more than unexamined dogma. A theological truth that has little practical value but, because it is orthodoxy, is received as true. Examining Triune nature of God though, one realizes how powerfully important, practical, and true this doctrine is in the life of the church, as well as in the life of people who are made in the image of the Triune God. The theological discussion on the Trinity begins with a brief historic overview of the doctrine of the Trinity, followed by identifying the fingerprints of the Triune God in Scripture, concluding with the implications for the church and individuals of worshipping one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Historical Survey of the Trinity**

The New Testament Gospels suggest that the disciples deeply struggled to understand this man, Jesus. A study on the disciples will see them struggle to understand how Jesus loved the outcast (woman at the well, John 4:27), the upside-down nature of Jesus' kingdom ("whoever wants to be first, must be slave of all," Mark 10:44), Jesus' choice to die upon the cross (Peter's rebuke of Jesus, Matt. 16:22), and Jesus' relationship with God whom he called Father (John 10:30-31). Jesus clearly talked about doing the will of the Father (John 5:19), being sent by the Father (John 5:36-37), and being loved by the Father (John 15:9), yet at the same time Jesus talked about being one with the Father to the extent that he was accused of blasphemy on more than one occasion (John 8:58; 10:30; 14:9). Thus, when Jesus talked about his relationship with the Father, the disciples often wondered what he meant (Mark 9:10, 32; Luke 9:45). The

disciples were equally confused when Jesus talked about how better off they will be when he goes because then he will send the counselor who is the Spirit of Truth (John 16:7, 13), after which the disciples said, “We don’t understand what he is saying” (John 16:18). The disciples struggled to understand the nature of Jesus.

The disciples lacked the theological language or framework to understand the Triune nature of God, but they did grasp that Jesus was something more than a man. The disciples, who were Jews, grew up in a strict monotheistic religious environment that would never have considered God being or becoming man, yet they worshiped Jesus (Eusebius, Williamson, and Louth 9). They experienced in Jesus something so extraordinary that the only conclusion to which they could come to was that this man, Jesus, was the Holy God. This conclusion as to Christ’s deity is best seen in the exclamation of Thomas at the time of the resurrection: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The reason that Scripture lacks clear formulaic language of the Trinity is due to the strict monotheism of Jews and subsequently of the first generation of believers. They simply struggled to explain what they experienced. To speak of God as three persons was utterly foreign, despite the clarity of witness of the disciples and the early church to see themselves in relationship to God the Father through the Son, by the Spirit as expressed by Paul: “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’ (Gal. 4:6). Despite the disciple’s struggle to communicate what they experienced in Jesus, they do convey a Triune understanding of God.

The traditional doctrine and language of the Trinity found its expression through the early church’s struggles in defining orthodoxy. The doctrine of the Trinity is the only doctrine that makes sense in trying to understand God when viewed through the historical



reality of the cross, resurrection, and Pentecost (Wilken 97). For the first three hundred years of the church, the single most important theological issue was the question of who Jesus was. Some said he was only a man gifted by God (Arianism). Others said he was God that only appeared to be a man (Docetism). The response of the church was that Jesus was fully man and fully God, which resulted in further struggles to explain how the uncreated Creator could be born in a manger (Latourette 155). Some argued that Jesus was a mode that God took for the purpose of salvation. God the Father became God the Son and now is God the Spirit (modalism). Others rejected the notion of one God and talked about a tritheism. Despite these difficulties in understanding and explain how the one true God determined to save sinners by sending his beloved Son, the early church clung to the radical claim that God is one—Father, Son, and Spirit.

Numerous attempts to explain the Trinity with analogies have been used. Some of these include such things as the Trinity being like water (i.e., ice, liquid, steam) or an egg (i.e., shell, yoke, whites) or a candle (i.e., wax, wick, flame). All analogies are false, for they all slip into the various false understandings of the Triune God in such ways as modalism or tri-theism (Seamands 98).

The best way to describe the Trinity is by means of the complete work of salvation brought by God. Stephen A. Seamands describes the Trinitarian nature of God's work as "the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world" (15). God himself completes all facets of salvation: he initiates, he works, and he perfects all aspects of people's salvation (Grenz and Smith 34).

By the time of the Nicene Council of AD 325, sufficient theological thought and discussion had taken place to bring clarity as to what Christians believe. The Nicene Council gives shape to orthodox belief in the Trinity:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end. (Tanner)

The Nicene Creed defines and teaches that Jesus is fully God using a variety of images: same essence, light of light, true God, and not made. Future creeds stress further the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit. The Athanasius Creed says “that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.” The creed goes on to teach that the Father, Son, and Spirit are uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal, almighty, Lord, coeternal, “one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.” Clearly a mystery exists in the very nature of God by which within his varying being exist a community of love and oneness (Bilezikian 89).

Today, groups that call upon the name of Jesus yet reject the historical doctrine of the Trinity. The more well-known groups that lack a historical orthodox understanding of God include the Latter-Day Saints, Jehovah Witness, Christian Science, and the Oneness Pentecostals. Even though most Protestant denominations hold to a Triune belief in God, a gap exists between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Despite confessing a belief in a

Trinitarian God, many churches today lack a Trinitarian worldview. This lack of Trinitarian worldview is seen how the reality of who God is (Father, Son, and Spirit) fails to shape church structure and community. Seamands argues that a Trinitarian worldview comes out of a study of Scripture and an observation of how the very being of God impacts all of what God does in both his creation and church (42-243).

### **Trinity in the Old Testament**

Like the New Testament, the word *trinity* is not found in the Old Testament. Not only is the word not used but a Trinitarian view of God within the Old Testament is revealed through the lens of the New Testament. Creation required the full and complete revelation of God in the Son (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15) for the Trinitarian image of God to bloom in all of Scripture (Olson and Hall 7). Viewing the movement of God in the Old Testament through the lenses of the work of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit reveals the Triune God at work through all of Scripture. Augustine argues that clues within the Old Testament are like seeds to be watered by the revelation of Jesus Christ, including moments when the Trinity is reflected in the manifestation of God's presence (Augustine and Dollen 1935). Examples of these various clues can be seen in such narratives as when Moses asked the question, "Who is sending me?" (Exod. 3:13). God responded with three "I AMs": "I Am who I Am. I Am has sent you to me" (Exod. 3:14). Another example is seen in the Book of Isaiah. When Isaiah saw the Lord seated high upon the throne he hears the calling out of the Seraphs: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty" (Isa. 6:3). These references to God in three are the clues Augustine points to that manifest God's Triune nature.

Other examples in the Old Testament with regards to the work of the Triune God include a distinction in personhood as described by his work. Examples of God working include the Spirit of God filling the builders of the tabernacle with skill and knowledge (Exod. 31:3), or giving people the words of prophecy (Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 2 Chron. 24:20), and even people rebelling against the Spirit of God (Ps. 106:33). These, and other passages, speak about the Spirit of God as being God, as being person, as well as being sent out from God. Also within the Old Testament, the Word of God goes forth from God (Augustine and Dollen 2008). In terms of this study though, the most critical passage is found in the opening pages of Scripture where God creates humanity in his image.

### **Trinity Seen in the Act of Creation**

Scripture begins with God. Genesis 1 describes the Spirit of God hovering over the deep, and the word of God going out: “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). In this beginning Scripture reveals the plurality of God who is one. The Hebraic word used for God through out this creation narrative is *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), one of the most used names of God in the Old Testament. *Elohim* is the plural form of the word El, which is a generic word for God (Brown et al.). *El* means god; *elohim* means gods. When *Elohim* is used to refer to God, over two thousand times, it nearly always is used with singular word forms for its associated verbs, adjectives, and pronouns. Examples of *Elohim* at work can be seen in the first three verses of the Bible. God (*Elohim*) creates, the Spirit of God (*Elohim*) hovers, and God (*Elohim*) speaks. Each one of these verbs is singular, describing the action of *Elohim* (gods). Stanly J. Genz and Jay T. Smith describe this

plurality of God in the singular as: “the Father creates the world through the Son by the divine Spirit” (34). Scripture begins with a plurality of God creating as one.

The Jewish (non-Trinitarian) understanding of using *Elohim* for God in the plural is that it is a means of honoring God, similar to saying that God is the greatest God of them all. A non-Trinitarian understanding of God would denounce any understanding of the word *Elohim* as God being plural but rather *Elohim* refers to the totality of his deity and his supremacy over all of creation. While accepting the monotheistic distinctive with regards to God and his supremacy over all of creation, the opening pages of the Bible reveal the Trinitarian nature of God in more than just the use of the name *Elohim*. Most importantly the very act of creation reveals God is at work in three distinct persons.

The opening words of Scripture begin with God as the source, the one who conceives, and designs all things (Gen. 1:1). In Genesis 1:2, Scripture says that the Spirit of God hovered, making a distinction of personhood in God. God creates and the Spirit is present, blessing the creation that God calls into being (Bilezikian 17). Genesis 1:3 indicates another action of God is revealed as the Word of God by which creation comes into being (Kidner 58). The Gospel of John reveals who this Word is:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4).

Thus, in the opening words of Scripture, God is present as the Originator, the Spirit, and the spoken Word.

Interpreting the opening verses of Genesis through a Trinitarian lens is clearly a Christian perspective supported by theologians such as Hendrikus Berkhof as seen in his introduction of the Christian Faith (160). According to Berkhof, reading the Bible

through this Trinitarian lens reveals a God who Originates (in the beginning God—Father), a God that blesses and perfects (the Spirit of God), and a God who accomplishes (God spoke—the Word of God, Son), yet one God.

If God is Triune, as argued by historical Christianity, creation itself would reflect the plurality of personhood. This argument that creation reflects the creator is made in Psalm 19 which says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Ps. 19:1-3). Using Psalm 19’s declaration that creation reveals God, the Genesis account of creation can be used to gain insight into the nature of God. Reading Genesis 1:4-25, the order of creation is as follows:

- Day one—Light and darkness, day and night, evening and morning;
- Day two—Heaven and earth, the expanse above and below;
- Day three—Dry land and waters, earth and seas; plants and vegetation;
- Day four—Sun and moon, and stars;
- Day five—Creatures that swim in the ocean and birds that fly;
- Day six—Living creatures upon the earth.

Dr. Tom Pauley, chair of biology at Marshall University, observes that creation as described in the Bible is ordered in terms of a biological flow of life that fits the common understanding of life’s origins (i.e., light, water, algae, sea creatures, and higher complex animals). As pointed out by Leon Kass, a demotion of divinity of the created order can also be seen in the created order (26). The heavenly objects (sun, moon, and stars) are

made on the fourth day, a contrast to the ancient world's view of the divine as seen in Egypt's worship of the sun (28).

This account of creation also indicates that everything was created in a plurality. All works of creation are distinct, separate, different, yet they also indwell and influence the other. Morning gives way to evening, and evening to morning. Heaven and earth are distinctly different, yet heaven dwells in earth, and earth dwells in heaven. The seas surround the land, yet the lands surround the seas. The sun is not the moon; the earth is not heaven. The sea creatures are not land creatures; they are all separate and distinct yet at the same time influence one another and by that influence indwell the other. This idea of mutual indwelling is expressed well by Peter J. Leithart:

The world has the shape it has because it is created by the Triune God, who is a community of mutual indwelling—because the God who creates is the Father who is in the Son by the Spirit, the Son who is in the Father by the Spirit, the Father who is in the Spirit, and the Son who occupies the Spirit along with the Father. The Triune God is in the world, nearer to us than we are to ourselves, yet the world is also encompassed by his loving presence. He does have the whole world in his hands, even while he inhabits the whole world. For Christians, being saved means being caught up into this communion, indwelled by God and indwelling him, and being opened up so that other people have room in us and we in them. (143-44)

The implications of this world being created by the Triune God extends to all areas of creation. A primary area where the Triune nature of God is reflected in his created work is when he made man and woman in his image.

Genesis 1:26-27 describes God creating man and woman. This passage is one of the few places where the Hebrew word *Elohim* is matched with the plural pronouns; *us* and *our*. It reads, 'God said, "Let us make man [male and female] in our image after our likeness' (Gen. 1:26). God, *Elohim*, the one God in plural, creates humanity in plural,

man and woman. Bilezikian pauses and wonders at the awesomeness of humanity being created in the image of God:

God, the originator, the accomplisher, the protector creates this massive creation, so massive that it is filled with billions upon billions of stars and galaxies to the extent that we cannot even begin to grasp. Yet the greatest act of His creation was to create beings in His image. (34)

Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith argue that humanity being made in the “divine image involves a special standing, a future goal and a glorious fellowship in community” (1198). The special standing that Grenz and Smith speak about is being loved by God with the future goal being the believer’s transformation into Christlikeness. Both circumstances are manifested in the fellowship of community. Thus, ultimately, being made in the image of God means to be made for relationship:

Because God himself is triune, we are in the image of God only as we enjoy community with others. Only as we live in fellowship can we show forth what God is like. Ultimately, then, the image of God is a social reality. It refers to humans as beings-in-fellowship. As we live in love—that is, as we give expression to true community—we reflect the love that characterizes the Creator himself. And as we reflect God’s character, which is love, we also live in accordance with our own true nature. (1284-89)

Thus humanity’s need for community is linked to God’s triune nature. The next step in this study is to look at what God has done to redeem humanity. The argument is the same: Just as creation reflects the triune nature of God, so does his work of salvation.

### **Trinity Seen in the Act of Salvation**

Scripture talks about salvation being a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). Like the creation of the world, the new creation called into being by God reflects his triune nature. This understanding of salvation being the work of the triune God is expressed by Paul in Ephesians, which says, “For through him [the Son] we both have access in one



Spirit to the Father” (v. 2:18). This passage describes the working of both the Son and Spirit leading to a fellowship with the Father. Reading further on in Ephesians 2, Paul provides a number of images of what this fellowship with the God looks like:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:18-22 ESV)

In this section of Scripture, Paul reminds the reader of the human condition outside of God’s work. The words that Paul uses are “strangers and aliens.” Earlier in Ephesians 2, Paul adds a description: “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). The descriptive words of *separated*, *alienated*, and *without hope* reflect the created order in its separation and isolation from God without Christ. Christine D. Pohl defines strangers:

Strangers, in the strict sense, are those who are disconnected from basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world. The most vulnerable strangers are detached from family, community, church, work, and polity. This condition is most clearly seen in the state of homeless people and refugees. Others experience detachment and exclusion to lesser degrees. (*Making Room* 183-85)

Paul was telling these Roman citizens that they were strangers without God and that as strangers they were forever without hope and spiritually homeless. Paul then goes on to describe the work of God—from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit—as being brought near to God. In the Ephesians 2:18-22 passage Paul provides three images of being brought near: *citizens of the kingdom*, *members of the household*, and *stones of the holy temple*.

Each of these images are full of Old Testament analogies and are worthy of study beyond the scope of this project. With each image the terms of belonging increase. These images of belonging described by Paul in Ephesians 2:18-22 parallel the spaces of belonging described by Myers as *public*, *social*, *personal*, and *intimate* (*The Search to Belong* 460). *Citizenship* in the kingdom can be equated to the public and social spaces of belonging. Citizens of the same country share the same identity but may be unknown to each other. Their connecting point is the king who is near and grants to them their citizenship. Citizens belong together, but lack the deeper levels of belonging. *The household of God* can be equated to the personal space of belonging. A house is where a person lives with other people (family members) who know much about those living under the same roof. Myers describes this personal space of belonging as deep friendships reflected in common effort to seek out and spend time with the other (1271-82). Unlike the citizen who lives in the kingdom where God is near, in the household of God, God lives in close proximity. The last image that Paul uses is *the holy temple of the Lord*, which could be equated to the intimate space of belonging. Paul's description of the holy temple is one of mutual indwelling. He describes the temple being built upon the cornerstone of Christ: "being joined together" (v. 21). In a building, the stones that make up the wall are so intimately connected that though they keep their distinct shape as stones, they are seen in oneness as a wall. Each stone is built upon another stone, being mortared together, sharing a common burden. Believers are likewise intimately connected together. This intimate space of belonging is different from the kingdom, or the household. The purpose of the Holy Temple is where God dwells within. This is the intimate space of belonging. Salvation, which is the work of God—Father, Son and

Spirit, is about moving deeper into the spaces of belonging with God, which is mirrored in a similar movement among believers.

This corresponding movement into the intimate space of belonging with God and believers is seen in the words of Christ:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Jesus' prayer reflects a vertical relationship between believers and God: "that they also may be in us" (v. 21). This verticalness of salvation is a joyful celebration in relationship with God, literally enjoying the very essence of his being. In the Roman Catholic tradition this union with God is experienced through the Eucharist. According to Roman Catholic belief, the celebrated Eucharist is the real presence of Christ where bread and wine are transubstantiated into the real body and blood of Christ (*The Sacrament of the Eucharist* 1374-76). Baptists do not affirm transubstantiation, but they do affirm the verticalness of salvation where by faith believers enjoy the very real presence of Christ. However, according to Jesus' last words prior to his arrest in the garden, his prayer is not just for believers living in a verticalness of relationship with God but also the reality of a horizontal relationship with others as seen in verses 22 and 23. Thus, Baptists, as well as other Protestant traditions, often call the Lord's Table Communion, for it not only reflects the verticalness of people's relationship with God experienced through faith but also the horizontalness of a believer's salvation being worked out in community.

### **Living within Community as a Means of Grace**

The theological framework that drove this project was connecting humanity's deep need of relational community and belonging as a consequence of being made in the image of God. God is Triune: Father, Son, and Spirit. God as Triune means that the very being of God exists in relational community and everything God does is an outflow of his nature; thus he creates beings that reflect and enjoy this fellowship of God. Being made in God's image means that people are made to be relational beings who enjoy deep friendships. Human beings are created to enjoy not only fellowship with the Triune God but also intimate fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the best historical examples of this theological framework manifested in the life of a church is the Wesleyan class meeting.

The Wesleyan class meeting began in 1742 as a means to collect money to help pay for a recently built preaching house (Watson 378). As the plan to collect the penny donations was implemented leaders observed that many people connected to the early Methodists were not keeping the General Rules. This observation led to the creation of the class meeting as a means to "inquire how their souls prosper" (395). The formal creation of the class meeting was in 1742 around the collection of funds, but both John and Charles Wesley had already been experiencing and experimenting with small groups in the forms of the holy club, religious societies, and united societies. Clearly, John Wesley had a good idea as to what he was wanting to accomplish in those groups during the formation of the class meetings.

Kevin M. Watson describes the purpose of the class meeting:

A class meeting is a small group that is primarily focused on transformation and not information, where people learn how to interpret

their entire lives through the lens of the gospel, build a vocabulary for giving voice to their experience of God, and grow in faith in Christ. (190-92).

A key part to Watson's argument is that the transformational quality of the class meeting is what made them impactful and significantly different from contemporary small groups. Today's small groups, according to Watson, tend to be either forms of affinity groups or knowledge transfer groups both of which fail to ask the attendee, "Is it well with your soul?" He does not discount the need for teaching and learning but argues that the lack of spiritual vitality in America today is due to the lack of genuine discipleship that can only happen in the context of a type of small group that is concerned about each other's spiritual well-being. Watson's argument is that the transformational quality of a small group birthed the Methodist movement and is the means for a renewed spiritual vitality today. Watson adds a quote from Wesley that powerfully expresses the importance of the class meeting:

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection. And the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever. (709)

Watson argues, along with many other contemporary Christian leaders and studies, that small groups are key to spiritual renewal and church growth (153). His larger argument, though, is that the only small group that really works is the transformative type based upon the early Methodist example. The other models of small groups, that he identifies as affinity groups, information-driven groups, Bible studies, Sunday schools, and even small home churches, are not capable of providing the transformative change needed.

