

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISPOSITIONAL FORGIVENESS AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE WISCONSIN ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

by

Gary A. Holmes

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the relationship between a person's disposition to forgive interpersonal transgressions over time and across situations, as measured by the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness, and their sense of community, as measured by the Sense of Community Index, in a United Methodist Church in the Wisconsin Annual Conference. The intervening variables of age, gender, longevity of church association, and religiosity (level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry involvement) were also evaluated.

A significant positive relationship between forgiveness and sense of community was discovered; however, the correlation coefficient was small. In addition, demographic factors and religiosity proved to have a significant relationship with forgiveness and sense of community.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISPOSITIONAL FORGIVENESS AND A SENSE  
OF COMMUNITY IN A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE WISCONSIN  
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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dedicate this dissertation to you, and rededicate the rest of my life to love you with the love of God in Christ Jesus.

## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM

“I choose not to forgive you.” These were the words of a member of my congregation as he rejected my request for forgiveness over a missed communication regarding an event the day prior. The words caught me off guard and led to a breakdown in our relationship. Our relational breakdown also led to relational tensions within the staff and some members of the congregation. This personal experience of unforgiveness raised questions about the relationship between forgiveness and community.

Recently in the national scene, a young father admitted that he harbored resentment and unforgiveness towards God for nine years since he had lost a newborn baby minutes after her birth. He also reported in a note to his wife that he had been ruminating about the abuse he had inflicted on young girls twenty years earlier. This man, who seemed normal to his family and neighbors at the time, would soon be responsible for the execution style shooting deaths of five young Amish girls on 2 October 2006 prior to taking his own life in an Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. Authorities say that the motive remains unclear for this vicious killing, but this father of three, Charlie Roberts, wrote a note describing his resentment towards God and his growing obsession with the abuse he inflicted twenty years ago. Apparently Roberts’ unresolved issues of forgiveness played a role in this tragic story.

Nevertheless, this tragedy opened a window into the remarkable values of the Amish life. While the world would expect the Amish community to be angry and call for some kind of retribution, it instead offered forgiveness. For example, days after the killing, the victims’ families insisted on establishing a fund for the killer’s wife and

children, and some even approached the Roberts' family to offer a hug and forgiveness (Hewitt, Egan, Dowd and Scully 58-61). The nonviolent, religious, and communal values of the Amish have helped shape this forgiving community.

The Amish have what Dr. Robert D. Enright, a University of Wisconsin-Madison professor of educational psychology and pioneer in the area of forgiveness studies, calls "forgiveness muscle" (Personal Interview). They practice and preach the importance of maintaining community through forgiveness. According to an Amish elder, "It's very important that we teach the children not to think evil of the man who did this" (Hewitt, Egan, Dowd and Scully 60). The Amish community values and teaches the development of forgiveness muscle. The Amish have developed the forgiveness muscle so well that they are even able to offer forgiveness in this profoundly tragic situation, muscle underdeveloped in the life of Charlie Roberts.

Around the world, unforgiveness, resentment, and anger from those who have experienced injustice have fueled cycles of hatred and wars for generations. Father Elias Chacour writes in his book about the challenges of being a Palestinian Christian. Chacour recounts the breakdown of relationships between Palestinians and their blood brothers, the Jews, following World War II. This biography recounts how Father Chacour was devoted to following Christ's example and call to forgive others. Even as Father Chacour experienced and observed incredible injustices between Jews and Palestinians and even between Palestinian family members, he dedicated his life to break the cycle of anger, resentment, and war by bringing the forgiveness of Christ to all. Led by his faith in Jesus Christ, Father Chacour has chosen to break the cycle of unforgiveness for the purpose of

developing forgiving communities. Father Chacour has chosen to live a life of forgiveness.

My interest in the dissertation topic of forgiveness and its relationship to community heightened when I attended a seminar on forgiveness led by Dr. Enright. I was captivated by Enright's presentation on the meaning and purpose of forgiving. Enright utilized extensive research, empirical evidence, and biblical texts to broaden and enhance my understanding of the topic.

Enright argues that forgiveness is a choice, and provides a process for resolving anger and restoring hope through forgiveness. He is also quick to state that when one chooses not to forgive, one chooses to hold onto resentment as well as negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Enright, *Forgiveness Is a Choice* 34). Psychologists generally agree that neglected negative feelings have the potential to lead to emotional and physical health problems. On one level, withholding forgiveness is personally unhealthy (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, and Wade 188). On another level, withholding forgiveness causes a relational breakdown within the community. In my experience, I felt a breakdown in my sense of relatedness to the community by the broken relationship.

I could not help but wonder what role resentment and anger from unforgiveness plays into a lacking sense of community. The Christian Church must understand the meaning and importance of forgiveness and its relationship to authentic community in order to fulfill its mission and purpose. The church must understand the mitigating factors that limit its ability to forgive and experience authentic community. These factors are explored in this study.

### **Theological Grounding**

This study on the relationship between forgiveness and community is grounded in a central Christian doctrine that forgiveness is essential to Christian community.

Furthermore, Trinitarian theology provides a foundational basis for these central notions.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a oneness that all of humanity is invited to share.

Forgiveness from God is available to all who repent from sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ. This forgiveness leads to God's ultimate purpose for humanity to commune with God and each other. However, the majority of focus in theological and psychological studies has been on the forgiveness of person to person, and has been less concerned with the impact of forgiveness of the community as a whole.

When one experiences a conflict within the Church community, it is a result of an injustice, or at least a perceived injustice. The response is often to harbor resentment and anger. The tendency is to find ways to avoid those relationships rather than restore them, and that is a choice. Avoiding others is done without understanding the cost of unforgiveness. The Bible gives numerous stories and teachings on the importance of forgiveness and its central role in the reestablishment of authentic community. One of the first examples of person-to-person forgiveness in the Hebrew Scriptures comes when Joseph unconditionally forgives his brother and half-brothers. Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers would save the Jewish nation from potential starvation (Gen. 37-47). In the New Testament, Jesus challenges Peter on his question of how many times he was supposed to forgive (Matt. 18:21-32). Jesus teaches that forgiveness is qualitative and not quantitative (Augsburger 233). Forgiveness is not an option for a follower of Christ. Forgiveness is less about a single act of forgiveness as it is about a depth of Christian



character. L. Gregory Jones emphasizes the importance of understanding forgiveness more as a depth of character:

For Christians, forgiveness is not simply an action, an emotional judgment, or a declarative utterance—though Christian forgiveness includes all those dimensions. Rather, forgiveness is a habit that must be practiced over time within the disciplines of Christian community. This is so because, as I have been suggesting, in the face of sin and evil God’s love moves toward reconciliation by means of forgiveness. Forgiveness aims to restore communion on the part of humans with God, with one another, and with the whole of creation. (163)

This disposition to forgive is the focus of Jesus’ teaching. Forgiveness is not only beneficial to the mental and physical health of the individual but is vital to the health and well-being of the community. Forgiveness is a choice that impacts ones relatedness to God and neighbor.

### **The Purpose Stated**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the relationship of dispositional forgiveness and sense of community in a Wisconsin United Methodist church. A survey measured the individual churchgoer’s dispositional forgiveness and sense of community. The survey results provided a cross-sectional picture of the United Methodist congregation’s dispositional forgiveness and sense of community. The dispositional forgiveness scores are correlated with their sense of community scores. As will be indicated in later chapters, previous research argues that a person’s disposition to forgive has a positive correlation with his or her commitment to the community. In fact, one study notes that a person’s willingness to forgive is primarily correlated to the person’s social commitment to the faith community life and not his or her mere personal beliefs (Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usai, Neto, and Shafighi 1). This relationship between forgiveness and social commitment to a faith community raises questions about

congregations that emphasize faith as a properly ordered belief system at the neglect of living out that faith in action. A belief system is important, but according to James 1:22, faith must lead to a corresponding way of life. Therefore, the survey included questions related to their activity in the life of the community of faith as well.

### **Research Questions**

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, four research questions are identified:

1. Among churchgoers, what is their sense of community?
2. Among churchgoers, what are their levels of forgivingness?
3. Among churchgoers, how does their sense of community correlate with their level of forgivingness?
4. Among churchgoers, do individuals' sense of community and level of forgivingness differ by age, sex, longevity of church association, and religiosity: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation and service ministry involvement?

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study, the principal terms are defined as follows.

*Sense of Community Index* (SOC) is a reliable instrument that measures a person's feeling of belonging to a determined group (McMillan and Chavis 15).

*Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness* (TNTF) is a reliable instrument that measures a "person's disposition to forgive transgressions that is stable over time and across situations" (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, and Wade 1287).

“*Forgivingness* is a person’s disposition to forgive transgressions that is stable over time and across situations” (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, and Wade 1278).

### **Methodology**

This is a correlational descriptive study that uses survey methodology. The tabulation of these surveys provided an indication of the relationship between the individual’s dispositional forgiveness and sense of community as well as the relationship to respondent’s age, gender, ethnicity, longevity of church association, and religiosity: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry involvement.

### **Subjects**

The subjects for this study were those churchgoers of a United Methodist congregation in the Wisconsin Annual Conference that responded to my survey. All churchgoers in the church’s database, both members and active nonmembers, were sent a survey and encouraged to participate. This convenient sample was taken from a United Methodist church located on the edge of one of Wisconsin’s larger cities. To maintain anonymity for this congregation, I will refer to this church as Faith United Methodist Church (Faith UMC). The average Sunday morning worship at Faith UMC is approximately five hundred.

### **Variables**

The variables of this research project are dispositional forgiveness and sense of community scores. Intervening variables that may affect the outcome of the study include

age, gender, longevity of church association, and religiosity: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry involvement.

### **Instrumentation**

A questionnaire is assembled to measure dispositional forgiveness, sense of community, demographic information, and religiosity in the individual respondents. To measure dispositional forgiveness, the questionnaire incorporated the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF; see Appendix D), and to measure sense of community, the Sense of Community Index (SOC; see Appendix C) was used. The questionnaire included demographic questions as well as questions on the respondent's religiosity (level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry involvement).

### **Data Collection**

After contacting Faith UMC's pastor and leadership to gain their support for the project, I contacted the Faith UMC's office staff to give them details for collecting data and gained their support to help with administering the logistics of the study. The data collection was scheduled to be completed in three weeks. Each week I sent an email to all the Faith UMC churchgoers (members and nonmembers listed on the Faith UMC data base; see Appendix G) informing them of the congregational questionnaire that was attached to the email (see Appendix H). Questionnaires were also handed out in worship for those three weeks. Churchgoers were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to a secured drop box in the Faith UMC narthex.

The completed questionnaires were tabulated and processed. The results were analyzed to determine the correlation among dispositional forgiveness, sense of community, demographic, and religiosity factors.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

The validity of this study comes through the use of psychometrically reputable instruments. Both the SOC and the TNTF offer tested and reliable results. The pioneering aspect of this study is established through the examination of these variables in their relationship to each other. This study's results therefore provide information on the correlation between forgivingness and a sense of community.

Determining the generalizability of this sample poses a more intricate challenge. To the extent that this United Methodist Church compares demographically with other church communities, some broader assumptions may be made. This convenient sample size was a limiting factor in generalizing the final observations. Repeating this study in a variety of other contexts will help determine the extent of this study's generalizability.

### **Overview of Study**

Chapter 2 reviews selected literature and pertinent research. The theological foundations of forgiveness and its relationship to Christian community are studied. The importance of forgiveness for the individual has been well studied, however, the importance and meaning of developing a community of forgiveness has received little attention.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the project's design, the research methods, and the methods of data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 discusses major findings of the study and practical applications that flow out of the research. It also offers suggestions for further inquiry.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

This study sought to examine the relationship between dispositional forgiveness and sense of community in a United Methodist Church in the Wisconsin Annual Conference. This literature review focuses on the theological understanding of the church as a forgiving community. The theology of the triune God provides a foundational understanding of God's ultimate purpose to reconcile the creation and invite humanity into a community of oneness. The oneness modeled in the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the living essence of this community to which all of humanity is invited to embody. Forgiveness becomes the pathway to this community. God offers forgiveness to all of humanity, as humanity is accountable to offer this merciful act of forgiveness to all others.

The literature review also encompasses recent sociopsychological studies on forgiveness and community. Significant understandings on the topic through empirical studies offer insights to the biblical and theological reflections. The intent of this study is to have a limited focus upon the relationship between a person's disposition to forgive and that person's sense of community.

#### **Theological and Biblical Precedents**

Trinitarian Theology and biblical forgiveness provide the foundation for understanding authentic community. These foundations must be understood in order to formulate the relationship for forgiveness and community in the Christian context. Assumptions by the Christian church around forgiveness and community have become barriers to a forgiving community intended by God for all of humanity.

## **The Triune God and Community**

The word *Trinity* may not be found in the Bible, but this theological construct plays a biblically foundational role in understanding the church as a community of oneness. This foundational role will be explained in a historical and theological review. I will argue that the triune God forms the basis for a community of oneness exemplified in the love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The triune God invites humanity to participate in this divine community, and forgiveness becomes the key to unlocking the barriers that separate people from God and each other. The essence of the Christian gospel is revealed in God's provision for forgiveness through Jesus Christ so that all of humanity may have the opportunity to choose to be in community with God and God's children.

Trinitarian theology has been a controversial theological construct since the beginning of the Christian Church. It was formalized, not without debate, as a doctrine at the first ecumenical conference, the Council of Nicaea, held in AD 325. The primary purpose of the council was to resolve the disputes over the doctrine of the Trinity and establish an understanding of the relationship of the Father, Son (Word), and Holy Spirit. From this conference comes the first ecumenical creed on Trinitarian theology known as the Nicene Creed (see Appendix E). Trinitarian theology holds that God is one (substance) and is revealed through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Frend 498-500). Several hundred years later, the debate apparently not over, John Wesley wrote on this controversy in his sermon on the Trinity at Cork, 8 May 1775:

I dare not insist upon any one's using the word Trinity, or Person. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better: But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot: much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist,



green wood, for saying, “Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy ghost is God; yet I scruple using the words *Trinity* and *Persons*, because I do not find those terms in the Bible.” I would insist only on the direct words, unexplained, just as they lie in the text: “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one [1 John 7]. (200-01)

Wesley argued for the truth that God is revealed in the Trinitarian relationship, if not for the use of the word *Trinity*.