This distinction between the various types of small groups and claiming that his version of the class meeting is the type that will bring spiritual vitality is just one more example of the inorganic church, as compared to Myers' organic church. The inorganic church depends upon finding the right structure, study, building campaign, bylaws, or any other spiritual elixir that will somehow result in church growth and greater spiritual vitality of church's members. Watson repeats the generally accepted reasons as to why the class meeting died: the rise of Sunday school (information-based group) and rising affluence of Methodists, causing them "less comfortable talking to each other about the details of their lives as followers of Jesus Christ" (748). I disagree with this assessment. To be clear, I agree with Watson's primary assumption that close relationships are key in spiritual vitality. They are, using the words of Wesley, a means of grace. I disagree with Watson that these close relationships can be controlled or structured in terms of how he so easily blames and dismisses small groups that do not fit his model. This disagreement is not an opposition to structure, for churches need strategic planning, buildings, bylaws, and Bible study; instead, it is a different understanding as to what constitutes spiritual growth in terms of relationships being a means of grace.

If the means of grace represents how people encounter God and receive his benefits, then different Christian movements from the time of the early church to present could be seen as different discussions about understanding the means. For example,

- Legalism's means of grace is obedience to the law.
- Gnosticism's means of grace is having the right knowledge or philosophy.
- Roman Catholicism's means of grace are the sacraments administered by the church (e.g., confession, Eucharist, baptism, last rites, marriage).

- American cultural Christianity's means of grace is finding the right spiritual elixir to experience God and be more spiritual (e.g., what translation of the Bible to use, what type of leadership structure, qualifications of pastor, what studies to do, which mode of baptism to use, how to serve communion, what type of small groups are needed).

The Protestant Reformation describes the means of grace as faith that is defined by trust and belief in the historical work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Though theologically accurate, the Protestant understanding has often been lived out more like a legal fiction, causing an existential drift towards the search of a spiritual elixir. Watson is right to see the power of mutual caring relationships as being an important means of grace, though this key insight becomes obscured in his discussion as to why the class meeting died. The class meeting did not die because of a structural change (e.g., Sunday school) or because people were financially better off but because the underlining means of spiritual growth and transformation were not understood. The means of grace became something structural versus something relational. The argument of this study and the key difference between organic and inorganic church is that spiritual growth happens through an intimacy and vitality of relationship—with God and with others. In this regard Wesley's prudential means of grace" is exactly right.

Wesley said that the prudential means of grace were the everyday habits that grow in a person the dynamic holiness of walking with God (6657). In essence, what made the class meetings so important to the development of early Methodism and the spiritual vitality of people is that they provided the opportunity for people to grow and develop intimate spaces of belonging. Salvation, being whole and holy, involves the community

of Father, Son, and Spirit and experiencing God's grace and the relational being of God through intimate fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ. The key question is not what structure or elixir is needed but how to protect, respect, and provide the various spaces of belonging within the community of faith.

The sermon based small groups are not the magical small group structure that is going to change people's lives as opposed to a Beth Moore DVD-based Bible study. The sermon-based small groups are simply an opportunity for people to share themselves within the structure of God's Word. They are a means of inviting people towards a relational encounter with God through the enjoyment of each other. The research conducted in this study was not focused on the increased numbers attending but rather upon people's sense of belonging.

### **God's Law as a Reflection of God's Heart**

In an old story about the first century BC Rabbi Hillel the Elder who, when asked by a Gentile to explain the Torah while standing on one foot, responded by saying, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn" (*Babylonian Talmud* 31a). Thus, if the theological argument of God's Triune image infiltrates everything he has done and everything he is doing and shall do then this communal means of grace will be seen in the law given by God to the Israelites.

The Leviticus code contains many statutes that cover the details of everyday life from dress to food, as well as everything related to religious worship. The heart of the Leviticus code is chapter 19 where God sets the standard. He says to the people of Israel, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (v. 2). The verses that follow are a



commentary on holiness and talk about relationships. This commentary can be seen in verse 3 which talks about individuals' relationships with their parents. Verses 4 through 8 that talk about one's relationship with God, and verses 9 through 10 talk about relationship to the poor and outsiders. Verses 11 through 13 talk about neighbors. The passage goes on to talk about the less fortunate, those in court, siblings, and even those who are rich. After every section, when a law is given, the reason for the law is simply stated, "I am the Lord," which basically means this law is a reflection of God, the great I AM. Verses 9 and 10 are a good example of how the law is a reflection of God:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

The care for the stranger in terms of leaving the gleanings of the field is done because it is a reflection of God's own being, a God who does all things as an outflow of the communal relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The law being a reflection of God's Triune being goes back to the early discussion of the Triune nature of God seen in creation and salvation. Any theology that rejects a Triune understanding of God will struggle to explain why God created, gave the law, and saved. The only possible way to explain the acts of a non-triune God is by using some form of process theology, which makes the act of creation, giving the law, and salvation necessary for God's own actual becoming. This line of thinking leads to creation itself being a necessary act of God in order for God to become a God of love, for love cannot exist in isolation. However, if God is Triune, then that God is love, for love itself exists in the very relational being of God. Therefore, creation is not an act of

necessity of God in order for God to become something more than he already is; rather creation is an outflow of a preexistent God of love. Creation, therefore, is a natural consequence as per God's preexistent being. Likewise, God's law, both natural and revealed, is a reflection of this Triune God whose very being is expressed through the prescribed relational way of life outlined in Leviticus 19:1-18. The heart of God's law begins with the command to be holy as God is holy and then proceeds to describe relationships, all of which ends with the command in verse 18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." After which the Lord gives the reason why: "I am the LORD." God's law, like God's creation and salvation, is an outflow of a God whose very being is relational community.

### **The Context of Huntington, West Virginia**

Huntington, West Virginia, was founded as a hub for the C&O railroad in 1873. Due to its strategic location for the railroad at the end of the nineteenth century, the city quickly grew to a population of thirty thousand by the start of the twentieth century. By 1930 the city's population grew to a size of eighty thousand. Huntington was booming. It was first in the nation to get an amusement park and second in the nation to get electric rail cars. The amusement park (turning 115 years old this year) was constructed to give people a reason to ride the rail cars. Huntington was a young up-and-coming city described in its early years by its founder, the railroad magnet, Collis P. Huntington (1821-1900) "as the next New York" ("Huntington"). Huntington continued to enjoy rapid economic and population growth well into the early 1960s, reaching its peak population of ninety thousand. During the 1960s though, things began to change. Huntington experienced a number of events that has caused it today to rank as one of the

worst places to live in the United States. The most obvious change was the loss of jobs. Huntington's growth was driven by steel processing, shipping, and manufacturing. When jobs left, so did people. Today, the population is at forty-eight thousand people, the result of sixty years of decline. Another factor is the airplane crash that took place in November 1970, killing not only the Marshall football team but many leaders of the community. With the thirty-seven members of the Marshall football team that died, so did twenty-five boosters, doctors, lawyers, and leaders in a community already struggling with decline. The impact of this crash can be felt today and seen most evidently how Huntington's city landscape has been frozen in time. Another factor causing decline are the powerful cultural and social shifts that have touched nearly every community in America. Many would cite violence or drugs as the causes of the cultural shifts but Robert Putnam names a different culprit. He argues that social decline is a result of the loss of what he calls "social capital and civic engagement" (40). Putnam's research is fifteen years old, but what he describes the loss of social capital are indicators of the splintered community found in Huntington. His book describes the loss of social capital:

Surveys of average Americans in 1965, 1975, and 1985, in which they recorded every single activity during a day—so—called "time-budget" studies—indicate that since 1965 time spent on informal socializing and visiting is down (perhaps by one-quarter) and time devoted to clubs and organizations is down even more sharply (by roughly half). Membership records of such diverse organizations as the PTA, the Elks club, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, labor unions, and even bowling leagues show that participation in many conventional voluntary associations has declined by roughly 25 percent to 50 percent over the last two to three decades. Surveys show sharp declines in many measures of collective political participation, including attending a rally or speech (off 36 percent between 1973 and 1993), attending a meeting on town or school affairs (off 39 percent), or working for a political party (off 56 percent). A drop of roughly one-third in social trust since 1972. Slumping membership has afflicted all sorts of groups, from sports clubs and professional associations to literary discussion groups and labor unions....

Gallup polls report that church attendance fell by roughly 15 percent during the 1960s and has remained at that lower level ever since, while data from the National Opinion Research Center suggest that the decline continued during the 1970s and 1980s and by now amounts to roughly 30 percent. (46)

The point of this quote is to show the long downward trend of towns, such as Huntington, ceasing to be communities. The consequences of the loss of community cohesion are felt in Huntington, West Virginia. As a state, West Virginia has the highest unadjusted mortality rate (1,161 per 100,000) in the country. It has the fourth highest poverty rate in the country (Krishnamsetty). A national study shows that child hunger and poverty have increased 6 percent over the past eight years and is now at 27 percent. In the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, West Virginia ranks last. The index is based upon measurements and polls in the categories of life evaluation, emotional health, work environment, physical health, healthy behaviors and basic access. In all areas measured, West Virginia ranked last among all fifty states except for the category of work environment, where it ranked forty-ninth, one ahead of Mississippi. According to the Gallup-Healthways Index, “No Americans had as negative an outlook about their future as West Virginians, who rated their projected life in five years the lowest” (Allen, Frolich, and Hess). According to a June 2015 prevention policy report from the organization Trust for America’s Health, West Virginia has the highest death rate per injury (“Facts Hurt”). The primary form of death from injury is drug overdose. The overdose rate in Huntington is fourteen times the national average. The ratio of drug-exposed newborns to healthy newborns is 1:4. According to local doctors, Huntington has the highest rate of new Hep B cases in the country and number second highest cases of new Hep C. In July 2015, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported current national

unemployed percentages, showing that West Virginia's unemployment is the highest in the nation at 7.4 percent ("West Virginia Unemployment"). Another July 2015 report released by CNBC ranks West Virginia at forty-ninth for businesses ("West Virginia Ranks 49th"). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, West Virginia has the highest rate of children entering foster care in the nation at 8.6 per 1,000 (Child Welfare Outcomes"). In a June 2015 report on child well-being, West Virginia ranks forty-second in the nation. The number of children living in poverty has risen 15 percent in the state since 2008. The current rate of child poverty is 27 percent ("Report: More WV Kids in Poverty").

Coupled with the various statewide issues, Huntington continues to be known as the unhealthiest and fattest city in the nation with obesity rates of 40 percent (Walters). In June 2015, a Hollywood reality television show began working towards the production of a program about obese people. When the mayor of Huntington, Steve Williams, expressed his displeasure over the television studio's plans, the director, Jamie Parks, tweeted, "Trying to create a tv show about the fattest town in America & just got an email from their obese mayor and homeboy is HIGHLY offended. #yikes" ("TV Show"). In 2014 the city of Huntington brought in a consultant to talk about what the city needs to do to change its image and increase tourism. The consultant reported, "Huntington has everything a city could want. It has a university with sports, good health services, shopping, nearness to major cities - it has just one problem, the people of Huntington don't believe in it" (Perry). The consultant's evaluation, along with the various other reports and studies reveal Huntington, West Virginia as a hurting and splintered community.

Here is a summary of the information already presented:

- The highest unadjusted mortality rate in the nation,
- The fourth highest poverty rate in the nation,
- Growing child poverty now at 27 percent,
- The lowest well-being index, making West Virginia the most miserable place

to live in the country,

- The highest death rate per injury,
- The highest drug overdose rate,
- The highest increases of new hepatitis cases,
- 25 percent of newborns drug affected,
- The highest unemployment rate in the nation,
- The forty-ninth ranked state for businesses,
- The highest rate in the nation of children entering foster care, and
- Ranking as the unhealthiest and obese city in the nation.

These collected reports and studies only show part of the issues that Huntington faces.

They do not show the racism, the prejudice, and the fragmentation of the community of

Huntington in terms of connectedness. Huntington also experiences a segregation

between those that are wealthy and those that are not. Some in Huntington have good

jobs provided by the hospitals or university. Due to their affluence, they experience a

very different Huntington than the one described by the various studies. However, many

in Huntington do not have good jobs and instead live in poverty. These two groups do not

meet. Not only does a disparity of wealth exist between them, but also a disparity of

relationships.

The churches in Huntington, West Virginia, are not immune to the social decline and the splintering of community. The population decline and economic poverty are reflected in the churches. Losing half a city in terms of population means that most churches over those same fifty to sixty years have lost half their congregations or more, especially when coupled with the cultural shifts of fewer people going to church. This down turn of churches in the Huntington area is reflected in the decline of the number of American Baptist churches located in Huntington. From 2002 to 2014 the number of American Baptist Churches located in the city of Huntington went from six to two. Within the last eight years, the American Baptist pastors that left a Huntington area church did not just leave the church, they left the ministry. Clearly a further study needs to be conducted in regards to the well being of the churches in Huntington, West Virginia. The purpose of this anecdotal information is to show the various struggles within the Huntington Christian community. New Baptist Church is not immune from these struggles.

I think that a sermon-based, small-group study is relevant in Huntington's current state of affairs because it draws on the deep theological promise and directive powerfully echoed in such authors as Leithart, Myers, Pohl, Watson, and Seamands. The theological promise that ties all of this together is that God exists in community and that through God's work of salvation—from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit—men and women are brought into that great dance:

What is new and revolutionary is that now we too, through faith in Christ, are enfolded in that divine fellowship and join in the dance! God has not left us outside the circle of his Trinitarian life. We are invited, as it were, inside the circle of intimate, delightful, Trinitarian love. (Seamands 554)

Therefore, if God joyfully surrenders and makes room for men and women, believers in the Triune God are to make room for others:

The nature of the universe as I've described it [the mutual indwelling of the trinity] encourages an ethic of self-giving love; if we are going to live in accord with the shape of things, we need to adopt a stance of availability, of openness to others and willingness to enter when others open to us. (Leithart 112)

The model that God used to save humanity, based upon who he is, is to bring men and women into community with Him. God practiced a radical hospitality (*Making Room* Pohl 251). Therefore, since this practice of radical hospitality is God's way of doing things, the best way for the church to do things is to imitate how God does them, which means for the church also to practice radical hospitality. This theological conviction of following God's example of radical hospitality is why sermon-based small groups is a worthy study in the climate of Huntington, West Virginia, because, according to Osborne, sermon-based small groups are the best tool available to grow affinity among people (15).

Small groups are not new. In fact, the first small group was Adam and Eve and the second small group was Cain and Abel. Both examples show that nothing magical exists about small groups. Adam and Eve's small group error was groupthink, meaning that if everyone in the group thinks that eating the apple is ok, then it must be ok. Abel's group error was the inability to deal with conflict in a competitive situation. The point of the above simple illustration is to show that putting people together in small groups does not necessarily result in something positive:

Groupthink occurs when a group values harmony and coherence over accurate analysis and critical evaluation. It causes individual members of the group to unquestioningly follow the word of the leader and it strongly discourages any disagreement with the consensus. (Dillion)



This study is different from contemporary small group models in that at its core it provides a culture for people to connect. The purpose of this study was not to grow numbers, or to have people invest more time at the church, or do an intense study of a book, or sit and watch a DVD. The purpose of this study was to create an environment for people to be known and to know.

### **Research Design**

The overarching theology of the ministry intervention and study is that since God himself exists within and is defined by community, then humanity too must also exist in healthy community to come alive. An anecdotal story about the importance of community and the dynamics of a group is told by C. S. Lewis. In Lewis' book *The Four Loves*, he tells a story of how he and two other friends (Charles and Roland) always spent time together. Charles died, and Lewis expected to spend more time with Roland, but, in fact, the opposite was true:

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald.... We possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases. (61)

The point of the story is that people need one another to more fully bring out who they are meant to be. If the gospel is the seed and the hearts of people are the soil (see Matt. 13) then community is the fertilizer that provides the enrichment needed for the seed to grow. Healthy community is messy as expressed in Proverbs 14:4: "Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest." Through both the good parts and difficult parts of community are the kingdom qualities

of forgiveness, patience, generosity, and compassion manifested. The opposite, noncommunity, fits Randy C. Alcorn's description of hell:

Hell will be agonizingly dull, small, and insignificant, without company, purpose, or accomplishment. It will not have its own stories; it will merely be a footnote on history, a crack in the pavement. As the new universe moves gloriously onward, Hell and its occupants will exist in utter inactivity and insignificance, an eternal non-life of regret and—perhaps—diminishing personhood. (729).

The purpose statement of New Baptist Church is, "We are a community of faith passionate about growing in God's word and being a blessing where God has placed us." Being community is essential to the church's purpose. Thus, the whole point of this study was to provide a means to invite the formation of community to happen within New Baptist Church, using an intervention through small groups mini-communities.

### **The Importance and Use of Small Groups**

Reviewing the literature on groups provides helpful categories in understanding different types of groups. Depending upon the perspective, a number of ways are used to define groups. From a social science perspective, a group is a collection of individuals. This social science perspective is further defined by Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Frederick Zander:

A group is a collection of individuals who have relations to one another that make them interdependent to some significant degree. The term group refers to a class of social entities having in common the property of interdependence among their constituent members. (68)

From a psychological perspective a group is defined as "one that is psychologically significant for the members, to which they relate themselves subjectively for social comparison and the acquisition of norms and values ... that they privately accept membership in, and which influences their attitudes and behavior" (Turner 2). According

to Donelson R. Forsyth a group is defined as “two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships” (3). Groups can include friends, families, softball teams, or work-related special interest groups. Groups can form through shared identity, the need to get something done, or simply as a result of necessary interdependence (Brown 28).

In very broad strokes groups are described as being planned or emergent. Cartwright and Zander define planned groups as ones that are formed for a purpose. Emergent groups are those that come into existence relatively spontaneously, “where people find themselves together in the same place, or where the same collection of people gradually come to know each other through conversation and interaction over a period of time” (47). As Forsyth writes, “People *found* planned groups, but they often *find* emergent groups” (6). Within each type of group are further levels of organization and cooperation, depending upon intended tasks or purpose. Various groups include command groups, task groups, functional groups, interest groups, friendship groups, and reference groups (i.e., social cliques).

### **Defining the Type of Small Group Used**

For the purpose of this study, the sermon-based small groups most resembled planned friendship groups with an interest in Scripture. This group structure required thought towards specific goals when the small groups were organized. One goal was to provide opportunities for friendship. The creation of these opportunities was done by providing both a fellowship time as well as constructed questions asked of group members to allow them to share snap shot stories of themselves. However, the group is more than a social club. The bulk of the meeting is a discussion and enjoyment of

Scripture. Even though the expressed purpose of this ministry intervention is not a deeper knowledge of the Bible, the enjoyment of Scripture is a critical component in the creation of community. Lewis intuitively recognizes the importance of a shared common purpose in his description of friendship: “Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest” (*Four Loves* 61). In the terms of this study, the bonds of friendship are formed around an enjoyment and engagement with Scripture. For the purpose of this ministry intervention, I prefer the description of enjoyment of Scripture over the more used phrase *the study of Scripture*. The enjoyment of Scripture implies a personal heart and relational engagement with God’s Word versus a cognitive learning. Both are important and have their place, and for the purpose of providing Sunday-morning attenders a capacity to connect more deeply at New Baptist Church, the right purpose to stress is enjoying God’s Word as that point of focus around which the groups organize. In terms of social science, this intuitive understanding of relationships as expressed by Lewis is discussed as the importance of purpose or common tasks for the development of healthy group cohesion (Group Dynamics 45). Scripture is the third object for people around which to meet and enjoy.

The focus of this dissertation has been on the importance and benefits of community (in the form of groups). The importance of groups has been described as being significant in their capacity to grow and mature individuals, reflective of God’s own being and central to the health and care of the soul. Groups have also been argued as the only way out of the struggles now facing the collective community of Huntington, West Virginia. The reason why groups are seen as a solution to many of Huntington’s ills is because through the experience of community the virtues of love, generosity, patience

and compassion are produced. However, as seen in all good gifts from God, due to human sin and brokenness, that which has been given by God for good and enjoyment can easily turn to great harm and debasement. The gift of community is no different. As great potential can come from groups, so does great harm. Groups can be abusive, oppressive, and emotionally damaging to some of their members. Groups can be sources of interpersonal conflict and create unhealthy boundaries of both exclusion to those on the outside and unwelcomed intimacy for those on the inside. Groups can also warp the critical thinking of group members and impact their decision making. A way to help mitigate the possible negative consequences of groups is to develop methods of healthy group cohesion (“Avoiding Groupthink”).

### **Group Cohesion**

Cohesion has been defined as “group members’ inclination to forge social bonds, resulting in members sticking together and remaining united” (Carron and Brawley 89). As a result group cohesion is a critical variable in the success of nearly any group. In broad categories cohesion has been composed of three primary factors. Janet McLeod and Kathryn von Treuer define the primary variables of group cohesion:

- (1) attraction to the group (analogous to interpersonal attraction or social cohesion), which is essentially a liking for the group or the group members,
- (2) commitment to the task (analogous to task commitment or task cohesion), which is the extent to which individual member goals are shared with or enabled by the group, and
- (3) group pride, which is the extent to which group members experience positive affect from being associated with what the group represents or the status of the group.
- (4)

Using this information in this study means that certain components were necessary to achieve relative success in sermon-based small groups. These components were

- Clear communication about the length of the study. Being very clear about the length of the project (4 weeks), and promising that these sermon-based groups were an experiment frees people up from the worry that church is being changed without their input or that they may become trapped in a bad situation.

- Clear communication about the purpose of the study. The communicated purpose of the study was to enjoy the fellowship of others and God's word. The purpose of the small groups was not to form deep covenantal relationships but to serve as a means to get to know someone else in a very broad way.

- Quality leaders. Osborne provides descriptions of the type of sermon based-small-group leaders that help achieve group cohesion. The two primary characteristics are spiritual warmth and relational warmth (124). Spiritual warmth is defined simply as a growing relationship with Jesus. Relational warmth is defined as someone whom people like. Osborne cautions the use of people who lack relational warmth as group leaders. He describes people who lack relational warmth as having low social skills, low emotional intelligence, or are spiritually prideful (126).

One area of group cohesion that needs some discussion is the emotional intelligence necessary among individuals not only for group cohesion but also for building and maintaining healthy relationships. According to Myra M. Beam, those teams that had a higher Bar-On Emotional Quotient saw a corresponding relationship to team cohesion:

Results of this analysis showed that there was a moderately positive correlation ( $r=.415$ ) between the individuals Total EQ score and their team's rating. This finding was significant ( $p=0.05$ ) and supported the hypothesis that Emotional Intelligence was related to team ratings by making teams more cohesive.

Many details can be planned in order for there to be positive group cohesion (e.g., quality of leaders, clear communication), but the group members own emotional health has impact upon the larger group.

Patrick Carnes talks more about relational competences than emotional intelligence. He argues that sexual addiction is a product of a person being unable to form and keep relationships, especially intimate ones. Since a large part of sexual addiction is an emotional disorder connected to a person's inability to experience healthy and nonsexual relational intimacy, a key part of dealing with sexual intimacy is learning relational competencies. The primary relational competencies that he discusses are honesty, nurturing, vulnerability, presence, initiative, and keeping one's word (264-68). The ability to grow relationally involves more than just having the opportunity for relationships but also having the personal capacity to grow in them.

### **Data Collection and Type of Research**

In conducting this study, different types of research were considered. A qualitative approach was selected over quantitative because I believe the only way to understand and evaluate the impact of the sermon-based small groups was through an interpretive narrative approach. A quantitative research would have been focused on a before-and-after measurement with regards to church attendance beyond the Sunday morning worship. The goal of increasing greater church participation among Sunday-only-attenders would have been shortsighted. Attendance is not necessarily a measurement of a person's felt sense of belonging. Seeking to have attenders participate at a higher level within the church was not the goal of this study. Theologically, the purpose of the ministry intervention and its study is to measure people's feeling of

belonging and to provide people opportunities to move to a deeper space of belonging if so desired. The goal was for people to become more whole and holy through a deeper fellowship. To say this thought differently, the goal of the study was not to have people do more things at church, but to invite people to belong. Counting before-and-after numbers does not measure the sense of belonging being sought. Therefore, a qualitative study was selected with the goal of measuring people's sense of belonging through narrative primarily gathered in focus groups. In this study the assumption that one-time-a-week church attenders do not feel a sense of belonging while those who attend multiple times a week do feel a sense of belonging had to be suspended. A different assumption was possible. Conceivably, Sunday-morning-only-attenders feel very much a part of New Baptist Church or that within their faith journey, due to past experiences, being a part of a church within the public space was what they required at that moment. These are the type of things that needed to be measured and the only way to do so was through hearing the voice of those who participated.

At the start of the study, a decision had to be made as to whether this qualitative research study should be conducted as being grounded or phenomenological. A phenomenological approach would focus on the shared phenomenon of the sermon-based small groups seeking to understand how that shared experience impacted the people who participated in the groups. The goal of phenomenological qualitative research is "to describe the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon" (Starks and Trinidad 1374). A grounded qualitative research study was selected instead because it provided the best approach of hearing from the participants their sense of belonging to New Baptist Church both before and after experiencing the sermon-based small groups and to



understand why they felt the way they did. Gaining an understanding of people's sense of belonging (the theory) is grounded in the experience of sermon-based small groups (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 184).

### **Focus Group Protocol**

The information was gathered primarily through the use of a focus group. Additional data was gathered through private interviews and follow-up conversations for clarification. A standardized set of questions was used in the focus group allowing for discussion to emerge. The protocol for the focus group built upon each research question and can be found in Appendix C. The participants in the focus group were selected with a purposeful goal of having a diversity of people in terms of individual life stages and some connection to New Baptist Church. The focus group included eleven individuals. Before the first focus group, an informed letter of consent was read and signed by each member (see Appendix F). The focus group met twice, once at the start of the study and another time at the end of the study. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded from which a transcript was produced. All participants of the focus group were relatively new to New Baptist Church, having been connected to the church for three years or less. No one who was a part of the original church merger was a part of the focus group.

### **Voluntary and Anonymous Church Survey**

A voluntary church survey was taken at both the start of the sermon-based small groups and at the completion of the sermon-based small groups (see Appendix E). The purpose of the survey was to measure congregational perception around topics of community (theological, ecclesiological, and personal). According to Vicki G Morwitz

and Gavan J. Fitzsimons, survey questions themselves can have behavioral impact upon survey participants. Thus, though not a part of the study, the mere fact of providing the survey to people was recognized as having possible impact even upon those who just read the survey but never returned it (64).

### **Summary**

The theological foundation of this study is that God himself exists in a community described as Trinity and everything that God does is an outflow of his Triune being. Thus the creation, the law, and salvation all reflect the Triune God. If the Triune nature of God is reflected in all that he does, then humanity finds its identity, purpose and being within a community described by Pohl as having radical hospitality and making room for each other (*Making Room* 1778). Thus, a purpose of church, another creation of God, is to be a place of belonging for the people of God. The goal of this study was to understand and measure people's felt sense of belonging as experienced at New Baptist Church as defined by Myers' spaces of belonging. Through the use of sermon-based small groups the study explored ways to create opportunities for people to find community. Data was gathered through the use of a before-and-after focus group, as well as a pre-and poststudy survey. The importance of this study extends beyond the needs of New Baptist Church and out into the larger area of Huntington, West Virginia.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Problem and Purpose**

The problem that this study sought to explore and to find answers for is about people discovering community at New Baptist Church. A large portion of the church congregation participates only on a Sunday morning. Recognizing that many of the Sunday-morning-only attenders may have strong bonds of community outside of the local church, there are possibly others that desire to experience a deeper sense of belonging at New Baptist Church but are unable to do so for some reason. The study sought to expose areas of church culture that kept strangers who were longing for a home from finding one.

The purpose of the study was to evaluate, by means of a focus group, the use of sermon-based small groups, surveys, and post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer times as effective means of providing opportunities for repeat attenders to move from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging at New Baptist Church.

#### **Research Questions**

The purpose was accomplished through research conducted using a pre/postintervention focus group around the following three basic questions. These questions and the rationale in asking them follow.

##### **Research Question #1**

Before and after the study, what were the levels of felt belonging among Sunday-morning-only repeat attenders at New Baptist Church as measured by their feelings of being welcomed and accepted, being known, and being appreciated?

Theologically, if community of mutual submission is so important for people to become who they were created to be, then logically the church needs to be concerned about the quality of community existent within its membership and ministry. Myers points out in his books that this community of deepening friendship and intimacy cannot be artificially constructed but must be something organic, which is grown in local communities of faith. Myers describes what an organic community looks like where spaces of belonging are present.

Healthy environments are vital—alive. They are not inanimate—dead. When places encourage community to emerge spontaneously, they have motion, emotion, and a living spirit. The goal is not to manufacture community, nor is the goal to build programs. The hope is to watch living community emerge naturally and to collaborate with its environment in helpful, healthy ways. (*Organic Community* 316-19)

Thus, the beginning point of this study involves some measurement with regards to how connected people feel using Myers' defined spaces of belonging (public, social, personal, intimacy). The basic means used to gauge a person's self-perception of belonging are through the felt experiences of

- Being welcome versus being shunned or, worse yet, being ignored;
- Being known versus feeling invisible; and,
- Being appreciated versus feeling unneeded or unwanted.

### **Research Question #2**

Before and after the study, what were the levels of perceived opportunities to relationally connect with other people among Sunday-morning-only repeat attenders as measured by felt relational needs being met or unmet, a capacity to express structured opportunities to fellowship with other people, and a theological awareness of the importance of Christianity community?

The purpose of this question comes out of the awareness that people have multiple reasons why they either may not desire to connect more deeply at a local church or may not be able to connect more deeply at a local church. Some of the multiple reasons as to why some people do not connect very deeply may have to do with their own capacities for community, or they do not want to connect due either to meaningful relationships elsewhere and so not having an emotional need or having gone through much pain in a church elsewhere and being wary of forming another emotional bond. Lack of church communication may also contribute to reasons why a person may not feel connected to a church. A person may want to connect to a church but just simply not know how to do so. In addition, a local church could just plain be emotionally stunted and be relationally closed off to newer people. The point is that the possibilities as to why people do not connect are many. The purpose of this question was to help understand key factors within New Baptist Church that help or hinder people in their sense of belonging.

Asking if their felt relational needs are being met or unmet revealed if a Sunday-morning-only attender wanted to foster a deeper sense of belonging with people in the church or not. Their relational needs being met was an indication that they were content to be a Sunday-morning-only attender, and if they did not believe that their relational needs were met revealed that further exploration was needed to discover why.

Asking if they were able to express structured opportunities present in the church for people to grow in relationships measured how well the church had communicated opportunities of belonging to people. This question sought to look past people's felt needs and discover if they have awareness of the possible means of relationally connecting at the church. Their ability to express some means of how a person could

become more connected to the church helped to isolate some of the possible reasons as to why a person may not connect well at the church.

Probing people's theological awareness about the importance of Christian community exposed any assumptions that may have hindered people's ability or willingness to develop meaningful relationships at the church. The theological weight of this study has argued and rests upon the criticalness of Christian community, yet some people may never relationally connect to a church because they have never even realized that a purpose of a church is to be a community of faith. A person's capacity to articulate at some level the importance of community within the local church helped narrow the field in terms of why people do not connect. If action follows belief, then very possibly the action of not connecting is following the belief that church has been understood in some way other than expressed here in the study.

### **Research Question #3**

Before and after the study, what other factors may have contributed to Sunday-morning-only attenders' sense of belonging or not belonging? This last question was open-ended in the awareness that other factors may be contributing to people's sense of belonging or their lack of finding meaningful relationships at New Baptist Church.

### **Population and Participants**

The study was conducted at New Baptist Church located in Huntington, West Virginia. Public invitations were made to the entire congregation of New Baptist Church to participate in the study (see Appendix G). The study had four different levels of participation: (1) sermon series for all attending the Sunday morning service, (2)

anonymous surveys, (3) volunteer participation in Wednesday evening small groups, and (4) selected individuals participating in a focus group.

### **Sunday Morning Attendance**

A large purpose of the study was to explore the theological importance of community. The teaching about the importance of community was primarily done through the Sunday morning sermon. The sermon was presented as a series on the first two chapters of Philippians. Each Sunday morning sermon's notes were provided with the small group questions for Wednesday evenings (see Appendix A).

### **Voluntary and Anonymous Church Survey**

An important source of data was voluntary pre/poststudy church survey that consisted of ten questions (see Appendix E). The questions in the survey probed people's theological understanding of community, their personal sense of belonging at New Baptist Church, and their personal initiative in welcoming strangers. Before and after survey results were compared using both paired and unpaired *t*-tests.

### **Wednesday Evening, Sermon-Based Small Groups**

Another level of participation was attending a Wednesday evening, sermon-based small group. The sermon-based small groups were open to all people age 18 and above. Public invitations to participate were made from the pulpit at every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening service two weeks prior to the start of the small groups. Invitations to participate in the small groups were also placed upon the communication screens in the sanctuary. Small group sign-up sheets were placed in the lobby for two weeks. Inserts were also included with each bulletin for two weeks. In

addition to these public invitations, private invitations were made to people who were Sunday-only attenders by telephone calls.

Prior to the start of the Wednesday evening, sermon-based small groups a total of nine group leaders were recruited to lead the various small groups. Using the facilitator instructions guide, I met with the group leaders prior to the start of the study in order to clarify the expectations and Wednesday sermon-based small group objectives (see Appendix B). A purposeful diversity was sought in selecting the nine group leaders.

### **Prestudy and Poststudy Focus Groups**

An important part of this study was the collection of research data through the use of a focus group. The participants in the focus group were selected with a purposeful goal of having a diversity of people in terms of individual life stages and some connection to New Baptist Church. The focus group included eleven individuals. Before the first focus group, an informed letter of consent was read and signed by each member (see Appendix F). The focus group met twice, once at that start of the study and another time at the end of the study. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded from which a transcript was produced. All participants of the focus group are relatively new to New Baptist Church, having been connected to the church for three years or less. No one who was a part of the original church merger was a part of the focus group.

### **Design of Study**

As stated, the purpose of the study was to gauge how successful sermon-based small groups effectively provide small group participants a sense of belonging at New Baptist Church. The data collection focused upon the participants' sense of belonging both before and after the small groups. In addition to the focus group, a voluntary and



anonymous church survey was conducted both before and after the study to provide additional insight into people's sense of belonging at New Baptist Church.

After two weeks of advertisement and planning, the small groups began. Each Sunday morning message contained a half sheet of notes. On the back were homework questions/reflections as a means of privately responding to the sermon (see Appendix A). These homework questions formed the structure for the following Wednesday evening small group. These sermon-based small groups on Wednesday lasted an hour for a continuous four weeks. At the end of the four weeks, another focus group was conducted as well as a poststudy survey.

The phases of the project were as follows:

- Group leader selection and training (two-week process that involved a Sunday afternoon for training);
- Advertisement of sermon-based small groups (two-week process);
- A voluntary and anonymous church survey conducted both before and after the study;
- Four-week ministry intervention of sermon-based small groups with a focus group on both the first evening of the event and the last evening of the event,
- An informational question-and-answer time with regards to New Baptist Church. This meeting was open to all and took place one week after the end of the small groups.

The heart of the study is community, thus the data sought was in regards to the quality of community being experienced at New Baptist Church. The data collected is grounded in a shared event in such a way to theorize why people connect or do not

connect to community. Thus, the research design followed a grounded qualitative research model using a structured focus group as the primary means of data collection.

### **Instrumentation**

Two types of instrumentation was used to gather research data: a structured focus group and congregational survey. The structured focus group was the primary means of data collection. The focus group was conducted using a protocol that reflected the goals as expressed in the research questions (see Appendix C). One focus group occurred at the start of the study and one focus group met at the end of the study. Eleven people participated in the focus group, all of whom were relatively new to the church. Both sessions were recorded from which a transcription was made for poststudy analysis.

### **Expert Review**

The dissertation committee assigned to this project conducted the expert review. This group included Dr. Thomas Tumblin, Professor of Leadership and Associate Provost for Global Initiatives and Academic Affairs; Dr. Milton Lowe, Director of Networks for the Beeson International Center; and, Dr. Ellen Marmon, Associate Professor of Christian Discipleship and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program.

### **Variables**

The dependent variable was people's felt sense of belonging to New Baptist Church. The goal of the ministry intervention was to shift this variable from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging. To achieve this purpose, the primary independent variables were the Sunday morning sermon, the notes taken to the small groups, and the quality of the group facilitators. There were confounding variables that kept people from being able to participate on a Wednesday night.

### **Data Collection**

Data was gathered through the use of a voluntary church survey and focus groups. The survey provided a broad measurement of people's perceptions in terms of their theological assumptions regarding Christian community, the quality of community at New Baptist Church, and how responsive they themselves have been in welcoming strangers. The survey results were recorded into a database and exported to a spreadsheet for analysis.

Data collection also involved the focus groups. Prior to the sermon-based small groups meeting, based upon those who signed up, I privately contacted eleven people requesting if I could meet with them after the Wednesday evening study. These eleven became my focus group. The focus group meeting was structured using the protocol questions and was recorded. The recording was transcribed for data analysis. Any important topics that were not explored in the focus groups were covered through private interviews. These conversations were not recorded but were summarized as notes after the interviews. If any significant themes were discussed during the focus groups that required further verification, then private interviews with notes were utilized. During the four weeks of the study, I requested updates from the group leaders using general questions with regards to their group processes in e-mails in order to have a written record of the communication for data analysis. After the four weeks of the study, a question-and-answer time was conducted using observation to evaluate any added benefit of the study.

## Data Analysis

After the completion of the month-long study with its interviews and transcribed data in hand, I began studying the data. The model I used was the one described by John W. Creswell in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*:

- Step 1 for data analysis was organizing the data in terms of focus group transcripts, e-mail communications with leaders, and notes from private interviews.
- Step 2 was to read and know the data. Creswell suggests reading and rereading that data multiple times to get a sense of what is being communicated (3505).
- Step 3 in the data analysis was describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes. This process of describing, classifying and interpreting the data is the heart of the analysis by which various codes or categories emerge. Coding is finding the main categories of information that relate to the research being conducted by winnowing out the information that is not used in the qualitative study (3532). From these categories of information, major themes are sought that relate to the study. Creswell makes the point of looking closely at such things as narratives, contradictions, silences, and even metaphors used by the participants in the focus group as sources of information.
- Step 4 was to interpret the data. Interpreting the data involves communicating the lessons learned and answers the question of what the data means. In a grounded qualitative study interpreting the data is “engaging in selective coding and interrelate the categories to develop a story of propositions” (3636).