Over the years, the essence of the doctrine has held, but not without adjustments and critics along the way. Over the last two hundred years, the topic gained little attention until Karl Barth sparked its revival by placing Trinitarian theology at the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics* (McKee 16). This revival has recovered the relational vitality of the Trinity, a relational vitality of oneness (Barth; Bilezikian; Cladis; Guthrie). “The oneness of God is not the oneness of a distinct, self-contained individual; it is the unity of community of persons who love each other and live together in harmony” (Guthrie 92). The Trinity is not only divine love revealed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it is the model for human relationships.

Some theologians challenge this view. Emil Brunner argues against the concept of God in a transcendent relationship:

[T]he order in which Father, Son and Spirit come ‘after one another’, is biblical, whereas ‘essential’ Trinities which place the ‘persons’ ‘alongside one another’ in a transcendent relationship represent not more than an aberration of theological thought which, however, has dominated church preaching and worship from fifth century onward. (Mackey 581)

Nevertheless, this transcendent relationship is birthed by the biblical text in rather convincing ways.

Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, in his book *Community 101*, provides an in-depth biblical and theological case for the Trinity as the original community of oneness. He sets the stage for his Trinitarian-based argument for the community of oneness:

In our day, there is a clamor for the church to rediscover its identity as a community. Many Christian leaders bemoan the fact that the church has lost its basic biblical definition as divinely designed community. Lay people and clergy alike express dissatisfaction with churches conducting their business as if it were a business. They compare the stilted and stultifying routines of their church life to the effervescent explosion of Holy Spirit-generated vitality that enabled the church of Pentecost to conquer the ancient world for Christ. They wonder with nostalgia where the power has gone. They realize that they have often become lost in a jungle-growth of unbiblical traditions that choke the life out of their churches and stifle their ministries. They yearn to rediscover the biblical tradition that preceded their various ecclesiastical traditions. They demand a radical return to the basics of biblical teachings about the church as community. (11-12)

Bilezikian provides a biblical and theological argument for the Trinitarian-grounded community of oneness. “Indeed, community finds its essence and definition deep within the being of God” (16). Beginning with the creation story, God’s desire is that man should not be alone, and community was formed. The creation story records that man and woman shall become one (Gen. 2:24). “God’s supreme achievement was not the creation of a solitary man, but the creation of human community” (19). Humanity is invited into the perfect communion of God’s oneness, but “God’s original design of oneness for his creation became shattered by the sin-rebellion, appropriately called ‘the Fall’ in religious tradition” (29). Not only was humanity’s relationship with God broken, but the Fall had devastating effects on human relationships. The Hebrew Scriptures record God’s effort to reestablish a community with and among humanity. The greatest command is to love God and love people (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). This love is modeled for humanity by the Trinity. “There is implicit in the love between

Father, Son, and Spirit a sense of *covenant* [original emphasis]: a living definition of community whose essence is love” (Cladis 10).

Jones states that the triune God is characterized by “self-giving love; further, God loves those whom God created. God wills communion with Creation, and so creates human beings in the divine image and likeness. So human beings are created for loving communion—with God, with one another, and with the whole creation; we are not made to live as isolated or self-enclosed individuals” (61). Once again, the communal nature of God is the oneness that is made available to all.

When the time was right, God sent his Son, born of a woman:

[T]hrough his ministry on earth, he established an unshakable foundation for the building of God’s new community. . . . As a result, Christ can form the new community—a new oneness—by making peace and by reconciling us all to God in one body through the cross, through which he put to death our mutual hostility. (Eph. 2:13-18; Bilezikian 33)

Jesus’ mission to form a new community of oneness is now to be furthered by the Church, and if the Church fails to demonstrate community to the world, it would fail its mission to be a witness (John 17:23). The Church must take seriously its responsibility to be a community of oneness. Bilezikian portrays an epic picture of the role of community for the Church. He states that “the making of community cannot be a side issue or an optional matter for Christians. It is as important to God as one’s individual salvation. Without community, there is no Christianity” (35).

The implications of this witness of oneness to the world for the church is critical:

In our day, whenever the church is ineffective and its witness remains unproductive, the first questions that must be raised are whether the church functions as authentic community and whether it lives out the reality of its oneness. In a community-starved world, the most potent means of witness to the truth of the gospel is the magnetic power of the oneness that was committed by Christ to his new community at the center

of history. Jesus spent the last hours before his betrayal with his disciples. He ended their time together with a prayer, the main burden of which was his yearning for the oneness of his followers down through the ages (John 17:11, 20-23, note vs. 20). Then, his vision arched over his time of suffering and death to anticipate the divine glory that he would recover in his oneness with the Father, the same glory he had before he came into the world—in fact, even before the creation of the world (v. 24). . . . He yearned for the church to join him in eternity and to share in the contemplation of the glorious oneness in heaven. (Bilezikian 37)

This glorious oneness is not a call to a secular community. Authentic community cannot be established outside the God who created, reconciled and sustains oneness for all of creation:

In order to be attuned to each other in oneness, humans must be individually attuned to God because he is himself oneness and the designer of human oneness. Therefore, the quality and the viability of human communities vary in response to the members' willingness to accept their own dependency on God. (Bilezikian 27)

As mentioned, the word trinity is not found in the Bible, however, this theological understanding of the nature of God plays a biblically foundational role in understanding the Church as a community of oneness. The community of oneness involves the love of God and the love of others. Without the love for God and others, there is no Christian community:

[G]enuine communion with God translates in active participation into the building of community. It is impossible to love God without loving our neighbor since, in the actual practice of love, our service to God can only find expression in our service to others. (Matt. 22:40). (Bilezikian 35)

Loving God and neighbor is intimately intertwined, and is at the heart of community. If we understand this loving and caring community as our destination, we need to understand the path to that community. The path to this community of oneness is a central theme of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; forgiveness.

## **Forgiveness and the Path to Community**

The Bible uses the words forgive, forgiven, and forgiveness over one hundred times (Wagner 31). Forgiveness is understood to be the removal of barriers that separate us from God and others:

[Forgiveness is] primarily the act of God by which he graciously takes away the obstacles or barriers which separate man from his presence, thus opening the way to reconciliation and fellowship. It is secondarily man's forgiveness of his neighbor, an aspect which becomes especially prominent in the teaching of Jesus. (Quanbeck 314)

W. A. Quanbeck identifies forgiveness as the gateway to reconciliation and fellowship with God in the Old Testament. Next, he notes the emphasis of Jesus' teaching for person-to-person forgiveness takes on more prominence than it had in the Old Testament. Reviewing the prominent teachings of Jesus on the subject of forgiveness will reveal that person-to-person forgiveness is significantly related and interconnected to God's forgiveness for the Christian believer. This divine forgiveness provides access to the fellowship of God. Therefore, forgiveness becomes both a pathway to the divine community and the disposition of its members.

**Understanding forgiveness.** For the Church to benefit from the act of forgiveness, the Church must be as clear as possible about what forgiveness means.

According to Marjorie J. Thompson forgiveness is a choice:

To forgive is to make a conscious choice to release the person who has wounded us from the sentence of our judgment, however justified that judgment may be. It represents a choice to leave behind our resentment and desire for retribution, however fair such punishment might seem. (19)

Thompson provides a concise and thorough definition of forgiveness. Offering a grace and mercy-filled gift to the offender fulfills one's responsibility to forgive others as God

has forgiven them. Henri J. M. Nouwen offers an even more honest definition of forgiveness, in light of the struggle of the human condition:

Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all of us love poorly. We do not even know what we are doing when we hurt others. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour—unceasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family. (15)

Nouwen understands that forgiveness is not a clean and simple process for humanity. He articulates the struggle to forgive for people living in a broken and hurting world.

Choosing not to forgive has implications for the community of faith.

“Unforgiveness is emotionally complex involving such affects as resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, residual anger, fearfulness, and depression” (Berry, Worthington, O’Connor, Parrott, and Wade 185). Choosing not to forgive may seem like the most non-threatening way to respond to an injustice, but its repercussions lead to a breakdown in ones relationship to God, relationship to the offender, and physical health.

**Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness.** The most recited Scripture in Christendom, the Lord’s Prayer is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. Luke records that Jesus is responding to the disciples’ request to learn from him how to pray. Jesus’ response is a poetic intimate prayer comprised of six phrases. One of the phrases seems a bit unrealistic. James K. Wagner calls it the “forgiveness clause.” This clause is the one that is most difficult to understand and practice (57):

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
(Matt. 6:12, NRSV)

And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.  
(Luke 11:4)

Apparently, Jesus has formed a condition for God's forgiveness to be realized. Just in case the point was missed, Jesus adds, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14). By forgiving others, one is assured that God will forgive him or her. The reverse is also true. In not forgiving others, God will not forgive the non-forgiver. William Barclay suggests, "It is quite clear that, if we pray this petition with an unhealed breach, an unsettled quarrel in our lives, we are asking God not to forgive us" (222). This conditional clause is repeated in texts such as Luke 6:37 and Mark 11:25-26. Jesus' apparently conditional forgiveness clause uses strong and direct language. Jesus challenges the mentality, for example, of asking God to keep one's body healthy while he or she makes poor eating choices and neglects to exercise. Wagner makes this observation:

Let us not take the "forgiveness clause" in the Lord's Prayer out of context. Jesus is clearly and boldly insisting on consistency and faithfulness in following him and in day-to-day living out his teachings. Furthermore, let us affirm and celebrate God's consistency, initiative, and unlimited love. (59)

Jesus teaches that how one treats others is important. Withholding forgiveness from others is fundamentally rejecting God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is a choice, and Jesus teaches to forgive as God forgives.

In his book, Jones also voices this mandate for forgiving as God forgives. Jones insists, "Jesus' forgiveness does not entail an abdication of responsibility or accountability to other people" (121). Jones writes a thorough Christian theological analysis of forgiveness. As the title of his book implies, he argues that, as difficult as it is, forgiveness is to be embodied by Christians:

Those who are forgiven by Jesus are called to embody that forgiven-ness in the new life signified by communion with Jesus and with other disciples. Indeed, that calls believers to live penitent lives that seek to reconstruct human relationships in the service holiness of heart and life. For Jesus, forgiveness cannot be earned, whether through repentance or by any other means. But our repentance is the only adequate response to God's forgiveness. (121)

Jones notes that forgiveness is more than a release from past guilt; it is a new perspective on past sins and betrayals. It is freedom to live as Christ lived and taught. This "new life of holiness is embodied through the practices of Christian community. . . . People learn to embody forgiveness by becoming part of Christ's Body" (4). This embodiment invokes a picture of God's forgiving community.

Traditionally, in the liturgies of the church, the congregation is offered some form of *prayers of confession* followed by *assurance of forgiveness*. I fear the journey of forgiveness is over-simplified. Much like justifying faith, people are in a moment made right with God, through the acceptance of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Paul writes that one must spend the rest of his or her life working out their salvation (Phil. 2:12). People must not only seek God's forgiveness but, as Jesus taught, forgive their neighbors as well. The congregation must understand what forgiveness is and how it is offered and received. One must not neglect the importance of forgiving others in worship and in the fellowship of the community. This forgiveness begins with a choice and often takes time and forgiveness muscle to realize. The importance of forgiving others was central to the teachings of Christ. To this point, Jesus taught us that one needs to be in a right relationship with others before he or she should even enter worship (Matt. 5:23-24). The path to community begins with forgiveness in the Christian community.



The limitations of this study have focused on forgiveness as the pathway to a community of oneness. The topic of reconciliation has received little attention.

Reconciliation is the process where two individuals offer forgiveness and work to remove any barriers that might separate their relationship. Forgiveness precedes reconciliation, but it is not the same:

Forgiving is completed in the mind of the person who forgives. When we forgive we see the person who wounded us as a fellow human being worthy of our love, and in that sense we reconcile ourselves to him.

But being reconciled to him as a human being and embracing him as a partner are two different things, and we should keep them apart. If we have forgiven, we have removed one obstacle to reunion—the wall of our own bitterness. Whether we heal the relationship depends pretty much on the forgiven person. (Smedes 29)

Forgiveness is a choice that one must make to move towards God's intended purpose: for all to be in a community of oneness. Jesus' teachings have demonstrated his clear mandate for followers to embody forgiveness as it leads to breaking the cycle of hostility and opens the path to a community of oneness, modeled by the triune God.

### **Sociopsychological Precedents**

Recent efforts by authorities in the sociopsychological field of study have offered valuable insight to the relationship between forgiveness and sense of community.

### **Forgiveness Research**

Forgiveness as a concept has a long history in religion (McCullough and Worthington 1143). The research of forgiveness in the sociopsychological field is very recent, and only in the last twenty years has the research been characterized by sustained interest, theoretical debate, and an emphasis on theory-driven empirical research (see Gorsuch and Hao; Worthington; McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen; Hoyt, McCullough, Fincham, Maio, and Davila; Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun for reviews).

This relatively new field of inquiry provides empirical research that offers insight and fresh perspectives for the Christian church. This research can help the church gain some practical insights into not only understanding forgiveness and community, but implementing practical guides for fulfilling its long-standing relationship with forgiveness and community.

**Understanding Forgiveness.** A consensus definition of forgiveness in socio-psychological studies is not available, yet Enright is identified for his emphasis on the “interplay of cognition, emotion and behavior” (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, and Wade 185). Others emphasize one or more of these aspects (Worthington and Wade 386).

Enright notes that forgiveness is a choice (Personal interview). In his book, *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*, Enright begins by identifying several case studies to witness to the impact the process of forgiveness has on people’s lives. Those who received forgiveness therapy experienced decreases in anger, anxiety, and fear, and an increase in self-esteem and hope (18). Joanna North of Great Britain has written a philosophical definition of forgiveness that Enright identifies as the guiding definition for his work:

When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts. (Enright, *Forgiveness Is a Choice* 25)

From years of testing, Enright has developed a “Forgiveness Process Model” (see Appendix F). The first phase of forgiving involves uncovering your anger. The second phase involves deciding to forgive, while the third phase helps the forgiver continue work

on the forgiveness process. The final phase involves discovery and release from emotional prison. This release can include discovering the meaning of suffering, the need for forgiveness, the purpose of your life and the freedom of forgiveness by stopping the cycle of anger and vengeance (Enright, Personal interview).

From a psychological perspective, Dr. Robert A. Emmons writes about the relational balance forgiveness brings to a person's life:

Forgiveness can activate integrative tendencies in the person, rescuing the psyche from inner conflict and turmoil, transforming the person from a state of fragmentation to a state of integration, from separation to reconciliation. Forgiveness is the integrated state of a person who is in a right relationship with God, with others, and within him- or herself. (171)

Emmons lauds forgiveness as a critical part of human health. He sees it as a pathway to right relationships within the context of community. This understanding is supported by another study:

When people forgive, they become motivated to pursue relationship-constructive, rather than relationship-destructive, actions toward an offending relationship partner. This set of motivational changes is facilitated by the development of empathy for the offender, which leads to an increased caring for the offending partner that overshadows the salience of the offenders hurtful actions. (McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal 333)

The relational benefits of forgiveness are immense. Forgiveness is a choice that leads to healthier and closer relationships.

**What forgiveness is not.** Enright is clear to articulate what forgiveness is not, as much as what it is. Much of the struggle that people have in forgiving others is in their ability to understand forgiveness as a process. Some need to know that forgiveness is more than accepting what happened. Ceasing to be angry is more of a by-product of forgiveness than a prerequisite. Forgiveness is more than being neutral toward the

offender and yet can move to positive feelings and thoughts toward the offender.

Forgiveness is more than making oneself feel good, it can move one to focus on the needs of others. Furthermore, Enright challenges that forgiveness is not condoning or excusing, justifying, or calming down. In some situations, forgiving and forgetting can be unhealthy when it could lead to repeat offenses. There are those who manipulate others by means of a pseudo-forgiveness:

Some people use the words “I forgive you” when they have not forgiven at all as a way to control others or to demonstrate their moral superiority. “I forgive you” in these cases means “You are a terrible person who should feel appropriately guilty and don’t think I am going to let you forget it for one minute.” (*Forgiveness Is a Choice* 30)

Confusion around forgiveness can be a significant barrier to advancing down the pathway towards a healthy community.

**The impact of forgiveness.** Forgiveness studies have increased a great deal in the last several years because of the empirical evidence pointing toward its positive impact upon the health of people who are able to forgive. Enright has observed that forgiveness is the process to healing life’s hurts. In a personal interview, he identified several experimental studies, with randomized experimental and control groups, in which people forgive or learn about forgiveness. For example, Enright sighted incest survivors, drug addicts, cardiac patients, emotionally abused women, terminally ill elderly cancer patients, and at-risk children. The at-risk children included those children from Milwaukee, Seoul, and Belfast. The forgiveness groups became emotionally healthier and less depressed. These groups also experienced lower levels of anxiety and improved hope and self-esteem. In the case of drug rehabilitation, the participants’ need for drugs declined substantially. The children groups improved their academic achievement, were

less angry and depressed, and demonstrated more prosocial behavior. Furthermore, these positive results were maintained over time (Enright, Personal interview).

One study on the interpersonal transgressions in family found that when family members forgive, “they become less avoidant, less vengeful, and more benevolent toward the relationship partner who hurt them” (Hoyt, McCullough, Fincham, Maio, and Davila 376). This study suggests that, from an empirical study, forgiveness has a positive health trait for the forgiver as well as an important and positive impact upon the relationships of those closest to them. When choosing to forgive, one improves the health and intimacy potential of his or her family relationships. Forgiveness is a pathway to a stronger sense of community within the family. On the other hand, “trait forgivingness was negatively correlated with trait anger, hostility, neuroticism, fear, and vengeful rumination and was positively correlated with agreeableness, extraversion, and trait empathy” (Berry, Everett, Worthington, O’Connor, Parrott, and Wade 184-185). Forgiveness becomes the pathway from life’s hurts.

**Forgiveness and religion.** Several studies incorporated the relationship of religion to forgiveness, and all confirmed a positive link (Edwards, Lapp-Rincker, Magyer-Moe, Rehfeldt, Ryder, and Brown; Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usai, Neto, and Shafighi; Hoyt, McCullough, Fincham, Maio, and Davila; Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun). The link, however, was limited to the value of forgiveness and not necessarily the practice. One study indicated that activity in the religious practice was the identifiable characteristic of a person’s disposition to forgive:

Christian believers did not differ from non-believers in their forgiveness practice in real life. Such a discrepancy can be explained by the difference between forgiveness as a virtue which one desires and forgiveness as an action which demands that one practice what one believes. However, what

predicts forgiveness as a practice is people's active involvement in religious practice. (Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun 194)

The practice of religion is what impacts a person's tendency to forgive. In other words, "having a religion has a strong influence on people's concepts and values of forgiveness, whereas involvement in regular religious practice influences one's tendency to forgive that is, 'forgivingness' and forgiveness in a real life situation" (Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun 193).

In a study by Richard L. Gorsuch and Judy T. Hao, two factors of religiousness were identified—personal religiousness and religious conformity. Religious conformity is a belief in God with no doubts, growing in a love relationship with God and others, and following teachings of a religious institution. This religious identity did not factor with forgiveness factors (344). That is to say, "people who were more religiously conforming were not necessarily more forgiving" (Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun 185).

Personal religiousness is characterized by one's closeness to God, church attendance, using religion for personal comfort, and protection. This was the only factor that correlated significantly with the forgiveness factors (Gorsuch and Hao 344). A confusing aspect of this study is reflected in how the religious factors were determined. That is, the characteristic of love is not well defined in the conformity factor, and is difficult to distinguish from the personal religiousness factor of closeness to God, and yet social relatedness proved to be the factor that showed the strongest correlation with forgivingness in religious faith. This positive relationship between social relatedness and forgivingness is also confirmed in a study that showed that "the difference in the willingness to forgive was mainly the social commitment to religion (attendance in church and the taking of vows), not mere personal beliefs" (Mullet, Barros, Frongia,

Usai, Neto, and Shafighi 1). This same study declared that “it is therefore, mainly the degree of social commitment to religion that seems to make a difference” (13). These studies suggest that religious people have a tendency to be more forgiving when they are more committed to their relationships within the church.

A 2001 Gallup Poll addresses a behavior that has a positive relationship to an individual’s spiritual commitment. The respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 being *strongly disagree* to 5 being *strongly agree* the statement, “Because of my faith, I have forgiven people who have hurt me deeply.” The results are based on telephone interviews with 729 adult members of a church, synagogue, or other religious faith community, aged 18 or older, conducted October through November 2001. Only 57 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 27 percent agreed. Of the respondents, 16 percent scored lower. More women strongly agreed (64 percent) while 49 percent of men strongly agreed. Results also indicated that the older the respondents, the more likely they would strongly agree. While 75 percent of Hispanics and 61 percent African-Americans strongly agreed, only 55 percent of the white population strongly agreed (Winseman 1-5).

This poll indicates that over 40 percent of the respondents do not strongly agree that because of their faith, they have forgiven people who have deeply hurt them. In the case of white males, the percentage is even higher. The study does not indicate if respondents have never been hurt deeply. The results indicate a significant number of people of faith who have not felt strongly about forgiving people who have hurt them deeply. Practicing forgiveness is more challenging than preaching it. In light of the

biblical reflections of this paper, those unwilling to offer forgiveness are blocking the forgiveness of God.

**Forgivingness.** Most previous research has sought to understand the dynamics of change leading to forgiveness, in which forgiveness has been understood more as a specific action in a certain context (for a review and model, see Worthington and Wade). Rather than look at a person's disposition to forgive, the focus has been on forgiving a single transgression or specific person. As noted, because forgiveness can potentially alleviate emotional distress and bring hope to people's lives, researchers have focused on acts of forgiveness in particular. Nevertheless, studying a person's disposition to forgive has received more attention in the last decade. This disposition to forgive has become known as "forgivingness," a term coined by Robert C. Roberts to distinguish the personal trait from the virtuous acts of forgiving (Roberts 289).

One study involving 810 adolescents and adults living in France and 192 college students living in Portugal sought to determine the relationship between forgivingness and satisfaction with life. Results of the study were surprising, especially to the testers. The study began with the assumption that there would be a positive correlation between the two variables, but the link between forgivingness and life satisfaction was weak to nonsignificant. The society appeared to value unforgiveness more highly than forgiveness, thus seeing forgiveness as unsatisfying. This study did note that among religious Portuguese students, where forgiveness is a central value and whose attainment results had an increase in satisfaction with life, demonstrated a positive correlation. Nonbelieving students showed a negative relationship between forgivingness and life satisfaction (Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard, and Mullet 331-32).



Forgivingness finds its satisfaction in the faith community that seeks to aspire to be a forgiving community. The problem occurs when unforgiveness is valued higher than forgiving in a society. Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Jack Berry, and Les Parrot, III define the negative emotions associated with unforgiveness: “Unforgiveness is a complex of related emotions consisting of resentment, bitterness, hatred, hostility, residual anger, and fear which are experienced after ruminating about a transgression” (108). At times people may choose unforgiveness and find satisfaction in the related negative emotions. People then would resonate that “depressive rumination was negatively correlated with trait forgivingness” (Berry and Worthington 199). Negative emotions can become normative and desirable.

Forgiveness must be accompanied by fairness. One article on forgiveness and justice noted the importance of taking the path of forgiveness without neglecting justice in the process. Forgivingness can be understood as human strength or a personality trait with positive consequences for individuals and social relationships. However, it is possible to use forgiveness for self-serving motives or fail to pursue justice by too readily forgiving (Exline, Worthington, Hill, and McCullough 339). One needs to balance forgivingness, or mercy, with the truth, or justice. Furthermore, one must identify those moments when he or she forgives for simple self-serving reasons.

Enright observes that the American culture is so obsessed with doing what is right, just, and fair, especially with our children, that the American people have not learned to balance what is fair with what is merciful forgiving. He emphasizes that a forgiving community is “fair and forgiving.” Mercy and truth must be kept in that difficult balance. American children learn to scream on the playground, “That’s not fair!”

but it would be unlikely to hear them question, “What is the forgiving thing to do?” Like children, we must be taught how to be dispositionally forgiving in order to break the cycle of hostility and anger due to unforgiveness in our homes, communities and world (Personal Interview).

### **Sense of Community**

Community can be defined by either a geographical location or a relational quality that does not reference a location. These two definitions are not mutually exclusive, but today communities are more commonly developed around interests and skills than around a location. David W. McMillian and David M. Chavis have researched and designed an instrument that applies equally to territorial communities, or neighborhoods, and to relational communities such as professionally or spiritually related. McMillian and Chavis have defined a sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (8-9). The study goes on to identify that strong communities “are those that offer members positive ways to interact, important events to share and ways to resolve them positively, opportunities to honor members, opportunities to invest in the community, and opportunities to experience a spiritual bond among members” (9).

Daniel Yankelovich reported that, in 1973, “roughly one-third of Americans felt an intense need to compensate for the impersonal and threatening aspects of modern life by seeking mutual identification with others,” on the basis of a sense of belonging together (85). “By the beginning of the 1980’s, the number of Americans deeply involved in the search for community had increased from 32% to 47%” (85).

Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary did a compelling study to “test the hypothesis that a need to belong is a fundamental human motivation” (497). The uniqueness of this study, compared to others on the topic, is that it has involved the analysis of frequency of interaction and persistent caring. The study noted the importance of interaction for a sense of belongingness:

Relationships characterized by strong feelings of attachment, intimacy, or commitment but lacking regular contact will also fail to satisfy the need. Simply knowing that a bond exists may be emotionally reassuring, yet it would not provide full belongingness if one does not interact with the other person. (500-01)

According to this study, consistent social contact is important if one is forming a close connection. A strong sense of belonging can only be satisfied by a combined assurance of knowing the other as well as consistent and regular interaction. The study concluded that people are basically and thoroughly driven by a need to belong. People have a strong desire to develop and maintain “enduring interpersonal attachments. People seek frequent, affectively positive interactions within the context of long-term, caring relationships. . . . The desire for interpersonal attachment may well be one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature” (522). For the Christian, the implication is clear that this study supports the understanding that one is created to be in relationships. According to this study, those relationships with God and others are to be emotionally reassuring and involve regular interaction.

McMillan and Chavis designed a questionnaire to determine the Sense of Community Index. This index measures four subscales: membership, influence, reinforcement of needs, and shared emotional connection. Membership is the feeling of belonging or having some sense of relatedness. The influence subscale determines if a

person has a sense of mattering and making a difference to a group, as well as having the group matter to the person. The reinforcement subscale measures the integration and fulfillment of needs. In other words, the needs of the person will be met through the resources of the group. Finally, shared emotional connection is the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences (9). This index will serve as the measuring instrument for determining a person's sense of community for this study.

### **Conclusion**

The synthesis of theological reflection and sociopsychological studies has helped to formulate this project. Jones' call to embody forgiveness parallels with Roberts' description of forgivingness. The Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF) effectively assists the recording of a respondent's disposition to forgive. The Sense of Community Index (SOC) provides a strong instrument for identifying a respondent's sense of community. Its subscales give a clear picture of how a person connects with his or her community of faith. This relationship of forgivingness and community is at the heart of the Christian experience. Roberts sums up this relationship:

Forgivingness and the practice of forgiveness are at home in an ethic of community or friendship—one underlain by a sense of belonging to one another. But they require that there be strong differentiation of individuals as well, so that the one can bear responsibility for offending the other, and the other can choose to forgive. . . The centrality of repentance tells us that the forgiving person has an underlying proneness to see others as fellows, a concern to live in peace with them. . . feel discomfort at having an enemy, and this will be an important difference in the structure of their forgivingness. (294)

This study is designed with the intention of identifying clear positive correlational lines between the faithfulness of offering forgiveness and that person's positive sense of

community. The premise might seem simplistic, but no study found dealt directly with this correlation. I believe the church of today is losing its sense of community for the convenience of surface relationships and a variety of associations. Families today tend to run from one event to the other, offering greetings and small talk, without experiencing the community of oneness intended by God. The time has come for the church to take an honest look at itself as a forgiving community. The church must resemble what the triune God has made possible for it to experience, and make the choice to forgive.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

The individualistic tendencies of American society have worked against the church's responsibility to be a witness of unity and intimate community to the world. The church tends to neglect this responsibility and the work of living into God's loving community for the convenience of scattered associations. People in America struggle to make time to sit down and have a meal with their families and they tend not to know their next door neighbors. Americans may know about God, but they do not feel relationally close to God. The church looks much like the culture Christ has called the church to redeem. The relationships within the church offer a witness to the world that may or may not reflect the hope and love of Christ. The church has the potential to neglect its responsibility to live as forgiven and forgiving people thus, leaving the institutional church to be irrelevant to the world and disconnected from God and each other. Christians are called to be an example and a witness, to be Christlike, to be holy, and to be a forgiving community of oneness:

For I am convinced that unless Christians can learn to understand and, more importantly, embody forgiveness in the context of pursuing such holiness, then there will be little hope that our lives will offer a faithful witness to the Triune God who is, in Word and Spirit, making all things new. And we live in a world, so I suggest, that is in desperate need of truthful embodiment of costly forgiveness. (Jones xvii)

The focus of this study is on the relationship between one's disposition to forgive and a sense of community. This study was accomplished through correlating community and forgiveness survey results from a Wisconsin United Methodist church. The anticipated outcome was the identification of a positive and significant correlation between respondents' disposition to forgive and their sense of community. Based on previous

studies, the forgiveness and community scores would be more positively correlated for females, older adults, and active and involved churchgoers.