- Step 5 represents and visualizes the data. Once the data has been sifted enough to define meaning, the work shifts to communicate the results in such a way that also illustrates the various levels of abstraction.

The data from the surveys was analyzed using paired and unpaired two-tailed *t*-tests as a means of identifying statistically significant changes between the before and after surveys. The first step in data collection was recording each survey into a database. From this database all information was exported into a spreadsheet for data analysis. Paired *t*-tests were run on surveys with matching digits. Unpaired *t*-tests were also run between all before-and-after surveys. Additional *t*-tests were conducted, comparing the initial survey responses from those who participated in Wednesday evening studies and those who did not. In addition, simple comparison of positive or negative responses on the survey was used as a means of data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A number of actions were taken to ensure that all ethical considerations were taken into account. These actions included the following:

- Formal approval from the Board of Deacons and from them a vote taken at a business meeting for formal church approval (see Appendix H),
- Church announcement and invitation to participate in study (see Appendix G),
- Informed consent regarding the voluntary and anonymous church survey (see Appendix D),
- Informed consent of focus group participants (see Appendix F), and
- Institutional review board approval.

All information shared by the participants gathered through the survey, the focus group or private interviews was erased (audio recordings or files) or burned (paper notes) following the dissertation approval. In addition, once the dissertation was approved, an evening service at New Baptist Church was devoted to the lessons learned portion of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### **Problem and Purpose**

The problem explored in this study was about the spaces of belonging. The theological implication of people being made in the image of God—Father, Son, and Spirit is that people require meaningful community to be whole and holy. The observed problem at New Baptist Church is that a number people only attend the Sunday morning service and thus are not available to move into deeper spaces of belonging within the church. This observation prompted the research questions that guided this project. The three research questions are summarized: *Do people who only come on Sunday morning feel like they belong at New Baptist Church, and is the church creating opportunities for people to relationally connect, and are those opportunities adequately communicated?* Thus, the purpose of the study was to evaluate, by means of a focus group, the use of sermon-based small groups, surveys, and post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer times as effective means of providing opportunities for repeat attenders to move from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging at New Baptist Church.

#### **Participants**

The whole church was invited to participate. Those who came only during Sunday morning participated in the sermons. Those present only for Sunday morning also had the opportunity to participate in the before-and-after survey, but not all did. Roughly, more than one hundred people participated in the Wednesday-evening small groups over the course of the study. The most intimate level of participation was the before-and-after

focus group. In that group, eleven people shared both their praises and struggles in finding community at New Baptist Church.

### **Sunday Morning Attendance**

The Sunday morning sermon set the context for the study. Over the course of the study, a series of sermons were given from the first two chapters of Philippians. A portion of each sermon contained some discussion about life in community. Notes for each sermon were provided as well as study questions that were used for the Wednesday evening groups (see Appendix A).

The theme of the first sermon was that living in the present-tenseness of salvation means allowing God to transform any present situations a person may be in through the work of God's people. The key verse used was Philippians 1:19, which reads, "For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance [σωτηρία - salvation]." In this verse Paul talks about how the people's prayers work toward his salvation.

The theme in the second sermon was that a life worthy of the gospel is a life lived in community. The key verse was Philippians 1:27: which reads

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Gospel worthiness was not defined by following certain rules but by a type of life lived together in community, and this type of life together is the church's primary witness of Christ to the world. A life that is not worthy of the gospel as described by Philippians 2:3 is one that seeks vain glory and is filled with strife.



The theme in the third sermon was that God has certain rights (e.g., the right of worship, the right of glory, and the right of honor), which Jesus, who is fully God, gave up in order that people may be given the right to become children of God (e.g., the right of new life, the right of fellowship with God). The key verse that was used was Philippians 2:5-7:

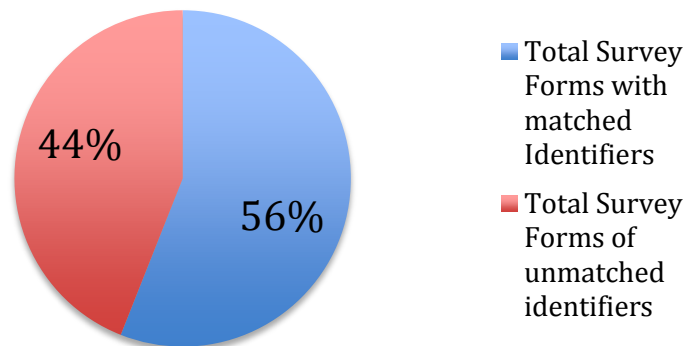
Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Having the mind of Christ means that believers in Christ are to surrender certain rights (e.g., the right to be comfortable, the right to get the credit, the right of having it one's own way) so that others may gain the right to be children of God.

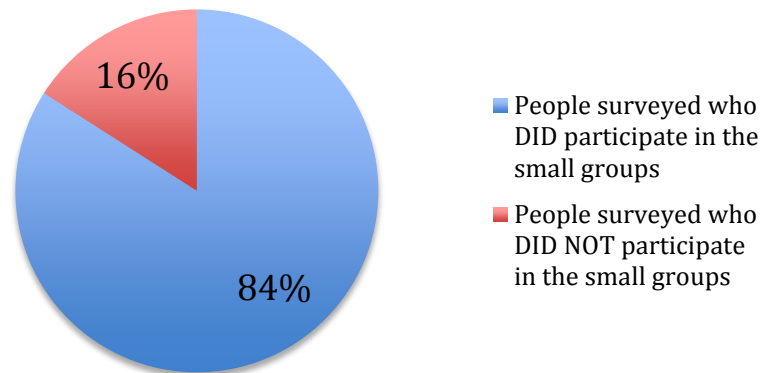
The theme in the fourth sermon was that a person's salvation is worked out in community. The key verse used for this sermon was Philippians 2:12, which reads, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Working out one's salvation is different from saying working for one's salvation. Working out one's salvation is what Christians do to manifest what God has already worked into their lives. Working out what God has already worked in is done in community because it is in relationship with others that the Spirit is manifested in a believer's life (e.g., love, peace, kindness, patience, thoughtfulness). Verses 2:14-16 describe what living out of one's salvation looks like (e.g., trust and obey God, seek to live holy lives, hang onto God's word).

### Voluntary and Anonymous Church Survey

All the people who attended the Sunday morning service had an opportunity to complete a survey that was given both before the study and at its conclusion. The survey consisted of ten questions (Appendix E). The total numbers of surveys completed before and after the intervention were roughly equal at seventy-five respectively. Of the seventy-one surveys at the end of the study, forty-one had matching identifiers with the original returned surveys (Figure 4.1). A paired *t*-test was performed on these matched surveys along with an additional unpaired *t*-test that included all pre- and poststudy surveys. The statistical results between the paired and unpaired *t*-tests were nearly statistically the same. In addition, of the seventy-one completed surveys returned at the completion of the study, fifty-eight of the surveys indicated that they had participated in at least one Wednesday evening study (see Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.1. Surveys with matched identifiers.**



**Figure 4.2. Participation percentages of returned surveys with small group involvement.**

### **Wednesday Evening, Sermon-Based Small Groups**

The sermon-based small groups met on Wednesday evenings. Public invitations were made to everyone in the church, with additional verbal invitations made to people who tended to attend only on Sunday mornings. The total number of sermon-based small groups that met was nine. These groups were led by a variety of facilitators whom I believed had a strong capacity to lead a sermon-based small group primarily due to their relational warmth. For some of the groups I purposefully sought husband-and-wife teams. Though husband-and-wife teams were not a part of the focus in this study, I was curious as to how well husband-and-wife facilitators would do. Most previous small group experience at the church tended to be either women or men small groups. I believe that having husband-and-wife facilitating teams helps both men and women feel more comfortable in the small group setting. The diversity of the small group facilitators can be seen in Table 4.1.

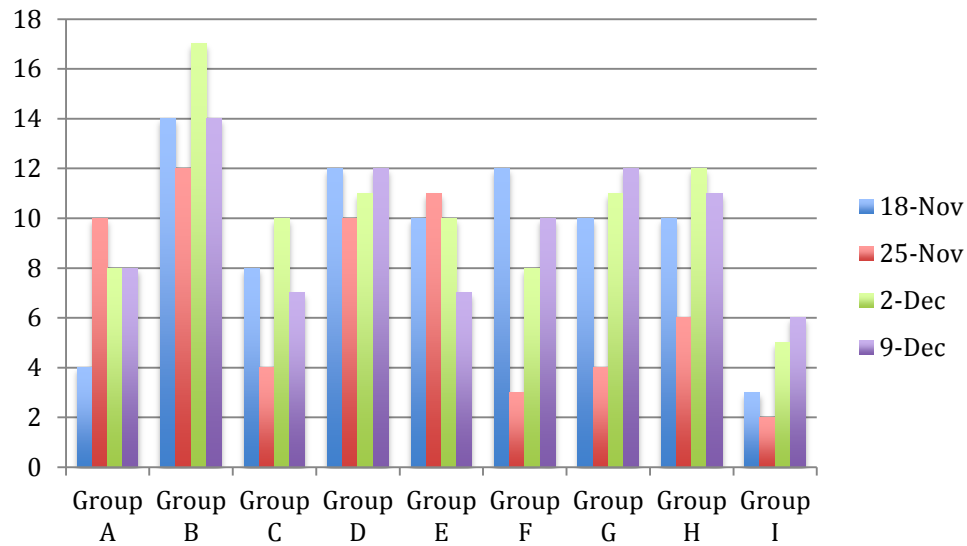
**Table 4.1. Wednesday Evening Small Group Facilitators**

<b>Types of Groups and Ages of Leaders</b>	<b>#</b>
Groups led by a husband and wife team	5
Groups led by one leader	4
Groups led by people who have never led any type of small group at New Baptist Church	7
Age of oldest group leader	84
Age of youngest group leader	20

On the first Wednesday evening of the study, all participants met in the sanctuary with the group leader names and room location placed on the large multimedia screens. Participants were then encouraged to self-select their small group with the instruction that each small group cannot be more than twelve people. If people were not sure what small group to attend, I was available to offer suggestions. The facilitators and myself discussed prior to the study how people would be selected for the groups. A primary goal of the study was for people to be in a small group with individuals they did not know well. Other options considered with regards to planning the groups included a process of requiring preregistration and from the collected names assign people to a variety of groups. This idea, and others like it, were discarded due to the feeling that most people would not preregister, as well as most people not liking being told what group they must attend. Allowing the participants to self-select seemed more of an organic process. Group facilitators did make private invitations to Sunday-morning-only attenders to participate in the group that they were leading. Due to the groups being multigenerational, and inclusive of both men and women, they achieved a sufficient diversity sought for this

study. Overall, the self-selection process of the participants coupled with invitations or suggestions from myself or a facilitator worked well.

The largest number of people attending on a Wednesday evening was ninety-two. The lowest attendance during the study was sixty-two, which happened on the Wednesday evening prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. The average attendance for all Wednesday evenings was eighty-one. The groups were mixed in terms of both genders and ages (see Figure 4.3).

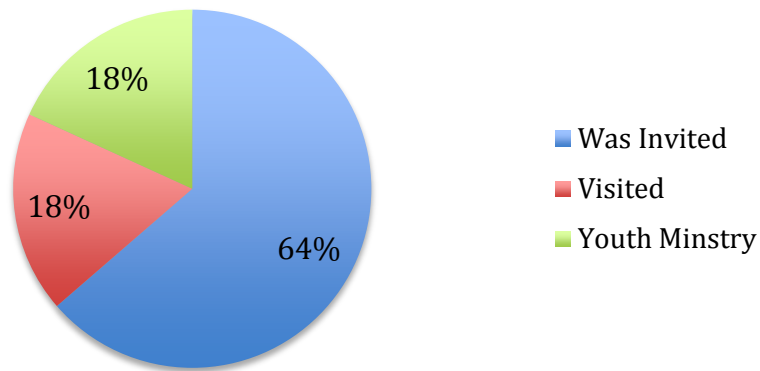


**Figure 4.3. Group attendance.**

**Prestudy and Poststudy Focus Groups**

An important part of this study was the collection of research data through the use of a focus group. The participants in the focus group were selected with a purposeful goal of having a diversity of people in terms of individual life stages and some connection to New Baptist Church. The focus group included eleven individuals. Before the first focus

group, an informed letter of consent was read and signed by each member (see Appendix F). The focus group met twice, once at the start of the study and another time at the end of the study. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded from which a transcript was produced. All participants of the focus group were relatively new to New Baptist Church, having been connected to the church for three years or less. They started attending New Baptist Church through a variety of ways. The vast majority started to come to the church through a personal invitation. Figure 4.4 summarizes how people found their way to New Baptist Church.



**Figure 4.4. Reason participants first attended New Baptist Church.**

Table 4.2 represents the demographics of those who participated in the focus group. People were selected who were relatively new to New Baptist Church. No one who was a part of the original church merger was a part of the focus group.

**Table 4.2. Focus Group Demographics**

Category	n
Total participants	11
Total married	6
Total engaged	2
Total single	3
Total widowed	1
Spouse does not attend church	1
Oldest participant	59
Youngest participant	22
Total number of women	6
Total number of men	5
Total church members	7
Total church nonmembers	6

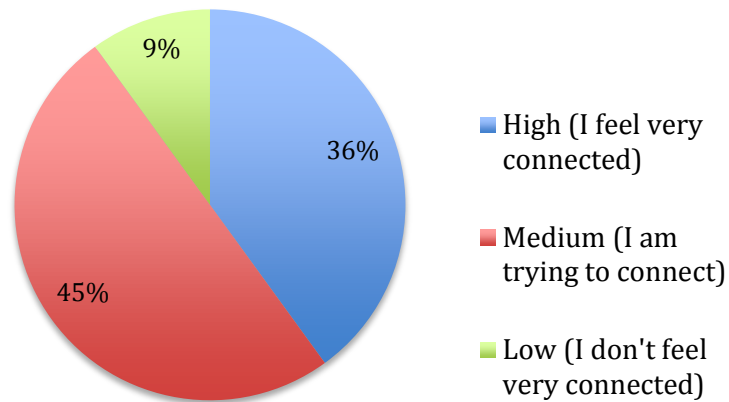
**Research Question #1**

Before and after the study, what were the levels of felt belonging among Sunday-morning-only repeat attenders at New Baptist Church as measured by their feelings of being welcomed and accepted, being known, and being appreciated?

Theologically, if community of mutual submission is so important in becoming fully who people are created to be, then logically the church needs to be concerned about the quality of community existent within its membership and ministry. Thus, the first research question focuses upon peoples' sense of belonging. The primary way that data for this research question was gathered was through a voluntary and anonymous church survey.

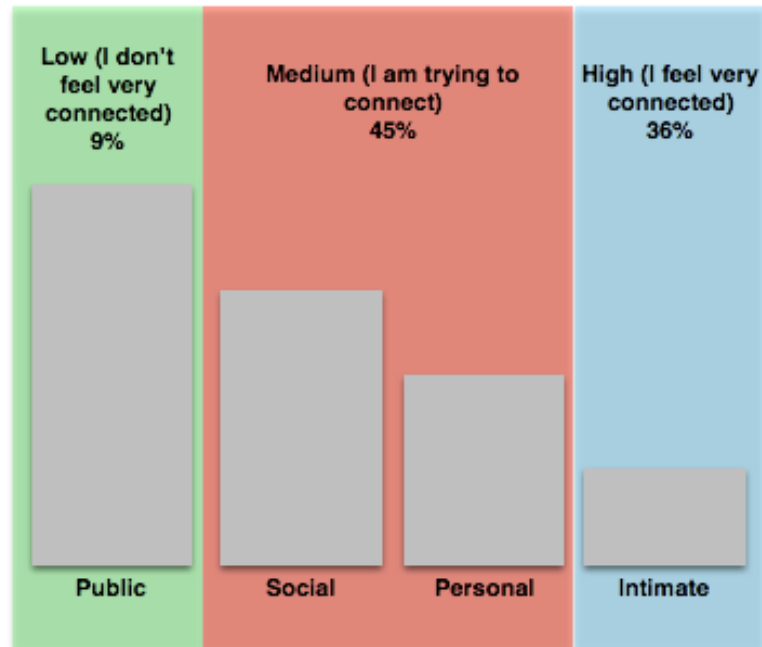
**Sense of belonging *before* sermon-based small groups study.** The initial results of the research revealed that the prestudy sense of belonging among Sunday-only

attenders was high and only slightly lower than those who attend more than one service at New Baptist Church. Roughly, 10 percent of people who attend New Baptist Church do not feel very connected while 90 percent either feel highly connected or that the possibility of a deeper connectedness exists (see Figure 4.5). Figure 4.6 displays overlaying results with Myers' scale of belonging.



**Figure 4.5. Participants' sense of belonging at New Baptist Church.**





**Figure 4.6. Participants' sense of belonging in relation to Myers' scale.**

Some of those who participated in the focus group also expressed a high level of connectedness to New Baptist Church:

I did not grow up in the church community, so for me I feel like I absolutely belong here. It is a different kind of family than I have ever experienced. So for me the longer that we have been here the stronger that feeling is for me that we feel like we belong here.

Another responded, "It [the church] has been a huge part in my life. I moved away and came back to Huntington, a large part of the reason why was this church." Another said, "I feel that my life is very blessed. I have friends that go to church that we hangout with outside of church. And our children are eager to see each other at church." These responses and others like them reveal a deep intimacy and sense of belonging that people have at New Baptist Church. However, others expressed a more moderate sense of community and level of connectedness to New Baptist Church. This more moderate level

was seen in how they expressed the welcoming atmosphere of the church and the ability to form relationships:

I feel like I belong here but have not put myself here. I feel like I am sucking things up but have not served, I feel like I am being a taker and feel convicted.

Leaving my old church and coming here has been such a tearing for me. I went from bathing our children together and sharing our meals together and being pulled away from our church family has been really hard and has impacted our marriage. This church has been so welcoming though Sunday school has been important. Tonight has been a good start.

I think of it in terms of the circles. Looking at Jesus there was the crowd, the seventy, the disciples, even in the twelve there were closer ones, and then John, the beloved disciple. I feel like I am a part, but that I am still on the outside looking in.

I don't feel very connected but feel that it is my fault. I simply have not taken time to do that. My daughter has had a baby a year ago and she is a single mother and a lot of evenings I am taking care of kids, and it has been time consuming, too, and I have to make them my priority. And it has been a long time that I have had kids that I have had to turn my life around. But I would like to do more, yet I know this [the church] is where God has sent me.

These responses and others like them reveal a level of belonging well described by Myers in the social and personal areas. They feel somewhat connected, yet they long for a deeper, intimate sense of belonging, and expressed frustration in not knowing how to find it.

**Sense of belonging *after* sermon-based small groups study.** An anonymous survey and focus group was conducted after the month of sermon-based small groups. The results of the study did reveal movement towards a deeper level of belonging. Due to the sermon-based small groups being a month long, the ability to evaluate new levels of belonging was difficult (see Figure 4.6), but the research did clearly reveal positive movements towards a deeper sense of belonging. This deeper sense of belonging was

revealed by the following comments when asked how these sermon-based small groups impacted their sense of belonging to New Baptist Church:

It feels like a cruel trick to start these [sermon-based small groups] and then all of a sudden they are over. They were really beneficial, and I wish they would continue.

They helped me get to meet, know people better, feel more comfortable, learn from different people. It was a great experience.

We talked about stuff that matters, and digging into the word together ... rather than just saying "How is your job," and so forth.