### **Research Questions**

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, four research questions are identified.

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

Among churchgoers, what is their sense of community?

Specifically, how do the churchgoers of a United Methodist church of the Wisconsin Annual Conference score on the Sense of Community Index (SOC; see Appendix C)?

This first research question identifies the respondents' sense of community based on scores related to four subscales. Three true or false questions will indicate the level of a person's sense of community in each subscale: membership, or belonging to the church, mutual influence with the church, reinforcement of needs to the church, and finally the sense of shared emotional connection with the church. These scores are critical to gaining a measure of the respondent's sense of community. This question is built on the premise that one's sense of church community, within the context of the local church, is indicative of a biblically sound faith community.

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

Among churchgoers, what are their levels of forgiveness?

Specifically, how do the churchgoers of a United Methodist Church of the Wisconsin Annual Conference score on the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF; see Appendix D)?

This question identifies the respondents' tendency to forgive transgressions that are stable over time and across situations. The TNTF provides a score that is representative of the respondent's forgivingness. This question is developed on the assumption that forgivingness is a fundamental characteristic of a follower of Jesus Christ.

### **Research Question #3**

Among churchgoers, how does their sense of community correlate with their level of forgivingness?

This research project was built on the premise that a person's sense of community has a positive correlation with their level of forgivingness. This question is, therefore, the focal point of this research. Analyzing the relationship of the respondents' tests scores will provide empirical evidence to whether a relationship exists.

### **Research Question #4**

Among churchgoers, do individuals' sense of community and level of forgivingness differ by age, gender, longevity of church association, and religiosity: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation and service ministry involvement?

Responses to the Congregational Questionnaire provided important demographic information (see Appendix B).

### **Subjects**

The participants for this study were churchgoers of a Wisconsin United Methodist church who responded to the survey. All churchgoers, members and active nonmembers, who were in their church's database were sent a survey and asked to participate. This



convenient sample came from a United Methodist Church in a suburban setting in the state of Wisconsin, called, for the sake of this study, Faith UMC.

### **Instrumentation**

A questionnaire was assembled to measure dispositional forgiveness, sense of community, demographic information, and religiosity in the individual respondents. The questionnaire incorporated the TNTF and the SOC. Demographic questions were included as well as questions on the respondents' religiosity: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry involvement.

David W. McMillan identifies the working definition for the SOC as "a feeling that members have a belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan and Chavis 9). The SOC was developed using the urban block as the referent for determining one's sense of community. McMillan and David M. Chavis note that the word *block* can be replaced with a different referent to assess different settings such as a school, neighborhood, city, or church (7). For this study, the word *church* or *congregation* was used as the referent. This scale consists of 12 True/False questions. Three questions were selected from each of the four subscales: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and emotional connection. The totaled scale showed an internal reliability coefficient of .80 (Chipuer and Pretty 644). No report on internal reliability for the subscales by McMillan and Chavis were provided.

The religiosity information was obtained by asking participants to respond to questions that applied to their involvement in the disciplines of prayer, worship, small group, and service ministry. Each discipline had one question. Each question had three

weighted options with an ordinal scaling ranging from little or no involvement to very involved. The questions were researcher designed to give a participant's level of spiritual-disciplined activity. The measured level of activity score was correlated with the respondent's other responses on sense of community and dispositional forgiveness.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity of this study comes through the use of psychometrically reputable instruments. Both the SOC and the TNTF offer tested and reliable results.

The SOC utilizes twelve questions that cover the four subscales of membership, influence, reinforcement of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan and Chavis 9). In a neighborhood study the Sense of Community Index reliability estimate is .66 for the total SOC scale. The subscales were ranging from .07 for emotional connection to .72 for membership. From a study in the workplace, the SOC reliability estimate for the total scale was .69, ranging from .38 for emotional connection to .51 for fulfillment of needs (Chipuer and Pretty 651).

The development and construct validity of the TNTF is well documented in a research study (Berry, Worthington, Parrot, O'Connor, and Wade 1277-90). The TNTF's use of five transgression scenarios tested to show a strong and reliable indicator of a person's disposition to forgive (1279). The Cronbach's alpha and Rasch reliabilities for the TNTF from the initial scaling were acceptably high with an alpha of .73 (1280).

### **Data Collection**

After contacting Faith UMC of the Wisconsin Annual Conference to gain their support for the project, I emailed a questionnaire to each churchgoer, both member and active nonmember, provided in the church's database. The Faith UMC churchgoer was

asked to print the questionnaire, complete it, and return it to the church narthex where a secured drop box was provided. That Sunday, I provided a ninety-second video clip informational announcement regarding the questionnaire that was played during both worship services. This clip simply introduced the questionnaire and gave the basic information included in the cover letter. Furthermore, the questionnaires were handed out on three consecutive Sundays to all adult worshipers with instructions to complete the questionnaire and place it in the secure drop box in the narthex. A three week window was provided for the questionnaires to be completed and returned. The e-mailed questionnaire was repeated in the second week. In the third and final week, a thank-you and a friendly reminder to turn in all questionnaires this week was e-mailed to the churchgoers.

### **Data Analysis**

The completed questionnaires were tabulated and processed. The results were analyzed to determine the correlation between sense of community, level of forgivingness, demographic, and religiosity factors. The first research question was addressed through the use of the SOC (see Appendix C) and collected data was summarized with frequency distributions and descriptive statistics. The second research question was addressed using the TNTF (see Appendix D). The data collected from TNTF was summarized with frequency distributions and descriptive statistics. Correlating the data from the SOC and TNTF addressed the third research question with frequency distributions and descriptive statistics. The fourth research question was addressed through the use of a Congregational Questionnaire (see Appendix B), and the

collected data was summarized and correlated with the other data through the use of frequency distributions and descriptive statistics.

Specifically, discrete variables were summarized by reporting percentages and ranges. Continuous variables and categorical variables with a large number of categories were summarized by reporting means and standard deviations. Relationships between variables were examined with frequency analyses when both variables were discrete. When one variable was discrete and the other variable was continuous, or had a large number of categories, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess the association between the two. Correlation analyses were used when both variables were continuous.

### **Variables**

The variables in this research project are dispositional forgiveness and sense of community scores. Additional variables in this study include: age, gender, longevity of church association and religiosity: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation and service ministry involvement.

### **Generalizability**

Determining the generalizability of this sample poses a more intricate challenge. To the extent that the United Methodist Church compares demographically with other church communities, some broader assumptions may be made. The convenient sample is a limiting factor in generalizing the final observations. Repeating this study in a variety of other contexts will help determine the extent of this study's generalizability. The pioneering aspect of this study is established through the examination of these variables in their relationship to each other. The research, therefore, provides information on the correlation between forgivingness and a sense of community.

To maximize the external validity of this research, participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, membership status, and length of association with the church to help assess the generalizability of the findings in addition to exploring the correlates of sense of community and dispositional forgiveness.

## CHAPTER 4

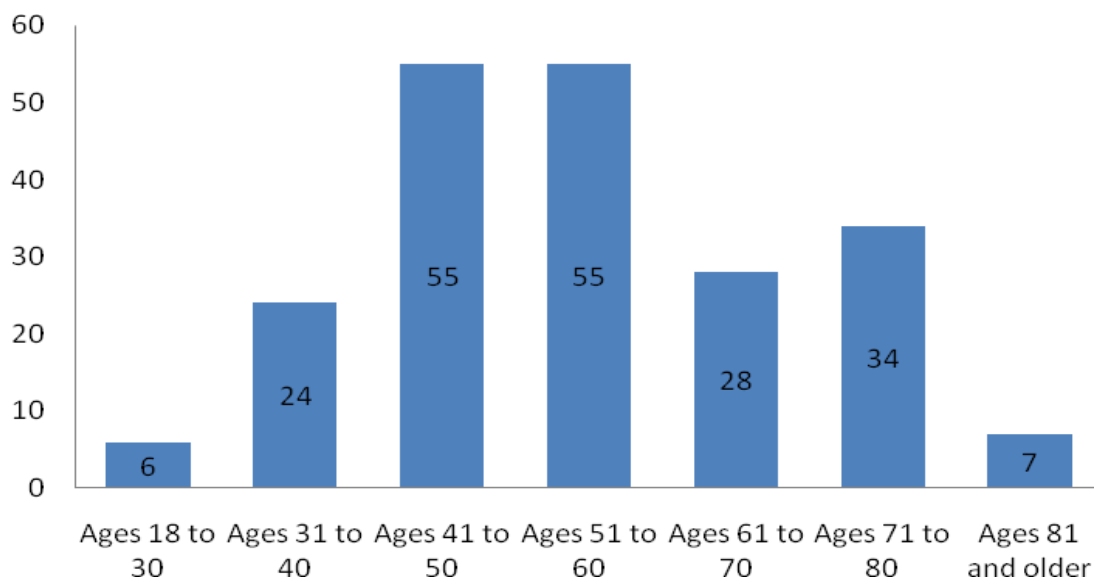
### FINDINGS

For the Christian church, forgiving as a pathway to belonging is a central teaching. Measuring how effectively a congregation is at forgiving and creating a God-honoring community can be obtained through shared stories. However, recent advances in psychosocial research have led to the development of new instruments that are providing more quantitative analysis in both the areas of forgiveness and sense of community. This study sought to examine the relationship between dispositional forgiveness and sense of community in a United Methodist church in the Wisconsin Annual Conference.

#### **Profile of Participants**

The congregational questionnaire was given to churchgoers of Faith UMC. According to this church's office, in the year 2007 the church had 853 members (18 years of age and older) and approximately ninety active adult nonmembers at the time of the survey. Of the membership, 55 percent are women. The average Sunday morning weekly worship attendance for 2007 was 493.

Two hundred and thirteen questionnaires were returned, and account for 22 percent of adult members (853) and adult active nonmembers (90). Of those who responded, 97 percent were members of Faith UMC and 58 percent were women. The respondent ages ranged from 22 to 86 with the average age being 55.5 years old ( $SD = 14.58$ ). Figure 4.1 shows the age distribution of the participants. Four respondents did not indicate their age on the questionnaire. The respondents averaged 12.6 years of membership at Faith UMC (see Table 4.1).



**Figure 4.1. Age distribution of participants (N = 209).**

**Table 4.1. Participants' Profile**

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Age (Years)	209	55.54	14.58	22	86
Church Association (Years)	212	13.67	10.26	1	42
Church Membership (Years)	209	12.57	10.16	0	55

### Reliability

The questionnaire (see Appendix H) used for this study was a combination of two previously validated instruments (SOC and TNTF) along with a series of demographic questions followed by four questions related to the level of involvement in faith disciplines called, for the sake of this study, religiosity. The religiosity questions each

covered an area of church involvement: level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry activity.

### **Sense of Community Index (SOC)**

The reliability estimates from the analysis of the Faith UMC data resulted in an acceptable internal consistency reliability for the total SOC scale ( $\alpha = .64$ ). The internal consistency reliability estimates were low to moderate for each of the subscales within the SOC: Influence  $\alpha = 0.20$ , Shared Emotional Connection  $\alpha = 0.34$ , Membership  $\alpha = 0.56$ , and Reinforcement of Need  $\alpha = 0.58$ .

### **Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (TNTF)**

The TNTF scale had good internal consistency  $\alpha = .79$ . This TNTF has no subscales in which to assess internal consistency.

### **Sense of Community**

The first research question asked, “Among churchgoers, what is their sense of community?” The SOC scores indicated that on average the sample has a positive sense of community. Table 4.2 indicates that on an ordinal scale of 0 to 12, the mean sense of community score was  $\mu = 9.79$  ( $SD = 1.97$ ). Because the participants had a disproportionately high sense of community score, the “0” and “1” responses were combined for further analysis.

**Table 4.2. Sense of Community Scores**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Minimum Score</b>	<b>Maximum Score</b>
SOC Score	188	9.79	1.94	2	12



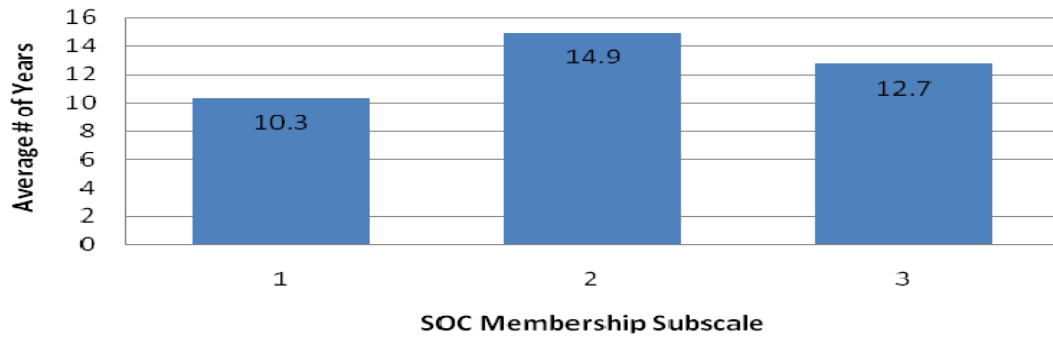
Gender was not significantly correlated with Sense of Community scores. SOC scores were slightly higher in younger people ( $p = .02$ ,  $r = -.16$ ). The negative correlation coefficient identifies a small negative relational trend between age and the SOC scores.

The membership subscale was significantly correlated with the demographic characteristics of age and years of church membership (See Figure 4.2). Specifically, as a sense of membership increased, the average age of the respondent decreased. That is, younger individuals had higher sense of membership. The relationship between the SOC subscale on membership and the average length of membership also showed a significant relationship. The middle value of 2 on the membership subscale held the highest average, while the trend showed a positive overall relationship. Because 97 percent of all respondents were members, no significant difference between years of church membership and years of church association in comparison to SOC (see Figure 4.3). Therefore, only the years of church membership were used to identify relationships within this section of the research.



( $p = .039$ ,  $F = 3.3$ )

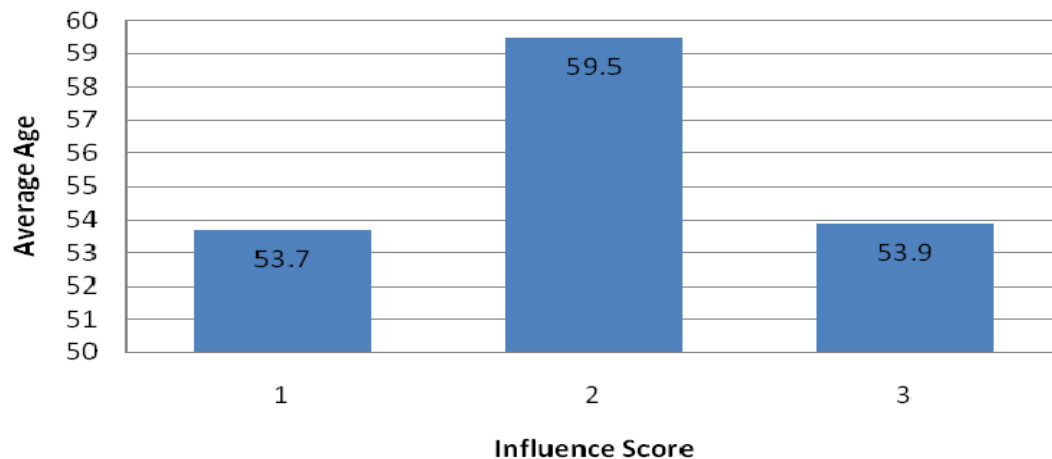
**Figure 4.2 Membership (SOC) vs. age.**



$p = .04, F = 3.26$

**Figure 4.3 Membership (SOC) vs. years of church membership.**

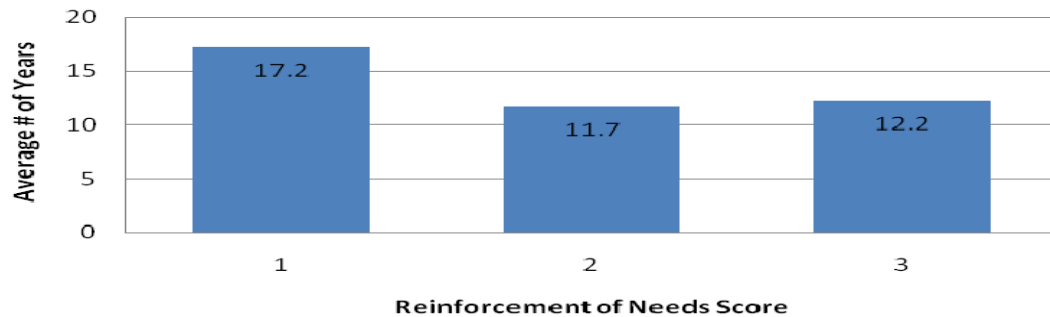
Influence as an SOC subscale had a notable relationship with the average age of the sample. Figure 4.4 shows that even though the p-value (.055) is not less than .05, a trend is evident. The middle response indicates that on average, older churchgoers only indicate a medium influence score.



$(p = .055, F = 2.94)$

**Figure 4.4 Influence (SOC) vs. age.**

The Reinforcement of Need subscale to SOC also showed a negative correlation with years of church membership. Figure 4.5 indicates that on average older members had lower scores on the Reinforcement of Needs subscale.



$p = .04, F = 3.22$ )

**Figure 4.5 Reinforcement of needs vs. years of church membership.**

### Dispositional Forgiveness

The second research question asked, “Among churchgoers, what are their levels of forgiveness?” The TNTF scores were more dispersed than the SOC scores (see Table 4.3). Gender was not significantly related with the TNTF ( $p = .09$ ), but the TNTF mean scores demonstrated a trend. Women recorded a higher mean score on the TNTF (16.5) compared to men (15.7).

**Table 4.3. TNTF Results**

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
TNTF Score	213	16.17	3.86	7	25

Figure 4.6 breaks down the TNTF scores into the number of responses for each of the five scenarios. The *definitely not forgive*, *not likely to forgive*, and *just as likely to forgive as not* responses to the scenarios accounted for 55 percent of the total responses (see Figure 4.7).

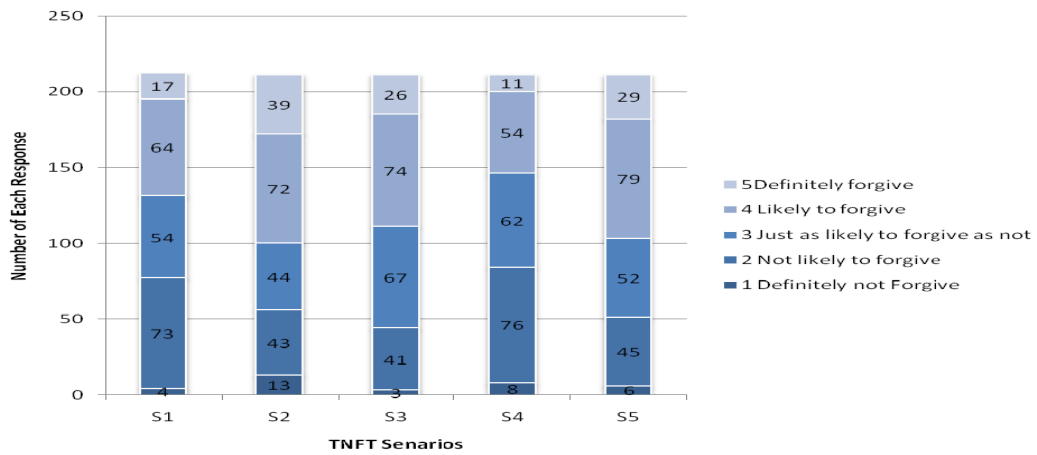


Figure 4.6. TNTF senarios vs. number of each response (n=213).

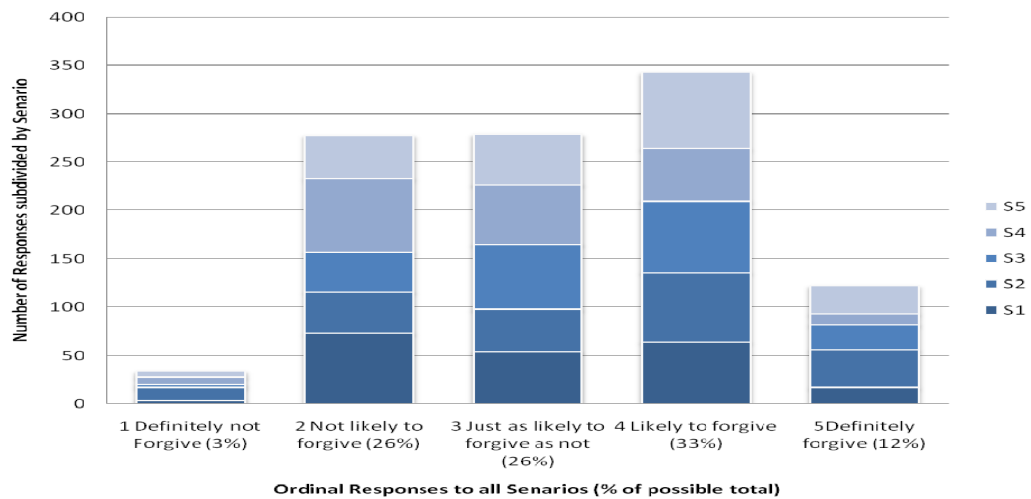


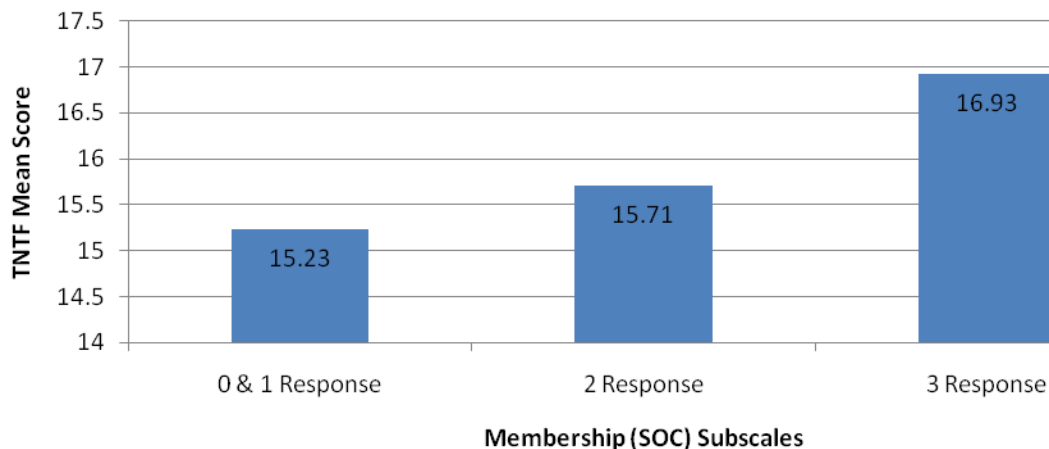
Figure 4.7. TNTF scores grouped in ordinal categories.

Similar to the SOC, the TNTF scores also had a significant relationship to age ( $p = .0002$ ,  $r = -.26$ ), length of church association ( $p = .01$ ,  $r = -.18$ ), and length of church membership ( $p = .006$ ,  $r = -.19$ ). These significant trends pointed to a slight tendency for older and longer standing members to be less forgiving.

### **Sense of Community and Dispositional Forgiveness**

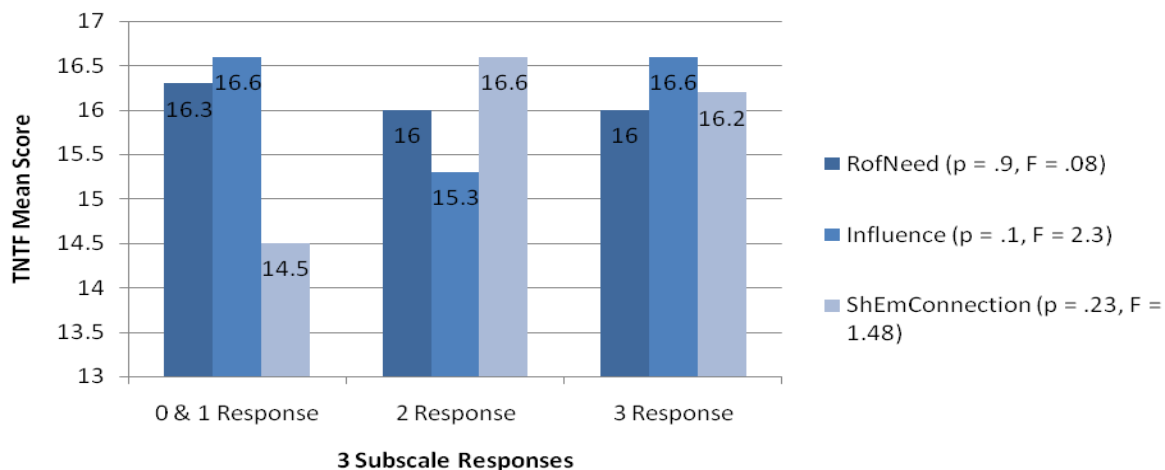
The third research question is the heart of this study: Among churchgoers, how does their sense of community correlate with their level of forgivingness? SOC and the TNTF scores demonstrated a significant relationship ( $p = .02$ ); however, the correlation coefficient was small ( $r = .16$ ). This correlation coefficient indicates a positive association between the two variables. Considering the strong p-value and the high potential for complicating factors in this study, this correlation deserves further exploration.

Comparing the TNTF scores to the SOC subscales provides more information regarding any correlation between these scores. The most significant relationship of the TNTF scores with the SOC subscale is illustrated in Figure 4.8. The higher the TNTF score, the higher the membership score. The membership subscale illustrates a positive correlation to the TNTF mean scores, while the remaining subscales show no significant relationship (see Figure 4.9). In general the sample population holds an average positive sense of community, while forgivingness scores were more dispersed across the scale.



( $p = .024$ ,  $F = 3.79$ )

**Figure 4.8. Membership (SOC) vs. TNTF.**



**Figure 4.9. 3 SOC subscale vs. TNTF.**

### Religiosity Relationship

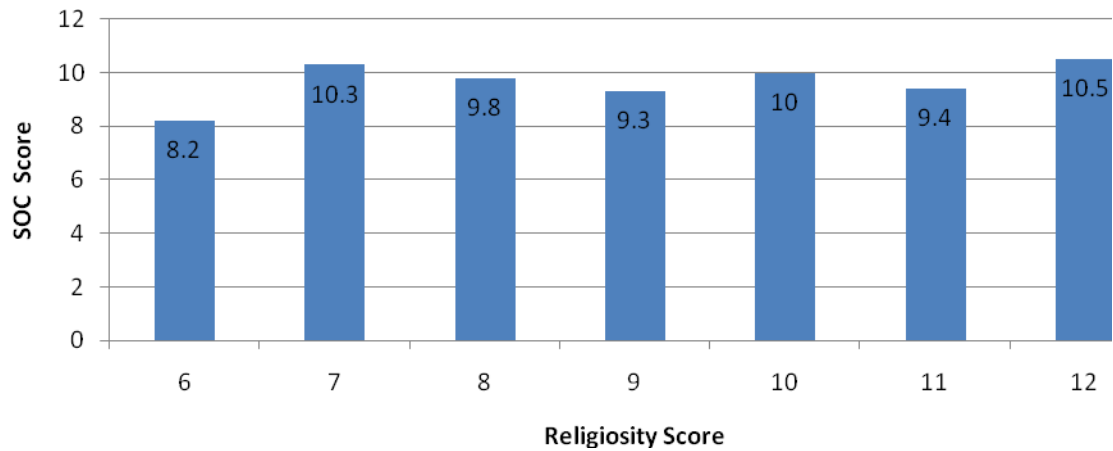
The fourth research question asked, “Among churchgoers, do individuals’ sense of community and level of forgivingness differ by age, sex, and religiosity: longevity of church association, level of active prayer life, worship attendance, small group

participation and service ministry involvement?” The final four questions of the questionnaire addressed the participants’ religious involvement, otherwise called religiosity, in the areas of prayer life, worship attendance, small group participation, and service ministry involvement. The responses to each of the four questions were weighted 1: no or low involvement, 2: moderately active, and 3: very active. The four religious involvement scores were combined to create a religiosity variable score. The Cronbach’s alpha internal reliability score for this created Religiosity variable was  $\alpha = 0.69$ . Table 4.13 provides the mean and standard deviation scores for each of the four questions that make up the religiosity variable. Notice that the highest involvement for this sample population is Worship, and the least involvement is with Small Groups.