For me it [sermon-based small groups] affirmed it [the church]. After talking about the community of the church and the importance of being united in purpose and what direction to take the church onward. It renewed my sense of belonging and how important it is to have that community of faith.

Being a part of the small group showed me that I need to try more in being more intentional to be with people.

My group was with people that I have never seen, and yet they are always here. And then to hear questions and discuss the word with them and learn so much from them. A question would be asked and then I would think how to answer it and then someone from another walk of life or different stage of life gave a totally different answer.

[Name] and [Name] were in our group. I met her first when she was making cotton candy at the trunk and treat event but over these 4 weeks I have really gotten to know them,... Sunday morning she said hello and we stopped and really talked. It was neat to see different people and different walks of life.

These groups have really helped me feel more connected here. We have jumped around different Sunday schools but never found a place for us. This has helped me feel more a part of belonging here.

I am used to a smaller church settings and to see someone that I have sat in a room with and spoke to, it makes it good. That you are more connected when there are [sic] someone I actually recognize and spend more time with. It helps a lot.

We might of [sic] waved at them [people in their small group] at Chili's and just said hi, but when we saw each other we actually talked.

These quotes that came out of the focus group clearly reveal that the sermon-based small groups impacted people's sense of belonging seen primarily in how relational connections were starting to be made.

The anonymous church survey provided a measurable means of evaluation with regards to the overall impact of the study upon those who participated in the sermon-based small groups. By comparing before and after surveys, along with being able to identify which survey respondents participated in the sermon-based small group study, a positive trend is seen in people's theological understanding of belonging and in their own movement in creating community. The perception of New Baptist Church as a place of welcome and community remained nearly static (see Table 4.3 and Appendix I).

**Table 4.3. Summary of Survey Results**

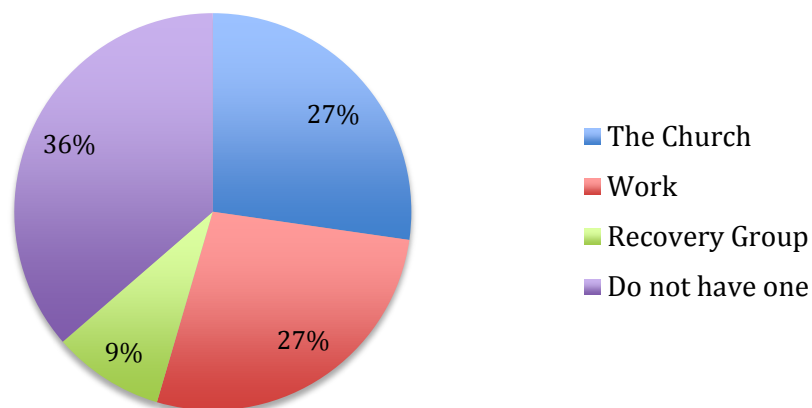
Survey Questions	Before-Study Survey %		Survey Respondents Who Did Participate in Small Groups %		Survey Respondents Who Did Not Participate in the Small Groups %	
	Positive Response	Negative Response	Positive Response	Negative Response	Positive Response	Negative Response
1. How a person welcomes or treats a stranger is a reflection of their relationship with God.	88	12	98	2	82	18
2. Belonging to a community of faith (church) is essential to a person's personal walk with God.	96	4	100	—	100	—
3. Deep Christian friendship is something that every Christian should seek, ask God for, and when found give thanks.	98	2	100	—	98	—
4. I feel that New Baptist Church helps people feel welcomed.	98	2	98	2	90	10
5. I am aware of various options on how to connect with people on a more personal level at New Baptist Church.	97	3	97	3	96	4
6. New Baptist Church is a place where people can find genuine Christian friendship.	96	4	97	3	95	5
7. I personally look for a person that is new so that I can welcome them.	63	37	84	16	73	27
8. I invite people who are new to my Sunday school class.	35	57	58	34	45	54
9. I invite people who are new out to lunch with me.	9	91	11	89	9	91
10. I invite people who are new to sit with me during church.	32	65	40	60	36	63

The purpose of Research Question #1 was to gauge people's sense of belonging at New Baptist Church. Overall, a positive affirmation towards a theological sense of community appears to be present as well as a positive affirmation in terms of how people perceived the competency of New Baptist Church in the area of building community. Very mixed results in terms of positive and negative feelings are seen in the individuals' own active initiative in building community.

## Research Question #2

Before and after the study, what were the levels of perceived opportunities to relationally connect with other people among Sunday-morning-only repeat attenders as measured by felt relational needs being met or unmet, a capacity to express structured opportunities to fellowship with other people, and a theological awareness of the importance of Christianity community? Research Question #2 sought to probe people's capacity to connect more deeply at New Baptist Church in terms of felt relational needs, awareness of opportunities, and theological awareness of the importance of Christian community. The primary means of gathering data was through the church surveys and focus group held both at the start and end of the sermon-based small group study.

**A capacity to belong *before* sermon-based small groups.** A critical question that was explored concerned not how involved the participants were at church but if they have a community and what it is. Figure 4.7 reflects people's community where they have a strong sense of belonging outside of their immediate family.



**Figure 4.7. Primary community.**

Nearly 40 percent of the focus group has a strong sense of community outside of the church. Though church is very important, their primary relational needs in terms of felt belonging are being met in the context of a work community or a recovery group. Some of these who identified their primary community outside of the church communicated that at one time church was the primary community but things happened that changed those relationships and caused them purposefully to identify work as their primary place of belonging:

The church used to be our primary community but after my husband died [a former pastor] it was hard for me to even go to church. Now my work is my family. I have four employees, all women, and I have become their mom. God gave me this job for me and for them. We care, look out, and protect each other.

My community is at work. I teach at a high school, but it is also the community where I live so I feel like I am on the mission field on a daily basis, but I feel like I am with my coworkers and my students more than my family. My coworkers are my friends and the students' parents are my friends.

I feel most a part of the recovery community. Being a person in long-term recovery that is really important in my life, maybe even more than family.... Because that is the power of how we stay sober and clean. Of one alcoholic helping another and that bond develops and you know it is like all the survivors of a shipwreck on an island together. Have shared something in common.

An interesting observation of those who identified their primary community as their place of work is that all of them who did so saw their work as a mission field. They purposefully saw the people with whom they worked as objects of God's love and served them not to get them to do something but as an outflow of their Christian faith. Another important observation is that identifying their primary community of belonging as being outside of the church did not exclude them from having deep personal relationships in the

church. Their level of relational intimacy in a workplace or recovery group gave them levels of capacity to develop meaningful relationships at church.

According to the focus group, 27 percent said that New Baptist Church is their primary community. This expressed feeling that the church is their primary community was evident as seen in comments from the focus group:

For me it [primary community] is here at this church. I was at [previous job] working for almost six years and had a strong community there and left that job a year ago, so I don't have that and I miss it, but leaving it I have found that I can build stronger relationships here.

I don't have any other [community] than church which is hard I think being this age [22]. I'm not in school, everyone I work with are not my age, they are 45-50 or older and I have only been there for one year. My school friends have gone their own ways. I love them, but don't want to be in their community.

One of the difficult things to gauge among those that expressed that the church is their primary community is exactly what level of community they are experiencing at the church. The church being a person's primary community does not necessarily mean that a person is experiencing personal or intimate spaces of belonging.

In the focus group, 36 percent shared that they did not have a primary community outside of family anywhere. They shared that their workplace did not provide a sense of strong community. They were not a part of any clubs or social groups, and that they did not believe they had developed any significant relationships at church or a sense of belonging or community.

**Perceived opportunities to belong at New Baptist Church *before* sermon-based small groups.** This probe was the most revealing in terms of areas of needed improvement at New Baptist Church. The focus group expressed in near universal



agreement that people who are new to New Baptist Church struggle to learn how to connect:

I found a good Sunday school but it took a lot of work. Classes have names [on the door] but that does not tell the focus, is it [the focus of the class] generational, is it age focus, is it Bible doctrine, is it relational, is it just counseling, so I had to do a lot of work asking about each class and then did not even know where the rooms were and not knowing where to go.

I had *no* [original emphasis] idea about anything or where to go.

I made my way to the church office, asked someone to show me around the building. It was only then that I became aware of various opportunities.

I had to push myself to find out what is here. I had no idea of where to go. Because I know [name] he told me to go there and I did and stayed. But this library, and this room, and so many activities, I had no idea. What is available could be easier presented to newer people.

On a random Wednesday night and someone presented a presentation of different ministries the church is involved with in the Huntington community, and I had no clue. I had no idea of the many opportunities here.

I feel like church is a maze. I want to become more involved but don't know how or where to start.

The lack of clear communication on how to develop relationships with other people at the church was clearly the strongest frustration about the New Baptist that the focus group expressed.

However, despite people's struggle to identify the various programmed opportunities of connecting to New Baptist Church, many of them shared how or why they were drawn more deeply to the community of the church:

I have been told that Sunday morning are great here, but nothing compares to the Sunday and the Wednesday evenings because of the silver hairs. The evening services are informal, and one is able to encounter the love, wisdom, and friendliness of the older generation there.

I think it is something that you cannot program [regarding sense of belonging]. It is an environment here, people are reaching out, loving. There is something here that has created an environment of welcoming, and it is really beautiful.

I have gone to churches that are very young and then ones that that are only for the old. Each church has a culture that excludes the other. But here there is a merging of generations and that is the welcoming part. The older ones with the camaraderie of the younger ones.

When we first came we were overwhelmed with the number of people, but [name] greeted us and shook our hands, and [name] took us out to lunch. This happened more than once and it was important that people wanted to talk to us.

It meant a lot to me that it was not someone at the front door or behind the desk that it was their job to be nice, but many people at church. The first night I came back and [name] asked me where is [name]. He knew our names and in some churches I went to a year and no one knew my name.

Some churches I have been to there are like assigned seats and you get in trouble if you accidentally sit in them. But people don't do that here.

I begged for prayer, something has to happen in my life and I needed other women to pray with me. So a group of us women when out to eat and stayed for hours talking.

One of the things that drew us to New Baptist was the wisdom here. At our old church we were not the oldest but were becoming the seniors. So following our children here and finding the intergenerational mix and seeing how the older adults are involved with the young children told me this is where I wanted to be.

I don't think people who have been here for awhile know how special this place is. This place is amazing.

These comments reflect a friendly and welcoming atmosphere at the church. The comments reveal various informal ways that relationships are formed at the church.

**Theological awareness of the importance of Christian community *before* sermon-based small groups.** The third probe of Research Question #2 that was explored was how a person's theology of community impacts his or her own capacity to engage

meaningfully in Christian community. The church-wide survey provided some interesting insights in this regard. Through ten questions, the survey was designed to measure three perceptions of those who chose to take the survey. These three areas were (1) theological awareness of the importance of community, (2) perceived opportunities for community at New Baptist Church, and (3) personal efforts in creating community. As seen in Table 4.3 (p. 79) only a small percentage (12 percent) provided a negative before-study survey answer to the statement, which reads, “How a person welcomes or treats a stranger is a reflection of their relationship with God.” Overwhelmingly survey participants (87 percent) gave positive responses to the first statement. The *t*-tests performed show no statistical changes over the course of the two surveys (see Table 4.4), but the 12 percent that provided a negative response to statement one also gave a negative response to question nine, which reads, “I invite people who are new out to lunch with me.” All of the returned surveys that recorded negative responses to statement one also recorded negative responses to statement nine. Granted, the survey question about taking a person who is new out to lunch was provided knowing that most people usually do not, on any given Sunday, invite a new person at church out to lunch afterwards. Overall, only about 10 percent say that they invite people who are new out to lunch with them by indicating an *always* or *often* answer. However, in the survey, nearly 50 percent of those who provided a positive response to question one answered at least *seldom* to statement nine. Looking at the 12 percent of the surveys that gave a negative answer to statement one is slightly anecdotal in attempting to measure people’s sense of community before sermon-based small groups. Primary insights were gained when looking at the after-study results.

**Theological awareness of the importance of Christian community *after* sermon-based small groups.** The results of the study show that those who chose to participate in the sermon-based small groups did become more aware of church opportunities when compared to those who did not participate in the Wednesday evening groups. A two-tailed *t*-test was performed on each survey question, comparing the prestudy survey scores with those who attended Wednesday evening sermon-based small groups and those who did not. Using the statistical accepted norms, Table 4.4 show those results that had a calculated *t*-test score of .05 or less. According to research standards, *t*-test scores of .05 or less reflect statistically significant changes.

**Table 4.4. Pre- and Poststudy Survey Mean Scores and *t*-Test *p* Values**

Survey Questions	Prestudy <i>M</i>	Poststudy <i>M</i>	<i>t</i> -Test <i>p</i> -Value	Attendance			
				Yes <i>M</i>	<i>t</i> -Test <i>p</i> -Value	No <i>M</i>	<i>t</i> -Test <i>p</i> -Value
1. How a person welcomes or treats a stranger is a reflection of their relationship with God.	3.27	3.40	0.0615	3.47	0.0710	3.6	0.1610
2. Belonging to a community of faith (church) is essential to a person's personal walk with God.	3.65	3.80	0.1159	3.76	0.2516	4.0	0.0729
3. Deep Christian friendship is something that every Christian should seek, ask God for, and when found give thanks.	3.81	3.72	0.2582	3.72	0.2847	3.8	0.9452
4. I feel that New Baptist Church helps people feel welcomed.	3.61	3.67	0.5534	3.77	0.0665	3.4	0.2526
5. I am aware of various options on how to connect with people on a more personal level at New Baptist Church.	3.33	3.43	0.3053	3.53	0.0315*	3.4	0.6892
6. New Baptist Church is a place where people can find genuine Christian friendship.	3.69	3.72	0.7650	3.7	0.9136	3.8	0.5227
7. I personally look for a person that is new so that I can welcome them.	2.67	2.93	0.0118*	2.97	0.0072*	2.7	0.8949
8. I invite people who are new to my Sunday school class.	2.23	2.58	0.0136*	2.72	0.0006*	2.5	0.3643
9. I invite people who are new out to lunch with me.	1.64	1.90	0.0144*	1.9	0.0254*	1.9	0.2597
10. I invite people who are new to sit with me during church.	2.09	2.32	0.0762	2.33	0.0659	2.2	0.6823

\*Significant change from first to second survey.  $P \leq .05$ .

Table 4.4 shows the before-and-after mean and the calculated *t*-test *p*-scores of the church survey. Four different *t*-tests were performed with the survey results. These were (1) forty-one paired surveys (those that had matching four-digit numbers), (2) an unpaired *t*-test of all returned surveys, (3) fifty-eight presurveys from those who attended a Wednesday evening small group, and (4) the surveys from those who did not attend a small group. Table 4.4 shows the scores from the pre- and postunpaired two tailed *t*-test, along with comparing presurvey scores with those who did and did not attend Wednesday

evening, sermon-based small groups. The forty-one matching paired survey results reflect the same statistical differences as the unpaired *t*-test results. The unpaired *t*-test results are shown in Table 4.4, thus reflecting all surveys returned both before and after the study.

According to the performed *t*-test on the pre- and postsurveys, the results show statistically significant changes in the scores as they relate to statements 5, 7, 8, and 9 for those who attended a Wednesday evening study. No significant statistical changes are apparent with regards to those who did not attend any Wednesday evenings between the pre- and postsurvey results.

Those who participated in a Wednesday evening, sermon-based small group became more aware of various options of how to connect with people on a more personal level (statement 5). This significant statistical change of statement 5 was also reflected in the focus group: “As we were leaving this evening we were talking about our different Sunday school classes, and I gave a plug for our class and talked about why you want to be in one.” This simple comment made in passing in the focus group reveals that people were offering invitations and points of connecting within their Wednesday evening, sermon-based small group.

Statements 7, 8, and 9 also show significant statistical change between the prestudy survey and the poststudy survey among those that attended Wednesday evening sermon-based small groups. These statements are about a person’s own initiative to build community and focus on looking for someone who is new and purposefully engaging that person in a meaningful way. The conclusion gained from Table 4.4 is that the primary impact of the Wednesday evening, sermon-based small groups had, in the areas that the

survey measured, was upon the changed awareness, sensitivity, and behavior of those who attended toward people who are either new or strangers.

### **Research Question #3**

Before and after the study, what other factors may have contributed to Sunday-morning only attenders' sense of belonging or not belonging?

The study revealed that a primary factor that has contributed to people's sense of not belonging in terms of New Baptist Church was the church's poor communication of opportunities that do exist. Another factor that contributed to people's lack of the sense of belonging involved the pain of previous church experiences, even ones with small groups as expressed by some of the participants of the focus group:

I did not want to attend the groups because of my previous experiences at other churches with small groups. But before I could escape through the front door, [name] caught me and invited me to his group. I am glad that I went. These groups were different. It allowed me to feel more able to share and meet people I had not met before.

Small groups are what killed our church. We looked back three years and realize that we took something that was good and it destroyed the membership of our church. When the church began dealing with other issues people had already migrated out into their small groups. When troubles hit there was no cohesion as a larger body. People were disconnected and it hurt us.

People having been hurt by previous experiences of church small groups seems to have had an impact on people's participation in the sermon-based small groups.