**Table 4.4. Religiosity Variables ( $\alpha = .69$ )**

Variable	n	Mean	SD
Prayer	213	2.62	0.58
Worship	212	2.76	0.53
Small group	213	1.88	0.93
Service ministry	213	2.27	0.75

The religiosity scores were compared to both the SOC and TNTF scores. Figure 4.10 shows the relationship between religious involvement and the sense of community scores. As the religiosity score increases, the mean SOC score increases as well. The higher the Religiosity score is, the greater the sense of community.

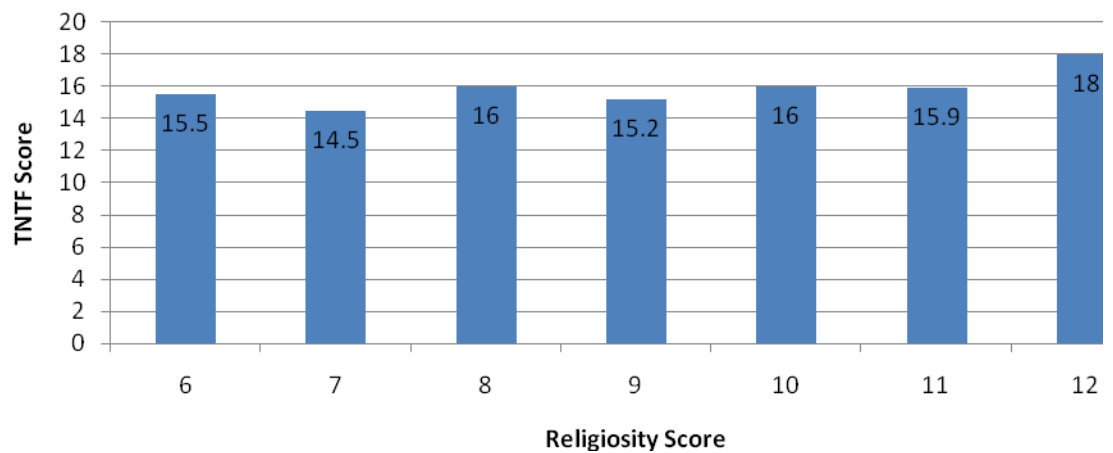


( $p = .00$ ,  $F = 4.17$ )

**Figure 4.10. Religiosity score vs. SOC.**

Likewise, as religiosity scores increase, the average TNTF scores increased.

Figure 4.11 illustrates that the higher the religiosity score, the significant trend is to have a higher TNTF score.

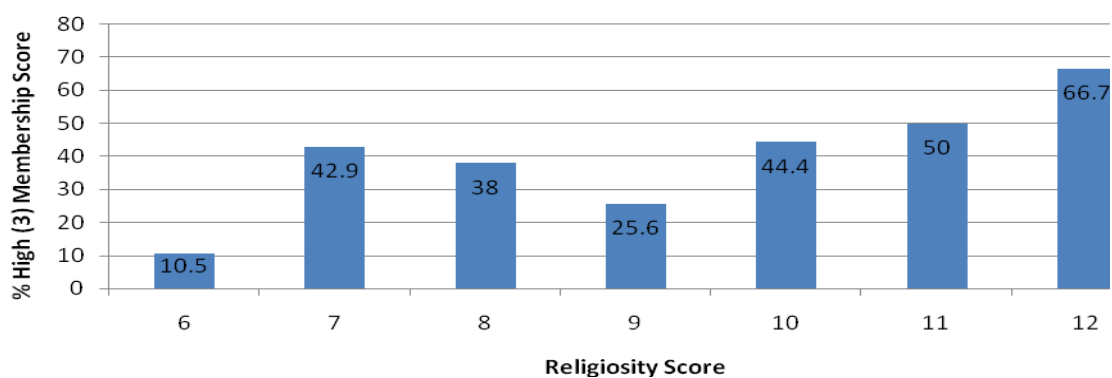


( $p = .00$ ,  $F = 3.06$ )

**Figure 4.11. Religiosity score vs. TNTF**



Religiosity scores were also significantly correlated with three SOC subscales: membership, influence, and shared emotional connection. Each of these subscales demonstrates a higher percentage of level 3 responses as the religiosity score increased. For example, in Figure 4.12, the percentage of those who scored a 3 (high score) on the membership subscale increased as the religiosity score went higher. Similar results were true for influence and shared emotional connection subscales.

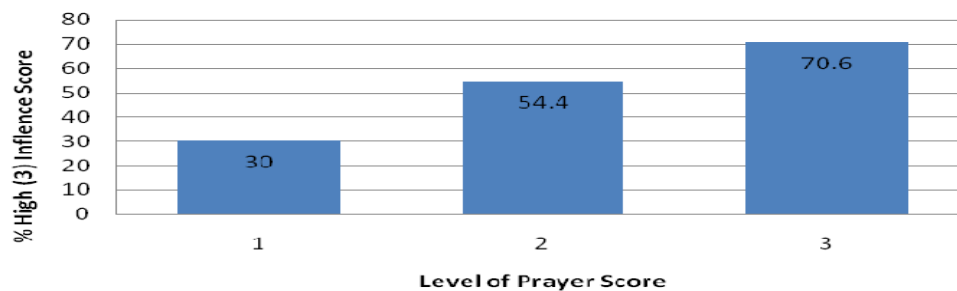


( $p = .00$ )

**Figure 4.12. Religiosity score vs. percent high (3) membership (SOC) score.**

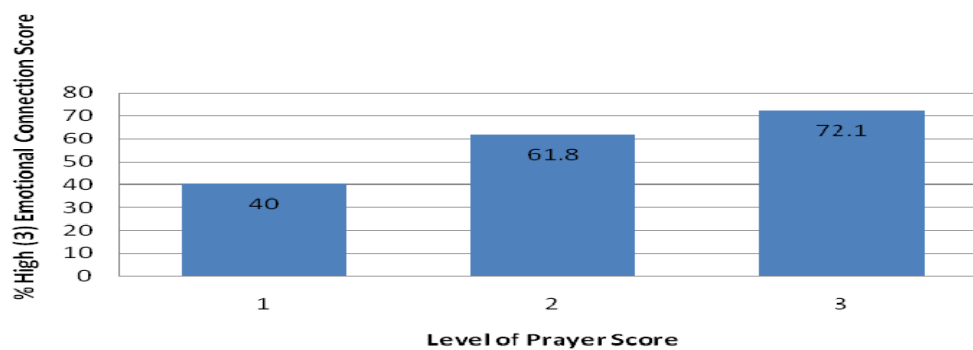
### Prayer Practices

Positive trends are found in several of the subscale comparisons. In Figure 4.13 shows if respondents had an active prayer score, they were more likely to score high on their influence (SOC) subscale. Of those who responded with an active prayer life (3), just over 70 percent indicated a high sense of Influence on the SOC subscale. Prayer has a positive impact upon one's sense of influence upon the community as well as the community's influence upon that individual. Very similar results occurred when comparing the level of prayer with shared emotional connection (see Figure 4.14) and the Membership subscales (see Figure 4.15).



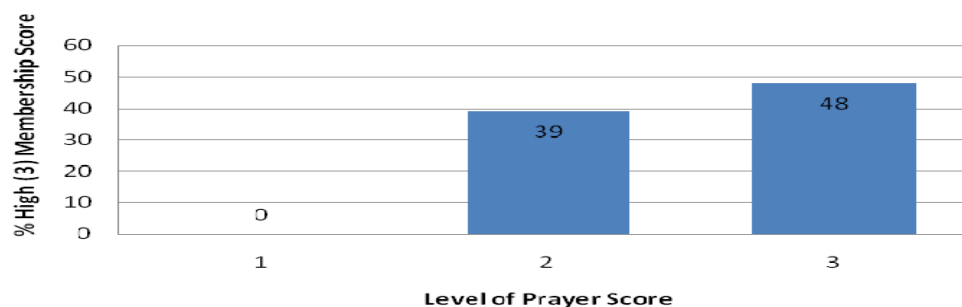
( $p = .02$ )

Figure 4.13. Level of prayer vs. percent high (3) influence (SOC) score.



( $p = .002$ )

Figure 4.14. Level of prayer vs. percent high (3) shared emotional connection (SOC) score.

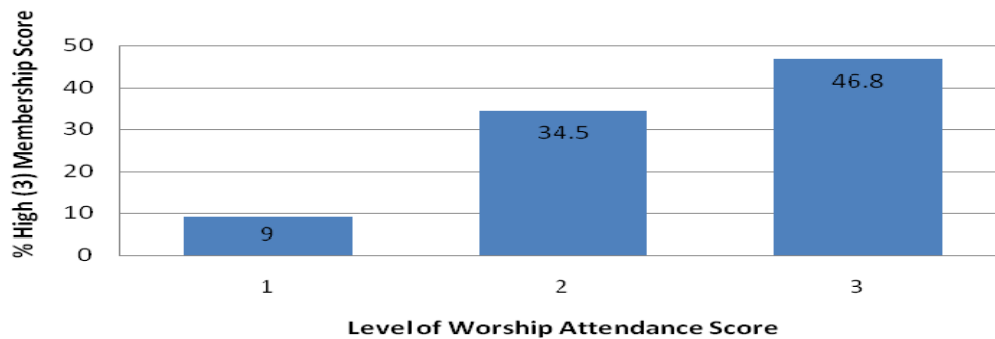


( $p = .00$ )

Figure 4.15. Percent high (3) membership (SOC) score vs. level of prayer.

### Worship Attendance

Although worship attendance had no significant relationship to the TNTF and SOC scales, a strong correlation between worship attendance and having a high score on the Membership SOC subscale is present. In Figure 4.16 a high score on worship attendance has a significant association with a high membership score.

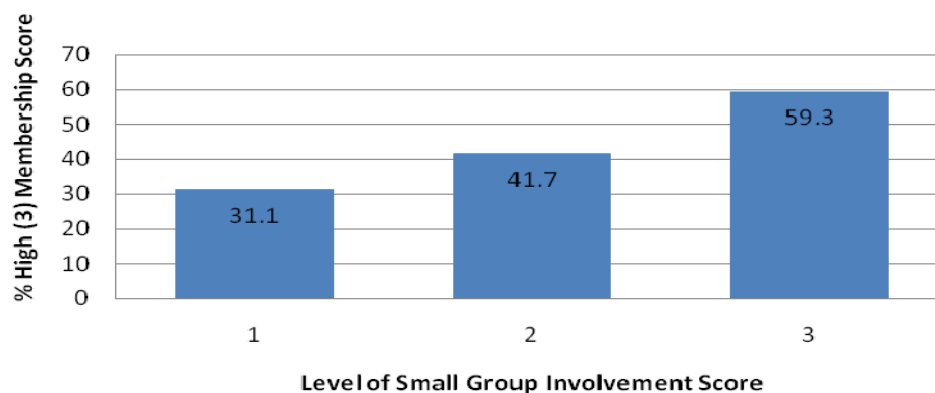


( $p = .00$ )

**Figure 4.16. Percent high (3) membership (SOC) score vs. level of worship.**

### Small Group Involvement

Small group involvement had no significant relationship to the TNTF and SOC scales but had a significant relationship with the SOC membership subscale. Figure 4.17 illustrates a strong positive correlation between small group involvement and membership. The higher the small group involvement is the greater the percentage of those who score high on membership.

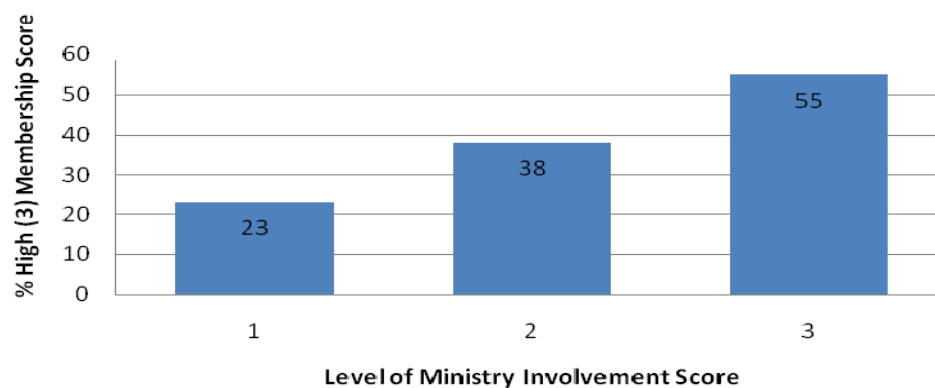


( $p = .00$ )

**Figure 4.17. Percent high (3) membership (SOC) score vs. level of small group.**

### Service Ministry Involvement

Involvement in service ministry scores had no significant correlation with the TNTF and SOC large scales. A strong correlation with the SOC subscale of Membership and service ministry involvement is illustrated in Figure 4.18.



( $p = .00$ )

**Figure 4.18. Percent high (3) membership (SOC) score vs. level of ministry.**

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The following are the major findings derived from this study.

1. Those churchgoers who participated in this study indicated they experience a sense of community at a high level.

2. Those churchgoers who participated in this study varied widely in their disposition to forgive.

3. The relationship between a participant's SOC and TNTF scores were significantly correlated but small.

4. Age had a significant relationship with the sense of community and dispositional forgiveness scores.

5. Of all forgiveness scenario responses fifty-five percent were marked less than 4 (likely to forgive).

6. The membership subscale on the SOC was the only subscale with a significant relationship with the TNTF scale.

7. The Religiosity questions revealed that the participants scored worship on average as the highest level of involvement and small group involvement as the lowest average among the four questions.

8. Whereas the SOC and TNTF scores showed an insignificant correlation, both scales significantly correlated with the religiosity scores.

9. The more involved participants were in prayer, the more likely they scored high in the SOC subscales of influence, shared emotional connection and membership.