Within the focus group, other reasons were given as to why people do not feel a sense of belonging at New Baptist Church. These reasons included the respondents' own busy schedule and work, thus not allowing them to invest time into the development of relationships within the church. Another respondent referred to family who had stopped coming because they simply did not feel welcomed. Here is an interesting exchange in

the second focus group around the issue of how easy (or difficult) people have to feel like they belong. The “dynamic” referred to in the quotes from the second focus group is the tension between the church being aggressive towards welcoming new people versus the church being passive towards welcoming new people. One of the focus group respondents made the comment that it took three years for him to experience a feeling of belonging at New Baptist Church. When asked, “Why three years?” the following conversation took place:

It took me three years in coming here to start feeling like I am a part of this community. I wonder how much is this is my personality? How does that compare to others? (Respondent 1)

Why did it take you three years to feel a part of this community?  
(Respondent 2)

I don't know, maybe I am reserved, but I really am not. In the outside world I seem to have no problem, yet I am guarded spiritually. I don't know how to gauge it. (Respondent 1)

When someone first comes in, no one to ask you to their class. They kind of thought you know where to go, but we did not know. We tried two different ones [Sunday school classes] and to this day we don't know where to go. No one walked me around and shared to me these different classes. I don't know. Even to this day. No one takes people around tells them about each class and the ages. “[For example] This is the old ladies Sunday school class.” I don't know. We went to [name] class because I grew up with him in my home church. (Respondent 3)

I think with small groups I think there is a sense of community and accountability too. It is so easy to sit and soak in a larger group, but if other people are there they will wonder where you are at and how you are doing. (Respondent 4)

For the first couple of years that I came and slipped in and slipped out.  
(Respondent 1)

Me personally I don't want pressure to be a part of something.  
(Respondent 2)



It goes back to the first week [original focus group]. Talking about being on my own and allowing the church to meet me where I am at.  
(Respondent 1)

It has been a frustrating dynamic with several friends of mine. Because I can't understand it, this sort of complaining, feeling that they described to us. "No one talks to us, reaches out to us, no one gets to know us, but then we say, "you know what, Wednesday nights, Sunday nights, those smaller groups, you get to know people then, and then Sunday school, even smaller," but then they will not do it. They come in and then they leave but then say no one reaches out to me. I know that it is hard for some people to sort of insert themselves. I don't know how do you reach people like that. (Respondent 5)

This church is strange, in the sense that it's a big church but you got three churches that were smaller that came together. And I look around and I see, it appears to me, that some of them group together and it appears that they went to Beverly Hills and others went to High-lawn. You know, or 20<sup>th</sup> street. (Respondent 6)

I don't see that, it seems seamless to me, I can not tell. (Respondent 1)

*Me neither.* (original emphasis; Respondent 4)

It is just like any church it gravitates to each other. I used the word strange because it is a different dynamic because it is a big church but it has a smaller church feel. Those people know each other and so they gravitate toward each other. (Respondent 6)

What was strange to me was how people in the prior churches, though small, did not know each other. It was odd. Even when we joined churches, some people thought that those new people were from the other church, but in fact they had been attending church with them for years.  
(Facilitator)

[Name] and I had different interpretation of the dynamic of when we came. We were warmly welcomed. I talked to [name], he introduced himself, remembered my name, and then asked [name] where I was Sunday night, where I was, was I ok. And we felt that because of these multiple groups [The church merger] that they had to work to welcome each other and create a church. There is a sense of community here because they had to do it. (Respondent 5)

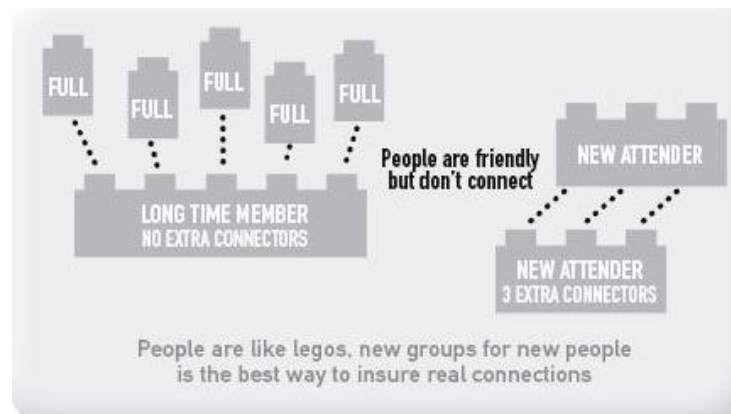
This exchange revealed many things. For some it shows that they believed that various groupings of people were defined by a previous church prior to the merger. Those who

did not recognize these groupings (Respondents 1, 4 and 5) were new to the Huntington community and had entered New Baptist Church knowing no one. Respondent 6 was a long-time resident of the Huntington area and though new to New Baptist Church, he knew many people in the church and knew what church they had been a part of and thus was able to interpret some of the close friendships as being preexistent prior to the merger. This insight voices what Osborne says is the “Lego effect”:

I think of people as being like Legos. We all have a limited number of connectors. Introverts have a few. Some extroverts have dozens. But either way, once they’re full, they’re full. And when that happens, we tend to be friendly but to not connect. It’s what happens when you move to a new town and are excited by everyone’s friendliness, only to be discouraged three months later that you haven’t connected with anyone. (79)

Respondent 6 voiced this “Lego effect” as one of the factors at New Baptist Church.

People from the prior merged churches did not come with many extra connectors. They already were enjoying various levels of belonging (see Figure 4.8).



Source: Osborne 80.

**Figure 4.8. The Lego effect.**

Another insight in the exchange with regards to other factors that impact a person’s sense of community was Respondent 5’s remark that his friends said that no one reaches out to them. Respondent 5 voiced a dynamic with regards to trying to understand the balance between the church’s role in reaching out to people and the stranger’s role in placing himself or herself where community happens. Primarily based upon the focus group, Table 4.5 provides a list of factors that have contributed to a Sunday-only attender’s sense of belonging or not belonging.

**Table 4.5. Items That Contributed to a Person’s Sense of Belonging or Not Belonging**

<b>Sense of Belonging</b>	<b>Sense of Not Belonging</b>
Being welcomed, asked about, and remembered by name	Poor communication of opportunities.
A culture of welcome and extra grace that exists due to multiple churches having to live together	A passivity toward new attenders A tendency of people to form relationships based upon prior church experience Past negative experiences at prior church, thus causing new attenders to be wary of forming deep relationships Busy schedules, no time for forming relationships at church

**Summary of Major Findings**

The study provided much useful information with regards to community at New Baptist Church. The major findings are those that provide key insight with regards to the future planning and direction of New Baptist Church:

- Nearly 50 percent of those involved in the study seek a deeper level of belonging at New Baptist Church.

- A systematic problem exists at New Baptist Church in its ability to communicate and welcome people to the various opportunities of deeper community that are already present at the church.

- People who participated in the sermon-based small groups were statistically more likely to be aware of various opportunities to develop relationships at New Baptist Church.

- People who participated in the sermon-based small groups were statistically more likely to have a greater sensitivity towards strangers.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Problem and Purpose**

The church is struggling to incorporate newer Sunday-morning attenders into its community life. The need that drove this study was to understand better people's general sense of belonging and New Baptist Church's ability to provide people with opportunities to form deep relational friendships.

The purpose of the study was to evaluate, by means of a focus group, the use of sermon-based small groups, surveys, and post-Sunday-morning question-and-answer times as effective means of providing opportunities for repeat attenders to move from the public space of belonging to the social space of belonging at New Baptist Church.

#### **Major Findings**

The study provided a number of needed insights for the church with regards to helping people find community at New Baptist Church. The research also affirmed the theological foundations of this study, primarily that due to the communal nature of God as Triune, people thus have a hunger and need to find and exist in community.

#### **People Seeking to Belong**

This deep created relational need in all men and women is seen in the opening pages of Scripture. With regards to man's aloneness, God's own verdict is that that aloneness is not good (Gen. 2:18). The consequences of sin in the garden resulted in aloneness and isolation. Adam and Eve not only hid from each other with the sewing of fig leaves to cover themselves (Gen. 3:7), they also hid from God (Gen. 3:8). The consequence of the Fall is broken relationships both with God and with each other. This

consequence of sin is not only seen in the isolation and aloneness of the Garden, but is also seen in the isolation and aloneness of the cross (Mark 15:24).

Thus, salvation involves a reconciliation of relational intimacy with God and a new awareness and healing of reconciliation with each other as expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:18. Thus, salvation is a vertical Eucharist (with God) and also a horizontal Communion (with others) as echoed by Jesus' prayer (John 17:21-22). God exists in community as Father, Son, and Spirit, and his work of creation and salvation brings people into that community.

The practical concern that flows from these theological foundations is how the importance of community is created and lived out. If salvation is understood in terms of relational reconciliation with God and others, then this theological understanding must impact the role and function of the local church. The local body of Christ must seek to be a place where people can discover both a vertical and horizontal relational healing and belonging. Though connected with the vertical relationship, this study focused on the horizontal spaces of belonging. An important component of the study was simply seeking to understand if people have deep friendships (i.e., the intimate space of belonging), and, if so, where (e.g., church, school, work). Recognizing the difficulty to gauge the depth of relationships expressed in the focus groups, 36 percent of those who responded said that they lacked a primary community. They were not a part of a local club. Their work did not provide a community, nor did they really feel a part of the church to the extent that they could call it their community. When questioning people's sense of connectedness to the church, roughly 50 percent of those questioned said they feel somewhat connected but really would like to connect more deeply. I recognize that the word *connecting* is very

generalized, lacking clear definition with regards to Myers' spaces of belonging. The point is that 36 percent do not think they belong to a community where they are experiencing deep relationships. Though some have clearly said that New Baptist Church is a place where they feel a deep sense of belonging, at least 50 percent expressed a desire for a deeper sense of belonging at the church. The 50 percent that expressed a desire for a deeper sense does not mean that the other 50 percent are experiencing a deep sense of belonging at the church; rather, it means that their level of relationships (public, social, personal, intimate) were satisfactory in their current season of life, and they did not need a change in that space of belonging. This finding highlights an important argument made by Myers: Churches must allow people to grow their sense of healthy community and belonging based upon their current season of life. Attempting to manufacture a one-size-fits-all environment for all people is not healthy (*Organic Community* 400-08).

Many factors were indicated why people were content in their current space of belonging. These included a high sense of community at their jobs, family responsibilities, as well as deep personal pain from previous church experiences causing them to delay forming deeper relationships at New Baptist Church. In the focus group, 50 percent said they do not want to become more involved or more deeply connected to New Baptist Church. The space of belonging they currently occupy is where they need or want at this time. Recognizing that half of those are content in their current space of belonging for whatever reason, one of the outcomes in terms of ministry is simply to engage people where they are and provide them with the means to become more connected as their own need or desires determine.

The more concerning indicator though was the 50 percent who said they would like to have a deeper sense of belonging at New Baptist Church but struggle to know how to do so. This finding prompts possible future studies. One answer to why people struggle to find deeper friendships is possibly their own lack of capacity to be a friend. Regardless, the purpose of this study was to discover the capacity of New Baptist Church to provide and communicate opportunities for people to find and develop relationships.

These findings support the theological foundation of this study. The theological thesis of this study was that since God is Triune, and his very being exists in community, then men and women must also exist in community to experience whole and holy lives. The study supported this theological foundation seen in how people stated a deep desire for community. Some were able to say, thankfully, that they do enjoy personal or intimate spaces of belonging, while those who did not, expressed desires for such community. No one communicated in any way that they are happy, content, and fulfilled in isolation. The hunger for deep friendship was clearly evident, thus supporting that humans, made in the image of the Triune God, require various spaces of belonging to experience whole and holy lives.

### **The Problem of Belonging**

The study's surprise was not necessarily that 50 percent of the people wanted a deeper sense of belonging at New Baptist Church; what was a surprise was that they had no idea how to go about finding it. Most people attending New Baptist Church are either experiencing or want to experience more personal or intimate levels of relationships. However, according to the study, the church is lacking a culture where the means of finding those relationships does not exist. This problem became evident in a very lively



focus group discussion that began as a hypothetical question on how they would connect more deeply with the church on a relational level. People's answer to this question turned into a long discussion with regards to the difficulty of discovering a Sunday school class.

The New Baptist Church Sunday school program began as a carry-over of preexistent Sunday school classes of the merged churches. All Sunday school classes aged high school or younger were merged into grade-appropriate classes. All other adult classes were allowed to maintain their individual identity held at the previous churches. This plan resulted in five adult Sunday school classes at the inception of New Baptist Church. Since that time, four additional Sunday school classes have been created, bringing the total number of adult classes to nine. Two of the classes start at 9:30 a.m., another two start at 9:45 a.m. The five other classes start at 10:00 a.m. Likewise, Sunday school classes have different end times of 10:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 10:45 a.m. Attempts to synchronize times have not gone well due to one of the 9:30 a.m. classes being broadcasted on the radio, a tradition that is tightly guarded, and most of the 10:00 a.m. classes flatly saying that they cannot get to church any earlier. Adding further to this confusion in that each class uses different teaching styles reflective of different generations. Three of the classes use DVD studies; two use the *International Bible Quarterly*; two tend to use books; and, two tend to do expository Bible studies. Further confusion exists in that New Baptist Church does not have the traditional educational wing of the church for classes, but has rooms constructed throughout the building with no map or posted directions for people to find their way. The members of the focus group expressed frustration at not knowing where the classes were located, at what time a class would start, what they were teaching, how they were taught, and the rough ages of those

who attended the class. Once a person found his or her way to a Sunday school class, he or she would report positively about the experience, yet this positive report did not diminish the frustration they had to go through in finding a class.

At New Baptist Church multiple ways exist for people to discover community, but a primary ministry that provides the opportunity to connect at the church is Sunday school. The average attendance of the Sunday school program across all ages is 255. Each Sunday school class has an identity, spends time together both in church and out of church, and cares for each other. Sunday school is New Baptist Church's primary care community, yet the study revealed that newcomers deeply struggled to find their way to them.

The problems with regards to Sunday school can be seen affecting the other opportunities at New Baptist Church for people to connect as well. Multiple opportunities exist that people can find, and when they do, they in fact do experience deeper community. These various opportunities include men's and women's groups, seasonal Wednesday evening small groups, mission trips, various ministry teams and step clubs. Step clubs are affinity groups organized around hobbies. The word *step* is an acronym for Skills, Talents, Experiences, Passions. The purpose of the step clubs is to allow avenues for people to develop relationships with others who share similar interests or passions. Currently twelve step clubs are meeting at the church (hiking, cooking, gardening, books, guns, motorcycles, photography, woodworking, movies, golf, art, and board games). However, like Sunday school, the other ministries or opportunities for people to develop deeper relationships lack clear pathways. As discussed in Chapter 2, these relational opportunities are critical because they are, according to Wesley, a prudential means of

grace. In order for a person to grow in dynamic holiness, he or she needs certain relationships that are concerned about the condition of one's soul.

### **Being Aware of Opportunities to Belong**

When the survey results were analyzed they showed a significant statistical change among those who attended the sermon-based small groups to be more aware of various options on how to connect with people on a more personal level at New Baptist Church. This changed awareness was also evident in the focus groups and how the participants grew in a capacity to talk about the various relational dynamics of New Baptist Church. The statistical change that was measured in regards to the issue reveals that the small group experience increased their awareness of other opportunities to develop relationships. This finding was unexpected because the sermon-based small groups were not designed to communicate various means of connecting to New Baptist Church. The changes in this area reflect more of a group serendipity than actual design.

The sermon-based small groups were unique when compared to other types of small groups at New Baptist Church. In the implementation of the sermon-based small groups, an intentional effort was given to forming new relational connections for those who participated. No Sunday school teachers were selected to lead the groups, and none of the normal periodic small group leaders were selected either. Thus, people tended to gravitate towards one of the various sermon-based small groups in large part out of curiosity or support for the person leading. For example, the one small group led by a college student had the highest percentage of senior citizens attending it. Another example is seen in a sermon-based small group led by the person who just found out he had leukemia. It was attended by people who were struggling with various cancers in

either loved ones or themselves. These reasons of why people gravitated to the different groups was an unexpected observation that is not normally seen in the static Sunday school communities or the traditional men's and women's small groups. This difference caused the sermon-based small groups to have a high percentage of people participating with others whom they had not previously known. Thus, people shared that they also grew in a relational knowledge towards each other, and their sense of belonging changed. The result was that those in the group who were a part of a Sunday school class or a step club invited those who were not in their classes. Those who had never toured the church were given tours. Those who did not know anyone began to have coffee with people in their sermon-based small group to whom they felt close.

From an observational perspective, the statistical change in a person's awareness of various opportunities at the church was serendipitously changed as the small group participants felt a greater sense of belonging among themselves. This change was a predictable and desirable outcome according to studies on group dynamics. As referenced in the literature review, these sermons-based small groups were organized as planned groups. By providing clear communication about the length of the study, the purpose of the study, and the quality of the leaders, a natural, serendipitous relationship developed among those who participated and is reflected in the significant change of statement 5 on the survey.

### **Inviting Others to Belong**

The survey results showed that for questions 7, 8, and 9 a significant statistical change occurred among those who attended a sermon-based small group. All three of

these statements relate to a person's sensitivity and responsibility toward people who are new or strangers. Three survey statements showed significant statistical change:

- I personally look for a person that is new so that I can welcome them.

(question 7)

- I invite people who are new to my Sunday school class. (question 8)
- I invite people who are new out to lunch with me. (question 9)

These three statements represent the greatest thematic statistical change measured in the study by the survey. These statements all relate to a person's own initiative to build community. Therefore, the greatest impact the sermon-based small groups had upon the personal actions of those who attended was a conscious engagement toward those who were new. To understand why the sermon-based small groups impacted the participants' actions towards strangers, a review of the various components of this study is helpful.

The means of influence that the study used were the survey, the sermon, and the small groups. The first means of influence encountered by the congregation was the survey. As the records indicate, only about 25 percent of those attending the Sunday mornings when the survey was presented filled out and returned a survey. Despite a 25 percent return rate, the entire attendance on that given Sunday received the survey. Thus, though not a part of the study, research suggests that survey questions themselves have impact upon those who just read the survey but never return it. According to Morwitz and Fitzsimons, by just asking people to rate themselves in terms of how they welcome a new person will influence their awareness of new people as well as influence their willingness to welcome him or her.

Another means of influence used in the study was the Sunday morning sermon. Each sermon over the length of the study was expository in nature and based upon the first two chapters of Philippians (see Appendix A). The sermons preached were not exclusively about church, community, or relationships, but they all had a component in them that challenged the hearer to see beyond themselves towards their neighbor. As a preacher, I would like to say that my preaching impacts people's behaviors, and I do think that over time it has some impact, but like evidence indicates, only those who attended a sermon-based small group actually showed any significant statistical change in this area of behavior toward the stranger. This research data means that the educational component alone minus the small group had no measurable impact on behavior according to the survey results.

The area of influence that caused the most apparent impact was the sermon-based small groups that met on Wednesdays. As previously indicated, the people who participated in the small groups registered the most significant change with regards to personal initiative to welcome new people or a stranger. Myers' provides a possible reason for this change in his book *The Search to Belong*:

A healthy strategy for those working to build community entails allowing people to grow significant relationships in all four spaces—all four [public, social, personal, intimate]. It means permitting people to belong in the space they want or need to belong. Insisting that real, authentic, true community happens only when people get “close” is a synthetic view of reality and may actually be harmful. (1006-08)

Regardless of how wonderful a Sunday morning worship service may be, the very nature of the event does not allow people to grow significant relationships. People are seated together shoulder to shoulder, not face to face. Any speaking that they do comes from some form of prescribed song or liturgy. The Wednesday evening small groups saw

significant change because those groups allowed people to grow relationships. The purpose of the sermon-based small groups was not to enforce intimacy or closeness but to allow significant relationships to develop around an enjoyment of God's Word. Thus, the behavioral change of those who attended the sermon-based small groups as indicated by the survey is a product of the liberty discovered by those who participated to grow relationships. As people became more comfortable with strangers within the sermon-based small group, they grew in their comfortable levels to welcome strangers in the larger body of the church. The behavioral change of increased sensitivity towards strangers was not a product of teaching or a sense of duty, but the simple experience of a new friendship.

The Wednesday evening, sermon-based small group study was connected to the Sunday morning sermon. To show the impact of the sermons upon the larger study, a thought experiment was carried out in terms of equations.

**Equation 1—sermon - small group = positively changed attitude and behavior.** If equation 1 was true, then the survey of those who did not attend the Wednesday evening, sermon-based small groups would also show a statistically significant positive change with regards to attitudes and behaviors towards people who are new. Thus Equation 1 is false.

**Equation 2—small group - sermon = positively changed attitude and behavior.** The Wednesday evening small group experience was tied to the Sunday morning sermon. The Sunday morning sermon created the biblical and theological structure that defined the small groups. The working assumption was that the statistical change in regards to sensitivity toward a stranger was a product of the Sunday morning

sermon coupled with a Wednesday evening discussion around the same Scripture passage. Hearing and discussing the same passage produced the statistical change. Support for this belief comes from anecdotal evidence presented by the focus group and private conversations. Multiple people expressed how these sermon-based small groups were different from previous small groups they had experienced. Many used the sermon notes to prepare for the study. Many came to the study with questions prompted by the sermon, and within each group the facilitators report a high level of various group members engaging with Scripture. Instead of trying to figure out what the Bible is saying, more time was spent on what the Bible means for the well-being of one's soul. Thus, I would argue that the small-group experience minus the sermon cannot claim credit for all of the positive changed attitude and behavior measured in the surveys. Equation 2 is false.

**Equation 3—sermon + small group = positively changed attitude and behavior.** Both the focus groups and the surveys clearly show that this study impacted people. The combination of the sermon and the small groups was important. It allowed not only a transfer of information, but also a time to grapple with what that information means to one's own soul, behavior, experience, and attitudes. This double engagement with Scripture through the sermon and small group provide both the awareness and means to take initiative towards strangers. Equation 3 is true.

These findings support the findings reported by Osborne in regards to sermon-based small groups. He claims that sermon-based small groups increase the educational impact of the Sunday morning sermon, provide opportunities for people to connect



relationally, and provide opportunities for developing new leaders (1-30). The data from this study on sermon-based small groups shows similar changes.

### **Implications of the Findings**

This study has impacted New Baptist Church in a number of areas. First, due to the overwhelming positive feedback received from those who participated in the sermon-based small groups, they will be repeated at select times during the church calendar year. Wednesday evenings have traditionally been a flexible night with offerings ranging from mission events to evening teachings, and small groups. The sermon-based small groups will be rotated into the Wednesday evening lineup. The sermon-based small groups allow for new friendships to form.

Due to the confusion discovered among new attenders to know how connect to New Baptist Church, a number of measures are needed to be taken to order to communicate opportunities of relationships to people. The different measures needed are listed in recommendations.

The study has created a greater awareness and freedom simply to allow people to connect to New Baptist Church however they are led. The church culture is to provide opportunities to help people form meaningful relationships inside or outside the church.

The study has impacted the outreach ministry of the church in two ways. The first is a greater sensitivity toward new people and strangers in addition resulting in greater congregational initiative to invite them into relationship. In addition, out of this study grew a greater level of encouragement for people connected to New Baptist Church to invest themselves in serving the Huntington community through the numerous organizations already present in Huntington. This increased awareness of missional

community outside of the church was an unexpected benefit of the study. Due to recognizing that people have meaningful community outside of the church and that a goal of the church is not to become a person's most meaningful community but to provide opportunities for relationships to develop, the study fostered an awareness of opportunities that exist beyond New Baptist Church. Thus, a tangible by-product of the study was a networking and contact sheet for people assisting them in how to connect to various ministries and missions within the Huntington tri-state area (see Appendix N).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Two major limitations were felt in this study. A focus of the study has been around the sense of belonging. The study used the tools of survey, sermon, small group and focus groups to provide and measure opportunities for people to grow in relationships. One limitation of the study was the lack of any discussion or research around the topic of necessary skills needed by an individual to grow in relationships. In other words, relational competences were not discussed or taught. As noted, 50 percent indicated that they would like to grow in relational connectedness at New Baptist Church, and as the study showed, New Baptist Church can improve in a number of areas. However, core relational competences were not taken into account to understand why the 50 percent wanting deeper relationships are struggling to find them. A possibility exists that one reason people struggle to grow in relationships is that they lack relational or emotional health to take advantage of the opportunities that New Baptist Church provides. An example of relational competencies can be found in Carnes' book. He talks about sexual addiction as being a product of people's inability to form and keep relationships. A part of a person's healing and transformation is the practice of certain

relational competencies such as honesty, nurturing, vulnerability, presence, initiative, and keeping of one's word (264-68). The ability to grow relationally involves more than just having the opportunity for relationships but also having the personal capacity to grow in them.

The second limitation of the study was the deep wounds that previous small group experiences have had upon people's predispositions or willingness to pursue healthy relationships in the church. A negative unexpected observation of the study was the number of traditional Wednesday evening attenders who did not participate in the sermon-based small groups. During the course of the study, the Wednesday evening attendance dropped roughly 30 percent. Some of this drop in attendance was made up from the Sunday-morning-only attenders who came out during the study, but it was an unexpected and negative observation to discover a number of faithful Wednesday evening participants absent during the length of the study. When asked why, the reason given was that previous small group experiences in past churches have been so painful that they did not want to relive those experiences. Clearly, such responses indicate deep wounds that have not healed. This negative attitude towards small groups presents a significant limitation of the study in that those who carry deep wounds from previous church experience simply are not able to see the church as a safe place to grow meaningful relationships. Not only do past wounds gained from previous church experiences make it difficult for those people to move towards more personal or intimate spaces of belonging, but may in fact be a factor that causes a reverse migration within the spaces of belonging. Understanding this factor and overcoming it was not a part of the study but deserves future thought.

### **Unexpected Observations**

Three positive unexpected observations were made. The first was the growing sense of awareness and momentum in terms of community throughout the length of the study. Due to the survey, the Sunday morning message, the sermon notes, Wednesday evening discussion questions, and the sermon small groups, people became very invested in the biblical passage being studied (Phil. 1-2) and the exploration of community. This momentum was evident in various Sunday school classes choosing community and relational topics for study, people's private home devotion time focusing on the Philippians passage, and personal conversations with people. This momentum was also evident in some of the focus group conversations. For example, one respondent stated, "We have been doing the sense of community with [name] and [name] and it has been neat that the sermons and Wednesday nights have all been around community. I love how God puts it all together." At the completion of the study there was a general excitement and eagerness felt in the church.

This second unexpected observation, as discussed in the impacts of the findings, was how people were encouraged to pursue community not just in terms of the church but beyond. Talking about opportunities for relationships in the context of the church opened the door to see ministry as an opportunity to grow and develop relationships. This new view of ministry as discovering opportunities for relationships progressed to an awareness of opportunities outside of the church within the general Huntington community. One of the problems identified in the local context of the study was the brokenness of the Huntington community. Huntington, West Virginia, is considered to be one of the most miserable places to live in the nation, plagued by poverty and drugs. The

reason sermon-based small groups are important is because they are a means of anchoring lives into meaningful relationships. The unexpected observation of people pursuing deeper relationships in the boarder community affirms a theological foundation of this study. Since God himself is Triune, self-existent in relationship, as people also become relationally healthy and aware, the brokenness in this world finds healing. A ripple effect was discovered that went from a purposeful awareness of strangers in the church and the importance of relationships, to practicing community in the larger public space of belonging beyond New Baptist Church.

The third unexpected observation was the group leaders' positive impact upon the sermon-based small groups. The group leaders who facilitated the small groups were inexperienced at leading a Bible study or a small group. In selecting the various group leaders, I was fearful that if I selected experienced Sunday school teachers, then the Wednesday evening sermon-based small groups would just be a repeat of the Sunday morning classes. Also, I believed, that people who had never taught Sunday school may be more open to leading a group as described by the facilitator instructions and training (see Appendix B). As promoted by Osborne, the primary criteria in the selection of facilitators was their relational warmth as seen in their ability to welcome people and help people feel comfortable (104). Due to these people having never led a small group before, some people participated in the study either to support a particular group leader or out of curiosity. As predicted by Osborne, the relational and spiritual warmth of the group leaders had a strong positive impact upon those who participated.

Another important observation in regards to the group leaders was the multigenerational age span. Permitting the participants to choose which facilitator-led

group to attend allowed a greater generational mix within each small group. Many seniors purposefully sought the college-age facilitator because they expressly said they wanted to understand that generation better. Some young participants chose more senior facilitators because they lacked opportunities to connect with the older generation. Another positive observation with regards to the facilitators was the impact that married couples had as group leaders. Five of the nine groups were led by a husband and wife team. In the context of New Baptist Church, groups led by a husband and wife team was new. The groups facilitated by a husband and wife team allowed for a different dynamic for those involved.

### **Recommendations**

This study on the sense of belonging in sermon-based groups revealed areas of needed change at New Baptist Church. The first recommendation is the most practical and obvious, namely clear and up-to-date communications for people on how they can relationally connect at Church. In order to meet people where they are in terms of relational need or spaces of belonging involves providing them the means to know how to maneuver the maze of groups and relationships already present at New Baptist Church. A number of specific recommendations in this regard include

- Monthly Sunday school class topics and maps of the church provided at a welcome center, on bulletin boards, in the monthly newsletter, and on the Web site;
- Repeat promotion and sign up for step clubs (affinity groups);
- A regular New Baptist Church orientation class that walks attenders through church structure, groups, boards, ministries and opportunities; and,

- Highly visible information kiosks near the church entry way that display Sunday school information and ministries of the church.

Another recommendation coming from this study is the continued use of the sermon-based small groups. These small groups showed the positive benefits produced from these groups was new friendships, a heightened sensitivity toward strangers, and opportunities for people to serve as facilitators. These benefits warrant the continued use of sermon-based small groups as one of the scheduled events at New Baptist on Wednesday evenings. A number of things take place on Wednesday evenings at New Baptist Church through the year, including men's and women's small groups, mission nights, electives, business meetings, and Bible studies. The recommendation is to hold sermon-based small groups for roughly four to six weeks twice a year as a part of the Wednesday evening rotation of events. Included with this recommendation is the continual use of people who exhibit a spiritual and relational warmth as the group facilitators who are not Sunday school teachers. This strategy of group leader selection provides leadership opportunities for a greater number of people in the church.

The next two recommendations are more strategic and require further study. This study only looked at the competency of the church to provide opportunities for people to develop deeper personal relationships, but it did not look at the competencies that people need for those relationships. Giving people opportunities without equipping them to grow in those opportunities will bring limits to community building at New Baptist Church. The recommendation is to conduct a study that looks at the relational competencies of people. This study would involve a literature review around positive relational skills needed for healthy and meaningful friendships. The implementation of this study would

be a sustained season of teaching that would include a heightened sensitivity towards relational competencies.

The other recommendation that requires further strategic thought and study is an evaluation of the current ministries at New Baptist Church in terms of Meyers' continuation of belonging. The evaluation would seek to discover what spaces of belonging the various ministries provide, asking in what ministries do people engage at a public or social level, and in what ministries do they engage at a more personal or intimate level? If New Baptist Church is to meet people in each of these spaces of belonging, then a greater awareness of where those different spaces are within the church is needed. The bulk of the literature review would be around developing a means of evaluation. The evaluation would involve focus groups or private interviews with people who are involved in each ministry with the goal of discovering how relationally connected they are to the other people who participate in the same ministry. The final result of the study would be clarity as to what spaces of belonging the various ministries fill, as well as a capacity to recognize limitations of opportunities within the church. The final product of this study would be the development of new ministries that provide a specific space of belonging per need, as well as the better communication of opportunities at the church with a greater accuracy in regards to their relational expectations.

The final recommendation from this study is one that involves the long-range planning and direction of New Baptist Church. The Sunday morning attendance of four hundred fills 90 percent of the church's seating capacity. An important topic of discussion among church leaders is how to increase the capacity of the church in order to



add more people. The three options that have been discussed are to build a bigger sanctuary, add a second Sunday morning service, or develop a satellite church.

Discussion on these options are normally around the issues of financial and human resources. This study on the spaces of belonging has created in me a heightened sensitivity towards the importance of healthy public, social, personal, and intimate relationships. The common primary goal of many churches pressed upon pastors and congregants is growth in terms of numbers. This goal of greater numbers is how the Great Commission, as expressed in Matthew 28, is often and wrongly understood:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (vv. 18-20)

Looking at the ending of the gospel of Matthew shows that the Great Commission is about being and living immersed in the Triune relational reality of God. The last command is to know (behold) the relational intimacy that a believer has with Christ (I am with you always). The opening command to go is the instruction to invite strangers into this shared community of God. Thus, the recommendation from this study is to shift the importance to creating a culture where people are immersed in the relational reality of God over that of gaining a greater number of attenders. In practical terms this recommendation means understanding that the church is to be something that happens throughout the whole week, as opposed to an event on Sunday morning. A danger observed from other churches that have gone to multiple services or sites is a whittling away of the opportunities of community during the week in favor of a high impact Sunday morning event. The challenge of seating capacity must be addressed at New

Baptist Church knowing that a primary means of experiencing God's grace is community found through the spaces of belonging.

### **Postscript**

This study has deeply impacted my view of the church. More specifically, it has helped me understand the purpose of the local church that I pastor. The study forced me to think through the theological premises that God created men and women and saved them to enjoy relational fellowship with him because in his very being he exists in relational fellowship.

My thoughts return to Lewis' third space trilogy book called *That Hideous Strength*. In the book, of the great evils that seduces people towards their own destruction was their pursuit of being in the "inner circle." This notion of life purpose as being better than one's neighbor as defined by that inner circle was, according to Lewis, the real evil. Like many cults and Amway-like sales techniques, the church growth movement leans heavily on the usage of inner circles. A new person comes to the church and is presented a bull's-eye chart of concentric circles that has *public* on the outside and *core* on the inside. The goal they say is to move from the public sphere to the core inner circle. To Lewis, this seeking to be in the inner core is the hideous strength. Churches that are caught by this hideous strength develop a culture of people looking to the board of deacons, or the elders, or the pastoral relations committee as being the core towards which to aspire. Holiness becomes understood as moving towards the core of the inner circle of secrets, authority, and power.

The work for this study pushed me to grapple with understanding the church through the lens of God's own holy Triune being. The conclusion gained through the

work of this study is that the goal and purpose of the church is not a movement of people from the public to the core but a movement from broken and isolated toward whole and healthy. This movement towards community is the goal of the church, not programs, activities, styles of worship, or weekly events, but people discovering and living out the enjoyment of fellowship with God and each other.

## APPENDIX A

## SERMONS OUTLINES AND WEDNESDAY SMALL GROUP GUIDES

**Sermon 1 Outline**—“**To Live is Christ**”—Philippians 1:12-30  
15 November 2015

**Key Verse**—For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance [σωτηρία]. (Phil. 1:19)

**Introduction**—Salvation as past, present and future work of God. Salvation is not only a saving from sin, but also a saving to a new and changed life lived in a relationship with God. This multi-dimensional understanding of salvation is seen in the New Testament by how the Greek word for salvation is used.

**Antithesis**—Many Christians live in only the past tense of salvation

**Thesis**—God is at work in present everyday circumstances and situations.

**Relevant Question**—What does it look like to live in the present tenseness of salvation?

**Synthesis 1**—God transforming every circumstance for His purpose and glory. (Philippians 1:12-17).”

**Synthesis 2**—God transforming every circumstance for His good in you.

**Synthesis 3**—God’s transformative work is done through God’s Spirit and God’s people.

**BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS**

*Philippians 1:1-26*

Wednesday, November 18th, 2015

New Baptist Church

**Opening Fellowship Questions**

- When you read the news, what stories do you spend the most time on (example: sports, world news, politics, local news, opinion blogs, etc.)?
- What was your most favorite vacation?

**Study Questions**

- What does Paul call the church members of Philippi (vs 1)? What does this mean to you?
- Do you see God’s good work happening in you (vs 6)? In what ways?
- In verses 9-11, what are the primary things that Paul is praying for?
- How did God turn Paul’s imprisonment and sufferings to advantage (vs 12-14, 20)?
- Why do you think that Paul’s imprisonment seemed to stimulate his friends to preach the gospel (1:14-16).
- Does suffering make a person’s witness more powerful? If so why? What are other qualities or conditions that make a person’s witness powerful?
- What does it mean to you when Paul says “to live is Christ” (vs 21)?

**Closing Fellowship Question**

- What was a difficult circumstance you faced that God used for His glory? Did you grow spiritually during this time?

**Prayer Concerns**

- Verse 19 shows the importance of praying for others. How can the group pray for you?

**Sermon 2 Outline—“Being the Church”—Philippians 1:27-2:5**  
22 November 2015

**Key Verse**—Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. (Phil. 1:27)

**Introduction**—Paul describes the life that is worthy of the gospel as standing firm in one spirit, being one mind, and striving side by side for the faith.

**Antithesis**—Many people define a life worthy of the gospel as living by rules causing many Christians live their lives in isolation or strife.

**Thesis**—God makes us worthy by inviting us into fellowship with Him.

**Relevant Question**—How does living in fellowship with God change us and move us towards a life worthy of the Gospel?

**Synthesis 1**—Living the life found in Christ.

**Synthesis 2**—Getting rid of strife and vain glory.

**Synthesis 3**—Having the Mind of Christ.

**BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS**

*Philippians 1:27-2:5*

Wednesday, November 25, 2015

New Baptist Church

**Opening Fellowship Questions**

- What is one of your favorite local restaurants?
- What are some of the things you like to do to relax?

**Study Questions**

- What does "let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" look like to you (vs 1:27)?
- How might the opponents of the church of Philippi frighten them (vs 1:28)? Are there opponents to the church today? How are churches / Christians frightened today?
- What is the sign of salvation that Paul talks about (vs 1:28)?
- What resources do we have as believers to be of one mind (vs 2:1-2)?
- In verse 2:2, the completion of Paul's joy is linked to the unity of believers. In your opinion, how is joy and the unity of believers linked? Has Christian unity ever been a source of your joy? Or the lack of unity as a source of sorrow?
- In verse 2:3 Paul says "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory (KJV)..." What does it look like when things are done through strife and vainglory?
- How does Paul define humility (vs 2:3-4)?
- What is "yours in Christ Jesus" refer to (vs 2:5)? How do you get it?

**Prayer Concerns**

- Before you close - please take a moment to share prayer concerns... as well as to pray for the church in the context of tonight' study.

**Sermon 3 Outline—“The Mind of Christ”—Philippians 2:5-11**  
29 November 2015

**Key Verse**—Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil 2:5-7)

**Introduction**—God has the right to all worship, glory and honor.

**Antithesis**—People tend to demand for themselves the rights that only belong to God (e.g., the right to have things their way, the right to get all the credit, the right to be the center of attention)

**Thesis**—The Son emptied himself, giving up his rights of receiving worship, glory and honor so that we may have the right to be children of God.

**Relevant Question**—If Jesus gave up his rights for us, what should we do?

**Synthesis**—We should have the mind of Christ and willfully

surrender our right to be comfortable, right to get the credit, and the right of having it our own way so that others may gain the right to be children of God.

**Closing**—All glory and honor and worship is given to Christ, not only because he is God, but because of what he has done. IT is due him. It is due him by his surrender and obedience through which we have been given the right to be children of God and to approach His presence and to enjoy fellowship.

**BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS**

*Philippians 2:5-11*  
December 2nd, 2015  
New Baptist Church

**Opening Fellowship Questions**

- As a U.S.A citizen, what are some of the things that you cherish most?
- What rights would you be willing to fight for and even die for?

**Study Questions**

- How would you describe the mind of Christ (verses 5-8)? What does it mean for you to “Have the mind of Christ (verse 5)?”
- What does it mean when the Bible says He “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Verse 7)?” How does this verse compare to Isaiah 53:12-13? Have you ever emptied (poured) yourself out for a person, project or cause? What was the result?
- Notice how Jesus chose to empty himself, be born, take the form of a servant, humble Himself, and die on the cross (verses 7-8). What does having the power to make these choices say about who He is, and the power He holds? Why did He chose to humble Himself and die?
- Why did God exalt Jesus (verse 9)? Have you ever observed humility and servanthood being rewarded with honor and added responsibility (glory)?
- How is humility and obedience related to each other (verse 8)?
- In our world, what is the normal way that people seek greatness (i.e. personal glory and power)? According to the text (verses 8-11), what is the Kingdom of God’s way in becoming great? Are there other passages in the Bible that support your answer and if so what are they?

**Closing Question**

What is God calling you to surrender so that you may better know Him and make Him known?

**Please pray for each other before you close.**

**Sermon 4 Outline—“Working Out”—Philippians 2:12-18**  
6 December 2015

**Key Verse**—Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12)

**Introduction**—The four primary attitudes and words of a spoiled child are “No, Me, Gimme, Now.”

**Antithesis**—Spoiled Christians (no, me, gimme, now) struggle to have healthy relationships with others and know the joy of the Lord.

**Thesis**—God has worked into each believer his very Spirit giving believers the fruits of love, peace, patience, kindness, and thoughtfulness.