10. Those who scored high in their membership subscale were more likely to score high in their level of worship attendance, small group involvement, and service ministry participation.

In the following chapter, observations, implications, applications, and limitations of these findings are discussed in greater detail.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This project originated from a desire to see if there was a correlation between a sense of community and dispositional forgiveness among churchgoers. A questionnaire was distributed to the churchgoers of a Wisconsin United Methodist church. Two hundred and thirteen questionnaires were completed, returned, and analyzed for this study.

In Chapter 2, forgivingness was discussed in relationship to a sense of community. In the Christian community, Jesus identifies the baseline for living as loving God and loving people (Matt. 22:37-40). This loving community is also the Church's witness to the world (John 17:23). Forgiveness plays the role of both pathway and disposition for this loving community. Henri J. M. Nouwen identifies the relationship between community and forgiveness by saying, "Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly" (15). Nouwen goes on to say that we must confront the hard truth that we all love poorly (15). This assertion forms the core of this research project.

#### Major Findings

The results of this study demonstrated that a significant relationship between the SOC and the TNTF scores was observed ( $p = .02$ ); however, the correlation coefficient was small ( $r = .16$ ). The intent of this study was to identify clear positive correlational lines between forgivingness and a positive sense of community. The correlation between the two large scales was significant, but small. A closer look at the SOC subscales and the religiosity responses provides insights into even more significant correlations between

forgivingness, a sense of community, and religiosity: involvement in prayer, worship, small groups, and service ministry.

### **Sense of Community**

The churchgoers who participated in this study indicated a high level of sense of community. Bilezikian stresses that “genuine communion with God translates in active participation into the building of community” (35). The sample church’s high mean score for a sense of community suggests that this congregation experiences and values their community; however, the older the churchgoer the less likely they were to feel emotional safety and intimacy. Furthermore, the longer churchgoers were a member of the church the more likely they would not indicate a high level of emotional safety and intimacy with the church. This church shows signs of discontentedness in their older and longer standing members.

### **Forgivingness**

The churchgoers who participated in this study had a very diverse response to their disposition to forgive. The results indicate that 55 percent of all forgiveness scenario responses were marked less than *likely to forgive*. This reality posed a conflict to identifying churchgoers with a high level of forgivingness. Therefore, being a churchgoer does not correlate with dispositional forgiveness. As identified in Chapter 2, Jesus taught the importance of dispositional forgiveness through his teaching of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) along with his instruction on forgiving seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:21-32). Jesus even goes as far as to say in his instruction in Matthew 18, that God’s great forgiveness for people can be blocked by one’s decisions to be unforgiving to others. Sociopsychological studies have also indicated that people are healthier when they



are disposed to forgiving others. Studies have even shown how forgiveness can decrease anger, anxiety and fear while increasing self-esteem and hope (Enright *Forgiveness is a Choice* 63), yet the sample churchgoers for this study indicated that, on average, they would be less than *likely to forgive*.

As in the relationship with the sense of community scores, age had a significant relationship with the dispositional forgiveness scores. The older and more long-standing members were less likely to forgive.

### **SOC and TNTF Relationship**

The relationship between the SOC and the TNTF was intended to identify the correlation between forgivingness and sense of community. This small correlation provides descriptive work for further study. These findings suggest that other factors, in addition to sense of community likely influence forgivingness, and a reasonable next step would be more descriptive work, such as regression analysis for example, to determine what other factors play a role. The small correlation may also be a factor of the type of instruments that were used. Self-report of a hypothetical situation may pose less accurate than reporting on an actual instance.

The membership subscale on the SOC had a significantly strong relationship with the TNTF scale ( $p = .024$ ,  $F = 3.79$ ). A closer look at membership reveals that, according to McMillan and Chavis, there are five attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system.

*Boundaries* are identified by language, dress, and ritual, indicating who belongs and who does not. While boundaries help create safety for members, they can also create outsiders (9). *Emotional safety* stems from a broader notion of security. The feeling,

belief, and expectation that one fits into a group, accounts for the *sense of belonging and identification*. A feeling of *personal investment* is the product of one working to become a member. This investment results in a meaningful and valuable feeling. A *common symbol system* is the collective representation of “myths, symbols, rituals, rites, ceremonies, and holidays” (3).

With this understanding of the membership subscale, a significant positive correlation is drawn with forgivingness scores; however, forgivingness does not significantly correlate with the other subscales of influence, fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection. Membership was the only significant indicator of sense of community for a higher disposition to forgive.

The influence subscale has a bidirectional meaning for two apparently contradictory forces at work simultaneously:

People who acknowledge that others’ needs, values, and opinions matter to them are often the most influential group members, while those who always push to influence, try to dominate others, and ignore the wishes and opinions of others are often the least powerful members (McMillan and Chavis 11).

The influence score identifies the need for trust in order for a more positive sense of community to be realized. Influence did not correlate with forgivingness.

The integration and fulfillment of needs subscale indicates more than just survival needs, but also the desirable needs to share similarities and what McMillan calls “creating an economy of social trade” (322). This economy is marked by mutual support and care, and has similar characteristics as the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31). This scale did not significantly correlate with the forgivingness scores.

Finally, shared emotional connection involves a shared history and the importance of personal interaction. The more personal interactions within a group, the likelier that people will develop close relations within that community. Several studies (Gorsuch and Hao; Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usai, Neto and Shafighi; and Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun) discovered that a social commitment to religion had more impact on a person's forgivingness than mere beliefs. In other words, a deepened sense of community is more a product of personal interaction over an emphasis on a shared static belief system.

### **Religiosity Relationship**

The religiosity scores were determined by questions that revealed the churchgoers' level of activity in prayer, worship, small group and service ministry. The religiosity questions revealed that the participants scored worship on average as the highest level of involvement ( $M = 2.37$  of a possible 3) and small group involvement ( $M = 1.88$  of a possible 3) as the lowest average among the four questions. It might be expected that corporate worship attendance would be the minimum requirement of belonging to a Christian community. Even the use of the word *churchgoer* in this study makes an assumption as it describes members and active nonmembers of the church. As noted in Chapter 2, one study concluded, "[H]aving a religion has a strong influence on people's concepts and values of forgiveness, whereas involvement in regular religious practice influences one's tendency to forgive that is, 'forgivingness' and forgiveness in a real life situation" (Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun 193). In another study, closeness to God, church attendance, and using religion for personal comfort and protection factored more significantly with forgiveness factors (Gorsuch and Hao 344). These studies suggest that the correlating factor for religion and practicing forgiveness is chiefly determined by

the person's social commitment within the church. Therefore, worship attendance plays a part in forming a forgiving community of faith, but it is not the only factor.

Two religiosity scores include small group and ministry service involvement. Both of these factors have a higher potential to create a more social involvement with others in the congregation. These two scores were lower and reveal that the responding churchgoers in this study place less emphasis upon these more social religious practices. The emphasis of a positive attitude towards the faith community of this study, is more about emotional relatedness and feeling good about the church community, than identifying community at a more intimate and more profound sense of belonging. This type of relatedness is a mark of the biblical community of faith. In the words of Bilezikian, "the questions that must be raised are whether the church functions as authentic community and whether it lives out the reality of its oneness" (37).

Forgiveness is a pathway and disposition to Christian oneness. To the degree that the SOC fails to measure oneness, it will fail to correlate with forgivingness. When the level of Religiosity scores correlated with the TNTF scores, it implied that involvement in prayer, consistent worship attendance, regular small group participation, and ongoing service ministry participation are more related to forgivingness than having a self-report of belongingness from the SOC.

Whereas the SOC and TNTF scores showed a small correlation, both scales significantly correlated with the religiosity scores. The involvement and social aspect of religious life correlated more with both a sense of community and forgivingness.

One unexpected finding showed that the more involved a participant was in prayer, the more likely they were to score high in the SOC subscales of influence, shared emotional connection and membership.

### **Limitations and Weaknesses**

The lack of correlation between the TNTF and SOC scores raises questions about the relationship between forgivingness and a sense of community. Religiosity scores, on the other hand, reflect the actual involvement level of a churchgoer while the TNTF and SOC look for a respondent's attitude toward forgivingness and sense of community. Self-reported attitudes, rather than reflecting upon an actual forgiving or community experience may limit the strength of the findings. Other forgiveness tests might be found that are based on an experience of forgiveness, rather than scenarios that were focused on the situations of college age people. In the case of the religiosity scores, the churchgoers reflect specific behaviors that can be measured. These scores were more easily measured and could be included in the analysis of the respondent's sense of community. The Christian community is defined by its love for God and people, and yet no question in the SOC was asked regarding the respondent's love for God and others.

Other unknown variables may affect the lack of correlation between forgivingness and sense of community scores. Increasing the sample size might help bring clear lines of correlation. Nevertheless, the lack of correlation might simply be a product of a community, even one with a high sense of relatedness, that does not value forgivingness. It may also be a product of a culture that places values on relationships within a group of people that are not intimate.

One study, on the value of forgiveness for a community, was surprised to learn that the population valued unforgiveness more than forgiveness and saw forgiveness as unsatisfying (Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard, and Mullet 331-32). This insight may help bring clarity to the weak response to dispositional forgiveness demonstrated in this study. Over half of the responses to the TNTF scenarios indicating a less than *likely to forgive* response. These responses, within the context of a Christian church, deserve an exploration of follow up questions. Future research could focus on churchgoers' personal beliefs regarding forgiveness. Some participants simply may not value forgiveness, and may even see forgiveness as a weakness in character.

According to the research by Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary, the need to belong is accompanied by a need for frequent contacts. Without frequent contacts, the relationship would be emotionally reassuring, yet not provide full belongingness (500-01). The SOC scores possibly reflect a sample that finds community emotionally reassuring without the deeper intimacy that comes with frequent contacts. This need for frequent contacts may be more effectively measured by the religiosity scores. Involvement in worship, small groups and service ministry increase the potential for contacts with others in the faith community. Likewise, commitment to an active prayer life implies a higher level of intimacy and community with God.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

Now that this study has been completed, the results can become a springboard for further studies by churches in their own settings. The questionnaire from this study can be reproduced in different settings allowing for a database of results from varying churches to be formed. This database would allow for more comparisons to take place.

When a significant number of churches have completed the study, benchmarks can be set for a congregation's score on the SOC and TNTF for comparisons. Demographic results and religiosity scores could be compared as well. The results could form a database that churches could begin to use to see how they compare with other churches and use the results to strategize ways to improve on their community relations and develop their forgiveness muscle.

This database would be a natural starting point for further studies. Interventions for developing forgiving communities of faith could be developed and tested.

Researchers could develop interventions to be tested using this basic questionnaire. For example, a study in 2005 revealed that a six-hour psychoeducational Christian-oriented forgiveness workshop prompted significant positive character change as it relates to improved ability to forgive (Lampton, Oliver, Worthington, and Berry 286).

Additional research could also identify other variables that impact a sense of community and dispositional forgiveness. The refinement of this process would have significant impact upon churches developing forgiving communities. As a congregation develops this trait, it can become a change agent for forgiveness and improved relations in its community. For example, the church could develop forgiving community seminars and workshops for schools, business, and families.

There would be great value in evaluating the congregations' sense of community in light of the psychological sense of community research that is available. A more thorough examination of the SOC subscales would offer more precision to the evaluation of community and, in light of Scripture, could assist the development of better faith community development practices. For example, outreach and membership care practices

of the church could incorporate the knowledge gained from the available psychological sense of community theory and research. The intricacies of membership can be examined in terms of what McMillan and Chavis called boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system (9-11).

### **Personal Reflections**

This study did not test the cause and effect relationship between forgivingness and a sense of community. The correlation between forgivingness and sense of community was identified, but more can be learned. It was my original intent to improve the sense of community of a congregation through an intervention that developed the community's disposition to forgive, or what Dr. Enright would call "strengthening the community's forgiveness muscle" (Personal interview). This study revealed that forgiveness is important to a person's sense of community, but more descriptive studies are necessary to refine the relationship. I also learned that a congregation with a strong sense of community does not mean it will have a strong disposition to forgive. Furthermore, when a Christian community matures through the disciplines of faith, or religiosity, forgiveness is more likely to be the disposition of its members.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I choose to forgive, even when forgiving others is a long and arduous process. Forgiveness, after all, is the dispositional pathway that Jesus taught and exemplified throughout his ministry. According to Jesus, forgivingness leads to authentic Christian community, and this forgiving community is a witness to the world it serves. Choosing to forgive takes more than trying harder, as in maintaining a strong belief system. This study reveals that training in the disciplines of faith, or religiosity, will strengthen the forgiveness muscle as well as improve the sense of community. By



the grace of God, may the Church choose to train in the disciplines of faith and choose to  
forgive.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Participant Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in this research study. You are being asked to complete a four page questionnaire that is comprised of three sections. This questionnaire is expected to take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your response to this research questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous, and all information will remain confidential. Only persons directly involved in the research can see this anonymous information. Once you have returned the questionnaire, because it is anonymous, you will not be able to withdraw from the study.

#### **AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

The completion and return of this questionnaire means that you agree to be in this study.

Please return this questionnaire to the drop box in the Narthex of Faith United Methodist Church, 111 Oak, Hometown, WI 53000, 608-555-5555, or mail it (with no return address to maintain your anonymity) to Sugar River United Methodist Church, 130 North Franklin Street, Verona, WI 53562 by December 2, 2007.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Holmes, Pastor/Doctoral Student  
Sugar River United Methodist Church  
130 North Franklin Street  
Verona, WI 53562

## APPENDIX B

### Congregational Questionnaire: Demographic Information

**Instructions:** This survey is designed to assess your attitude. To begin, you are asked to indicate some of your basic demographic information followed by a series of question to indicate your religious involvement. This is followed by an Attitude Index and then finally a Scenario Questionnaire. The entire survey will take 10-15 minutes. Do not write your name on this Questionnaire to maintain your anonymity. Thank you for participating.

1. Name of your church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender (circle) M F
4. How long have you been associated with your current church? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you a member of your current church? (circle) Yes No
  - a. If yes, how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

Below are a number of questions about your church involvement. Please read each question and mark the response that best represents your answer.