**Relevant Question**—How do Christians work out into their lives what God has already worked into them by His Spirit?

**Synthesis 1**—Christians work out their salvation through trusting and obeying God (Phil 2:14-15).

**Synthesis 2**—Christians work out their salvation by seeking to live holy lives (2:15).

**Synthesis 3**—Christians work out their salvation by hanging onto God’s word (2:16).

**BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS**

*Philippians 2:12-18*

December 9th, 2015 - New Baptist Church

**Opening Fellowship Questions**

- When you have had a really bad day, what do you do to feel better?

**Study Questions**

- Verse 2:12 tells us to work out what God has worked in (verse 2:13). What has God worked in?
- Notice how Paul is talking to the church as a whole (not just to individuals) in verses 12 and 13. Thus when he says “work out your (plural) salvation, he is talking to the church as a local community of believers. Thus what does it look like for a church (rather than an individual Christian) to work out their salvation? (see Philippians 2:2-4 as a good reference)?
- What does it look like when a church IS NOT working out its salvation?
- Verse 12 tells us to respond to what God has already done in us with “Fear and Trembling.” Why? What are some examples that you can share of doing something with fear and trembling? How does this relate to doing something because of what God has done in us?
- Verse 14 says to “do all things without grumbling or disputing.” What examples are there in the Bible of people grumbling and disputing? What did they fail to see because of grumbling or disputing? What do people today fail to see when there is grumbling or disputing? In your experience what is the outcome of grumbling and complaining?
- According to verse 16, what are we to “hold fast to?” How would you instruct someone to hold fast to the word of life?
- Why is it important “to hold fast to the word of life” while living “in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation?” (Verses 15, 16).
- In verses 16 through 17 Paul talks about how seeing the church’s hanging onto God’s word in obedience makes him know that he has made a difference and causes him to rejoice. What is the connection between a personal sense of purpose and joy and seeing others faithful in God’s word?
- ***The Whole Study (Philippians 1:1-2:18) has been about how being a Christian is experienced, lived out, and shaped through genuine Christian community. How have you found this true in your own life? How has this study challenged you personally?***

**Please pray for each other before you close.**

## APPENDIX B

### FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS AND TRAINING

#### Facilitating a Small Group

- **Goals of Study**
  - The goal of the study is to use Scripture as a means of deeper fellowship and connection with others.
  - The desired outcome of the Wednesday studies is that people feel welcomed, appreciated, and valued.
  - Other possible positive products of the study may be deeper life applications of the Bible passage and/or a better understanding of the Bible passage.
  
- **The Facilitator's Role in the Study**
  - To run the group in such a way that people feel welcomed and appreciated
  - To be willing to share personally, also to add any insight to the various questions being asked
  - To ask questions that may draw people into conversation
  - To keep a healthy environment within the group
    - Dealing with EGRs (Extreme Grace Required)
    - Deferring long monologs to private conversations
  - Both to open and close the evening
  - To provide feedback to Trent after each study with regards to
    - General observations of the study—any ideas for improvements



- Numbers for the evening
- To ask any questions prior to the study
- When possible, to track any needs of people within your group

### **Leading the Study**

- **Gathering**
  - Welcome people
  - Open with prayer
  - On the first night, share names (and maybe something about themselves)
- **The Study**
  - Opening fellowship question
  - Study questions
- **Closing**
  - Closing fellowship question or application
  - Share prayer concerns
  - Close with prayer

## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

- Question 1: (Before and after) Currently, in your life, outside of immediate family, what are the most important communities, as defined by feeling a strong sense of belonging in your life, that you are a part of (work, school, clubs, etc.)?
  - Probe—How important are these communities to you?
  - Probe—Do these communities provide the friendship and fellowship that you believe you need?
  - Probe—According to your own needs for friendship and community, how important is the church?
  - Probe—What is your opinion of the role of the church in terms of meeting those felt relational needs?
- Question 2: (Before and after) How do you rate your sense of belonging at New Baptist Church?
  - Probe—Do you feel welcomed?
  - Probe—Do you feel accepted?
  - Probe—Do you desire a deeper level of connection with the community at church? Why or why not?
  - Probe—To you, what would that look like or feel like to belong?
- Question 3: (Before and after) If a person desired to connect more deeply with the church on a relational level, how would he or she do that? What instruction would you give to a person if he or she expressed to you a desire of wanting a deeper level of connection with people at New Baptist Church?

- Probe—According to the instruction given, do you think that people who followed it would actually feel more connected to the church? Why or why not?
- Probe—Are there private things (Example: spiritual disciplines) that a person can do to enhance their sense of belonging at New Baptist Church?
- Probe—In your opinion, how easy would it be for a person to feel like he or she belongs at New Baptist Church?
- Probe—What would or does belonging feel like to you?
- Question 4: (Before and after) What does New Baptist Church do that makes you feel welcomed?
  - Probe—Are there things that the church does that make you feel unwelcomed? If so, what are they?
  - Probe—What would be the most important thing the church could do to help people feel like they are welcomed and accepted?
  - Probe—What would be the most impactful change the church could make to help people feel a part of the community of faith here at New Baptist Church?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

#### **Regarding Voluntary Congregational Survey**

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of people's sense of belonging through the use of sermon based small groups. As part of my study I am conducting a voluntary congregational survey at the start of the study (middle of November) and at its conclusion (middle of December). The topic of the survey is hospitality and you are invited to participate in it. The survey is 10 questions in length and can be completed in roughly 5 to 10 minutes. The survey is completely voluntary and unanimous. Those who take the survey are asked to use the last four digits of their social security number as a means of comparing any before and after changes. Throughout the length of the study the completed surveys will be kept under lock in the church office and at the end of the project all surveys will be destroyed. The survey is completely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to even consider being a part of it. You are welcomed at any time to ask me (Pastor Trent Eastman) questions about anything in this survey or larger study. I may be contacted at [REDACTED] or by email t [REDACTED]. By you filling out the survey you are indicating your consent for the information gained in the survey to be used in the larger study.

## APPENDIX E

### VOLUNTARY CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

#### **Voluntary Congregational Survey (2)**

*Please circle that answer that best conveys how you feel with regard to each given statement.*

1. How a person welcomes or treats a stranger is a reflection of their relationship with God.

**Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

2. Belonging to a community of faith (church) is essential to a person's personal walk with God.

**Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

3. Deep Christian Friendship is something that every Christian should seek, ask God for, and when found give thanks.

**Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

4. I feel that New Baptist Church helps people feel welcomed.

**Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

5. I am aware of various options on how to connect with people on a more personal level at New Baptist Church.

**Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

6. New Baptist Church is a place where people can find genuine Christian friendship.

**Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

7. I personally look for a person that is new so that I can welcome them.

**Always - Often - Seldom - Never**

8. I invite people who are new to my Sunday school class.

**Always - Often - Seldom - Never**

9. I invite people who are new out to lunch with me.

**Always - Often - Seldom - Never**

10. I invite people who are new to sit with me during church.

**Always - Often - Seldom - Never**

Did you attend any of the Wednesday Evening Small Groups?

**Yes - No**

**Last 4 of SS#** \_\_\_\_\_

*The purpose of the last 4 digits of Social Security Number is a means to compare survey results both before and after the study. All surveys will be kept in a locked office and destroyed after study.*

**APPENDIX F**

**FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

**The Sense of Belonging in Sermon-Based Small Groups**

You are invited to be in a research study being done by **Pastor Trent Eastman** from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you attend New Baptist Church and have chosen to participate in the Wednesday evening small group sermon based studies.

If you agree to assist Pastor Trent Eastman in his research, you will be asked to participate in a small focus group that will last for about an hour. During this hour you will be asked to share your feelings and perceptions about how well you feel connected to New Baptist Church. The focus group that you are invited to participate in will meet at the beginning of the study (around the beginning of November) and again at the end of the study (middle of December). There is no financial payment for participation in this study.

The focus group will be audio recorded for the purpose of accurate collection of what people shared in response to the questions asked. A transcript will be produced from this recording for use by the researcher to compile his results. At no time will your name appear in the study. At the conclusion of the study all research data such as the audio recording and transcripts will be either deleted or destroyed.

If at any time you would like to withdraw from the study you are welcome to do so whenever you want. Your participation is completely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to even consider being a part of it. You are welcomed at any time to ask Pastor Trent Eastman questions about anything in this study. He can be contacted at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

If you are willing to assist in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation. Thank you for your help.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Your Name

**APPENDIX G****CONGREGATIONAL ANNOUNCEMENT AND INVITATION****Announcement Regarding Research Project and Study at  
New Baptist Church - Fall / Winter 2015**

*From Pastor Trent Eastman*

Dear Brothers and Sisters of New Baptist Church,

For a number of years I have been pursuing a Doctor of Ministry Degree through Asbury Theological Seminary. One of the chief components of the degree is the implementation of a research project around a ministry experiment for the purpose of new learning and insight. I am interested in learning how to help people discover church as more than an event to attend, but a community in which to belong. Thus the focus of my research project and ministry experiment is to conduct a series of Wednesday evening small groups over a period of 4 weeks that are based on discussions around the previous Sunday morning sermon. The purpose of these groups involves a deeper journey into God's word, but also a sharing of lives around what God is doing in their own life. One of the hopeful outcomes of the project is that you will know a few more people at New Baptist Church and possibly even discover life long friendships. Thus the format involves attending on Sunday morning, taking notes and then returning on Wednesday evening to discuss God's word further as a small group. If you come on Sunday morning - your homework is done! A general church wide survey, in which you are invited to participate, will be conducted at both the beginning and ending stages of the project.

All people are welcome to attend the Wednesday evening small groups. We will do our best to get you into a group in which you will feel most comfortable. Just show up that first Wednesday night of the study (November 18) and you will be good to go.

A special note to those who have only experienced New Baptist Church on a Sunday morning. One of the greatest blessings that God gives to us is each other. Thus my hope is that you come on Wednesday night and explore the richness of Christian fellowship. But please always know, participation in these groups, or in any part of my research study is fully voluntary and whether you choose to participate or not does not change the fact that you are always welcome at New Baptist Church.

**APPENDIX H**

**INSTITUTION INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

**The Sense of Belonging in Sermon-Based Small Groups**

October 11, 2015

Dear Deacon Board of New Baptist Church

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of people's sense of belonging through the use of sermon based small groups. I request your permission to conduct this study at New Baptist Church.

The study involves running small groups on Wednesday evening for 5 weeks that use the Sunday morning sermon as the point of discussion. From the gathered small groups I will invite people (roughly 15) to participate as volunteers in a focus group where they will be asked questions with regards to their sense of belonging at New Baptist Church (Please see the attached informed consent letter).

Also, the research being conducted includes a general survey given to church attenders on a given Sunday around the topic of hospitality. The survey is 10 questions in length and can be completed in roughly 5 to 10 minutes. The survey will be given both at the front end of the research (beginning of November) and the end of the research (middle of December). The survey is completely voluntary and unanimous. Those who take the survey will be asked to use the last four digits of their social security as a means of comparing any before and after changes. Throughout the length of the study the completed surveys will be kept under lock in the church office and at the end of the project all surveys will be destroyed.

If at anytime you feel that the church should withdraw from the study it is welcome to do so. The study is completely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to even consider being a part of it. You are welcomed at any time to ask me (Pastor Trent Eastman) questions about anything in this study. I may be contacted at (xxx)-xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Pastor Trent Eastman

As Chairperson of the Deacon Board I acknowledge that Pastor Trent Eastman's research project has been presented and approved by the Deacon Board of New Baptist Church.

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Signature

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Date Signed



APPENDIX I

DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS

Survey Questions	Pre-Study Survey				Survey Respondents that DID participate in Sermon Based Small Groups (85%)				Survey Respondents that did NOT participate in the small groups (16%)			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. How a person welcomes or treats a stranger is a reflection of their relationship with God.	39%	49%	12%	0%	48%	50%	2%	0%	64%	18%	18%	0%
2. Belonging to a community of faith (church) is essential to a person's personal walk with God.	72%	24%	1%	0%	76%	24%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
3. Deep Christian Friendship is something that every Christian should seek, ask God for, and when found give thanks.	81%	19%	0%	0%	76%	22%	0%	0%	73%	27%	0%	0%
4. I feel that New Baptist Church helps people feel welcomed.	61%	39%	0%	0%	76%	22%	0%	0%	45%	45%	9%	0%
5. I am aware of various options on how to connect with people on a more personal level at New Baptist Church.	36%	61%	3%	0%	50%	47%	0%	0%	45%	55%	0%	0%
6. New Baptist Church is a place where people can find genuine Christian friendship.	72%	27%	0%	0%	72%	24%	0%	0%	82%	18%	0%	0%
7. I personally look for a person that is new so that I can welcome them.	8%	55%	33%	4%	12%	72%	16%	0%	0%	73%	27%	0%
8. I invite people who are new to my Sunday school class.	8%	27%	45%	12%	10%	48%	31%	3%	18%	27%	45%	9%
9. I invite people who are new out to lunch with me.	0%	9%	45%	45%	2%	9%	67%	22%	0%	9%	73%	18%
10. I invite people who are new to sit with me during church.	3%	29%	41%	24%	3%	33%	57%	3%	9%	27%	45%	18%

## APPENDIX J

### NETWORKING AND SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

#### New Baptist Church

#### Board of Missions—Service Opportunities

January 2016

1. Lily's Place
  - a. [www.lilysplace.org](http://www.lilysplace.org)
  - b. Donating options
    - i. Check mailed to PO Box 2, Huntington, WV 25706
    - ii. Donate online
    - iii. Link your Kroger Plus card:
      1. Register online at [krogercommunityrewards.com](http://krogercommunityrewards.com)
      2. Be sure to have your Kroger Plus card handy and register your card with your organization after you sign up.
      3. If you don't have a Kroger Plus card, they are available at the customer service desk at any Kroger
      4. Click on Sign In/Register
      5. Once you are registered, you can link your card to Lily's Place. Just follow the directions. It's easy!
    - iv. Link your Amazonsmile account
      1. Go to [amazonsmile.com](http://amazonsmile.com)
      2. Type in your Amazon username and password or create an account if you do not already have an account
      3. After you are logged in you will be prompted to pick a charity to support
      4. In the search space type Lily's place
      5. Select Lily's place
    - v. Items: diapers, paper towels, Febreze air freshener, baby laundry soap for HE machines, non latex non powder gloves, one piece pacifiers, stamps, garbage bags, Clorox and Lysol wipes, Windex, Swiffer wet and dry replacements, bottled water (gallon size), toilet cleaner, copier paper, file folders.
2. Ronald McDonald House
  - a. [www.mchouse.org](http://www.mchouse.org)
  - b. 304-529-1122
  - c. Collect pop tabs or tabs off soup cans.

- i. They fill up 18 Rubbermaid tubs every 4-6 weeks. Then they recycle them and typically make \$350 or more.
  - d. They are always in need of Kroger or Food Fair gift cards to help buy milk, bread, eggs, etc. for the kitchen
  - e. Donations of packages of crackers, snack cakes, individual cookie packages, etc. to help stock the kitchen.
  - f. Prepare a meal for the residents. This could be made in advance and delivered or made on site in one of their kitchens.
  - g. Link your amazon smile account
    - i. Go to [amazonsmile.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile)
    - ii. Type in your amazon username and password or create an account if you do not already have an account
    - iii. After you are logged in you will be prompted to pick a charity to support
    - iv. In the search space type Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Tri-State, Inc.
3. A New Beginning
  - a. [www.anewbeginningcpc.com](http://www.anewbeginningcpc.com)
  - b. 304-697-0411
4. Habitat for Humanity
  - a. [www.hahabitat.org](http://www.hahabitat.org)
  - b. 304-523-4822
  - c. Habitat Restore 304-781-1333
5. Marshall Medical Outreach (MMO)
  - a. Search Facebook for Marshall Medical Outreach to the Homeless
  - b. Donate:
    - i. Hygiene items
    - ii. Oatmeal cakes
    - iii. Over-the-counter meds
    - iv. Socks
    - v. Deodorant
    - vi. Your time
6. Faith in Action
  - a. [www.fiarivercities.org](http://www.fiarivercities.org)
  - b. 304-697-1274
  - c. Volunteer for many non-medical services to the elderly and adults with disabilities
    - i. Transportation
    - ii. Shopping/errands
    - iii. Respite

- iv. Companionship
  - v. Paperwork
  - vi. Yard work
  - vii. Minor home repairs
  - viii. Light housekeeping/laundry services
  - ix. Reassurance telephone calls
7. Gideon's
- a. [www.gideons.org](http://www.gideons.org)
  - b. 615-564-5000
  - c. Donate money
  - d. Send Gideon cards (see website)
  - e. Donate Gideon-placed Bibles
  - f. Become a Partner in Prayer (see website)
8. Hospice of Huntington
- a. [www.hospiceofhuntington.org](http://www.hospiceofhuntington.org)
  - b. 304-529-4217
9. Huntington City Mission
- a. [www.huntingtoncitymission.org](http://www.huntingtoncitymission.org)
  - b. 304-523-0293
10. Food Pantry at New Baptist Church
- a. [www.newbaptistchurch.com](http://www.newbaptistchurch.com) then search under ministries
  - b. 304-523-3355
  - c. Volunteer your time every Tuesday 10-4
  - d. Donate money
  - e. Donate canned goods, non-perishable food, condiments, etc.
  - f. Donate hygiene items (especially the travel size you get at a hotel)
11. Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM)
- a. [www.wvbcm.org](http://www.wvbcm.org)
  - b. 304-532-3166 Rob Ely's cell phone
  - c. Be an active church family for the college students who attend
  - d. There are occasional food needs for dinners, tailgates, fellowship events
  - e. Transportation — providing a van (church van) for trips
  - f. Visit BCM (Wednesday evenings at 9:15 Campus Christian Center)
  - g. PRAYER!
12. Young Life
- a. [www.ylhuntington.younglife.org](http://www.ylhuntington.younglife.org)
  - b. 304-525-7790
  - c. Ways to help Young Life of Huntington as a whole
    - i. Become part of the Young life committee
    - ii. Hosting or providing meals for the all-area leadership meetings

- iii. Fundraising opportunities
- d. WyldLife (middle school):
  - i. Food for club meetings (pizza)
  - ii. Adults interested in training to be volunteer leaders
  - iii. Parents of middle school kids who want to care for the team
- e. YoungLife (high school):
  - i. Parents/adults who want to care for volunteer leaders
  - ii. Fundraising for summer camp
- f. YoungLife College:
  - i. Food once a month at trivia night (pizza)
  - ii. Tailgate at football games
  - iii. Adults interested in training to be volunteer leaders (small group leaders)
- g. YoungLives: (teen moms and their babies)
  - i. Diapers
  - ii. Financial help for their camp trip (approx \$500)
  - iii. Sponsorship for their Bunco Tournament/silent auction fundraiser
  - iv. Childcare help on a weekly basis (GREAT need)
  - v. Mentors who want to go deep with girls and walk alongside them

### 13. Recovery Point

- a. [www.recoverypointwv.org](http://www.recoverypointwv.org)
- b. 304-523-4673
- c. Types of giving:
  - i. One-time, monthly, quarterly or yearly donation
  - ii. In-kind Services
    - 1. Donate your professional services (attorney, physician, etc)
  - iii. Item donations:
    - 1. Household items
    - 2. Cleaning supplies
    - 3. Paper products
  - iv. volunteer

### 14. Boys and Girls Club of Huntington

- a. [www.bgchuntingtonwv.org](http://www.bgchuntingtonwv.org)
- b. 304-523-5120

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