6. How would you describe your prayer life?
  - \_\_\_ I pray a few times a year
  - \_\_\_ I pray several times a month
  - \_\_\_ I pray regularly each day
7. How would you describe your church worship attendance?
  - \_\_\_ I attend worship a few times a year
  - \_\_\_ I attend worship about once a month
  - \_\_\_ I attend worship regularly each week
8. How would you describe your participation in your church's small group (small group as defined as a group of approximately 4 to 12 people, involving some level of sharing joys and concerns, studying the faith, prayer, and serving others)
  - \_\_\_ I am not involved with a small group at this time
  - \_\_\_ I will meet with a small group a few times a year
  - \_\_\_ I attend a small group one or more times a month
9. How involved are you in a church's service ministry (for example: ushering, choir, food pantry volunteer, Habitat for Humanity build, etc.)
  - \_\_\_ I am not involved in a service ministry with the church
  - \_\_\_ I am involved in a service ministry a few times a year with the church
  - \_\_\_ I am involved in a service ministry on a monthly basis with the church

## APPENDIX C

### Sense of Community Index

You are going to read some statements that people might make about their church. Each time you read one of these statements, please indicate if it is mostly true or mostly false about your church by simply circling “true” or “false”

- |      |  |      |       |
|------|--|------|-------|
| Q1.  | I think my church is a good place for me to belong.                      | True | False |
| Q2.  | People in this church do not share the same values.                      | True | False |
| Q3.  | This congregation and I want the same things from the church.            | True | False |
| Q4.  | I can recognize most of the people who attend my church.                 | True | False |
| Q5.  | I feel at home in this church.   | True | False |
| Q6.  | Very few in my church know me.   | True | False |
| Q7.  | I care about what this church thinks of my actions.                      | True | False |
| Q8.  | I have no influence over what this church is like.                       | True | False |
| Q9.  | If there is a problem in this church the congregation can get it solved. | True | False |
| Q10. | It is very important to me to belong to this particular church.          | True | False |
| Q11. | People in this church generally don't get along with each other.         | True | False |
| Q12. | I expect to belong to this church for a long time.                       | True | False |

Subscales:    Membership = Q4 + Q5 + Q6  
                   Influence = Q7 + Q8 + Q9  
                   Reinforcement of Needs = Q1 + Q2 + Q3  
                   Shared Emotional Connection = Q10 + Q11 + Q12

\*Scores for Q2, Q6, Q8, Q11 need to be reversed before scoring.

## APPENDIX D

### Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness

Below are a number of situations in which people might find themselves. People respond in different ways to these situations in terms of what things they will forgive. I would like you to read each situation and imagine it has happened to you. Then I would like you to use the scale below to indicate how you think you would respond to the situation:

- 1 = definitely not forgive,*  
*2 = not likely to forgive,*  
*3 = just as likely to forgive as not,*  
*4 = likely to forgive, and*  
*5 = definitely forgive.*

1. Someone you occasionally see in a class has a paper due at the end of the week. You have already completed the paper for the class and this person says he or she is under a lot of time pressure and asks you to lend him or her your paper for some ideas. You agree, and this person simply retypes the paper and hands it in. The professor recognizes the paper; calls both of you to her office, scolds you, and says you are lucky she doesn't put you both on academic probation. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive the person who borrowed your paper.

- |                                   |                                  |   |                              |                               |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1                                 | 2                                | 3   | 4                            | 5                             |
| <i>definitely<br/>not forgive</i> | <i>not likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>just as likely<br/>to forgive as not</i> | <i>likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>definitely<br/>forgive</i> |

2. A fairly close friend tells you that he or she needs some extra money for an upcoming holiday. You know a married couple who needs a babysitter for their 3-year-old for a couple of nights and you recommend your friend. Your friend is grateful and takes the job. On the first night, the child gets out of bed and, while your friend has fallen asleep watching television, drinks cleaning fluid from beneath the kitchen sink. The child is taken by an ambulance to the hospital and stays there for 2 days for observation and treatment. The married couple will not speak to you. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your friend.

- |                                   |                                  |   |                              |                               |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1                                 | 2                                | 3   | 4                            | 5                             |
| <i>definitely<br/>not forgive</i> | <i>not likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>just as likely<br/>to forgive as not</i> | <i>likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>definitely<br/>forgive</i> |

3. A friend offers to drop off a job application for you at the post office by the deadline for submission. A week later, you get a letter from the potential employer saying that your application could not be considered because it was postmarked after the deadline and they had a very strict policy about this. Your friend said that he or she met an old friend, went to lunch, and lost track of time. When he or she remembered the package, it was close to closing time at the post office and he or she would have to have rushed

frantically to get there; he or she decided that deadlines usually aren't that strictly enforced so he or she waited until the next morning to deliver the package. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your friend for not delivering the application on time.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>definitely</i>	<i>not likely</i>	<i>just as likely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>definitely</i>
<i>not forgive</i>	<i>to forgive</i>	<i>to forgive as not</i>	<i>to forgive</i>	<i>to forgive</i>

4. You just started a new job and it turns out that a classmate from high school works there, too. You think this is great; now you don't feel like such a stranger. Even though the classmate wasn't part of your crowd, there's at least a face you recognize. You two hit it off right away and talk about old times. A few weeks later, you are having lunch in the cafeteria and you overhear several of your coworkers, who do not realize you are nearby, talking about you and laughing; one even sounds snide and hostile toward you. You discover that your old classmate has told them about something you did back in school that you are deeply ashamed of and did not want anyone to know about. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your old classmate for telling others your secret.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>definitely</i>	<i>not likely</i>	<i>just as likely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>definitely</i>
<i>not forgive</i>	<i>to forgive</i>	<i>to forgive as not</i>	<i>to forgive</i>	<i>to forgive</i>

5. A distant cousin you haven't seen since childhood calls you one day and asks if he can stay with you while he looks for work and an apartment. You say it will be fine. He asks you to pick him up from the bus station that night and you do so. Your cousin is just like you fondly remember him; you reminisce for several hours. The next morning you give him some advice on job and apartment hunting in the area, then you go about your own business. That night you come home and witness an angry argument in front of your residence between your cousin and a neighbor. Your cousin is obviously very drunk, cursing, and out of control. You ask what's happening and without really taking the time to recognize you, your cousin throws a bottle at you cutting the side of your head. The police arrive and, with some scuffling, take your cousin away and take you to the emergency room where you have stitches put on your cut. The next afternoon, your cousin calls from the police station. He says he is really sorry about the whole scene and that it was not like him but he was upset about being turned down for three jobs that day. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your cousin.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>definitely</i>	<i>not likely</i>	<i>just as likely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>definitely</i>
<i>not forgive</i>	<i>to forgive</i>	<i>to forgive as not</i>	<i>to forgive</i>	<i>to forgive</i>

## APPENDIX E

### The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit  
and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in the one holy catholic (Christian) and apostolic church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## APPENDIX F

### Forgiveness Process Model

#### PRELIMINARIES

- Who hurt you?
- How deeply were you hurt?
- On what specific incident will you focus?
- What were the circumstances at the time? Was it morning or afternoon? Cloudy or sunny? What was said? How did you respond?

#### PHASE 1—UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER

- How have you avoided dealing with anger?
- Have you faced your anger?
- Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?
- Has your anger affected your health?
- Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?
- Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?
- Has the injury changed your worldview?

#### PHASE 2—DECIDING TO FORGIVE

- Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.
- Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.
- Decide to forgive.

#### PHASE 3—WORKING ON FORGIVENESS

- Work toward understanding.
- Work toward compassion.
- Accept the pain.
- Give the offender a gift.

#### PHASE 4—DISCOVERING AND RELEASING FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON

- Discover the meaning of suffering
- Discover the need for forgiveness.
- Discover that you are not alone.
- Discover the purpose of your life.
- Discover the freedom of forgiveness.

Source: Enright



## APPENDIX G

### E-mail to Congregation

November 15, 2007

Faith United Methodist Church Family,

My name is Gary Holmes, pastor of Sugar River UMC, Verona. During this exciting ministry venture I have been working to complete my Doctor of Ministry Degree from Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY. As a final step I am researching for my dissertation. I would like to ask for your support by completing and returning the attached congregational questionnaire.

You will find attached to this email a copy of a congregational questionnaire. I would ask you to print the attached questionnaire for every family member that is a member of Faith or identifies Faith as his or her church home and is 18 years of age or older. I have included the questionnaire in two different formats, so that you may choose to open the PDF or the Word Document file.

It takes approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Once completed, please bring the questionnaire to Faith and place it in a drop box located in the Faith Narthex by December 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Over the next three Sundays I will also be making copies of the questionnaire available for the congregation at the conclusion of the worship services. Your support in completing a questionnaire would be deeply appreciated.

Option: If you would like to mail the questionnaire back rather than bring it with you to worship at Faith, please send it to Sugar River UMC. In order to keep your anonymity, please do not include your name or return address.

Sugar River UMC  
130 N. Franklin St.  
Verona, WI 53593

I look forward to sharing the results of this research with the congregation when the dissertation is completed. I am very grateful for Faith's ongoing support and love. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Gary Holmes, Pastor/Doctoral Student  
Sugar River UMC  
130 N. Franklin St.  
Verona, WI 53593  
608 845-5855

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Cover Letter and Congregational Questionnaire**

#### **Participant Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in this research study. You are being asked to complete a four page questionnaire that is comprised of three sections. This questionnaire is expected to take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your response to this research questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous, and all information will remain confidential. Only persons directly involved in the research can see this anonymous information. Remember that you may stop taking the survey at any time and in that way withdraw from the study.

#### **AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

The completion and return of this questionnaire means that you agree to be in this study.

Please return this questionnaire to the drop box in the Narthex of Faith United Methodist Church, or mail it (with no return address to maintain your anonymity) to Sugar River United Methodist Church, 130 North Franklin Street, Verona, WI 53562 by December 2, 2007.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Holmes, Pastor/Doctoral Student  
Sugar River United Methodist Church  
130 North Franklin Street  
Verona, WI 53562

**Instructions:** Please carefully read instructions for all three sections and complete this four page questionnaire. The entire survey will take approximately 10 minutes. **Please do not write your name on this Questionnaire in order to maintain your anonymity.** Thank you for participating.

### Congregational Questionnaire: Section 1

Below are five separate situations in which people might find themselves. People respond in different ways to these situations in terms of what things they will forgive. Please read each situation and imagine it has happened to you. Then I would like you to use the scale below to indicate how you think you would respond to the situation:

- 1 = *definitely not forgive*,  
 2 = *not likely to forgive*,  
 3 = *just as likely to forgive as not*,  
 4 = *likely to forgive*, and  
 5 = *definitely forgive*.

1. Someone you occasionally see in a class has a paper due at the end of the week. You have already completed the paper for the class and this person says he or she is under a lot of time pressure and asks you to lend him or her your paper for some ideas. You agree, and this person simply retypes the paper and hands it in. The professor recognizes the paper; calls both of you to her office, scolds you, and says you are lucky she doesn't put you both on academic probation. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive the person who borrowed your paper.

- |                                   |                                  |   |                              |                               |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1                                 | 2                                | 3   | 4                            | 5                             |
| <i>definitely<br/>not forgive</i> | <i>not likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>just as likely<br/>to forgive as not</i> | <i>likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>definitely<br/>forgive</i> |

2. A fairly close friend tells you that he or she needs some extra money for an upcoming holiday. You know a married couple who needs a babysitter for their 3-year-old for a couple of nights and you recommend your friend. Your friend is grateful and takes the job. On the first night, the child gets out of bed and, while your friend has fallen asleep watching television, drinks cleaning fluid from beneath the kitchen sink. The child is taken by an ambulance to the hospital and stays there for 2 days for observation and treatment. The married couple will not speak to you. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your friend.

- |                                   |                                  |   |                              |                               |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1                                 | 2                                | 3   | 4                            | 5                             |
| <i>definitely<br/>not forgive</i> | <i>not likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>just as likely<br/>to forgive as not</i> | <i>likely<br/>to forgive</i> | <i>definitely<br/>forgive</i> |

3. A friend offers to drop off a job application for you at the post office by the deadline for submission. A week later, you get a letter from the potential employer saying that your application could not be considered because it was postmarked after the deadline

and they had a very strict policy about this. Your friend said that he or she met an old friend, went to lunch, and lost track of time. When he or she remembered the package, it was close to closing time at the post office and he or she would have to have rushed frantically to get there; he or she decided that deadlines usually aren't that strictly enforced so he or she waited until the next morning to deliver the package. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your friend for not delivering the application on time.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>definitely not forgive</i>	<i>not likely to forgive</i>	<i>just as likely to forgive as not</i>	<i>likely to forgive</i>	<i>definitely forgive</i>

4. You just started a new job and it turns out that a classmate from high school works there, too. You think this is great; now you don't feel like such a stranger. Even though the classmate wasn't part of your crowd, there's at least a face you recognize. You two hit it off right away and talk about old times. A few weeks later, you are having lunch in the cafeteria and you overhear several of your coworkers, who do not realize you are nearby, talking about you and laughing; one even sounds snide and hostile toward you. You discover that your old classmate has told them about something you did back in school that you are deeply ashamed of and did not want anyone to know about. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your old classmate for telling others your secret.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>definitely not forgive</i>	<i>not likely to forgive</i>	<i>just as likely to forgive as not</i>	<i>likely to forgive</i>	<i>definitely forgive</i>

5. A distant cousin you haven't seen since childhood calls you one day and asks if he can stay with you while he looks for work and an apartment. You say it will be fine. He asks you to pick him up from the bus station that night and you do so. Your cousin is just like you fondly remember him; you reminisce for several hours. The next morning you give him some advice on job and apartment hunting in the area, then you go about your own business. That night you come home and witness an angry argument in front of your residence between your cousin and a neighbor. Your cousin is obviously very drunk, cursing, and out of control. You ask what's happening and without really taking the time to recognize you, your cousin throws a bottle at you cutting the side of your head. The police arrive and, with some scuffling, take your cousin away and take you to the emergency room where you have stitches put on your cut. The next afternoon, your cousin calls from the police station. He says he is really sorry about the whole scene and that it was not like him but he was upset about being turned down for three jobs that day. Imagine yourself in such a situation and mark how likely you are to forgive your cousin.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>definitely not forgive</i>	<i>not likely to forgive</i>	<i>just as likely to forgive as not</i>	<i>likely to forgive</i>	<i>definitely forgive</i>

**Congregational Questionnaire: Section 2**

You are going to read some statements that people might make about their church. Each time you read one of these statements, please indicate if you believe it is mostly true or mostly false about your church by simply circling “true” or “false”.

- |      |  |      |       |
|------|--|------|-------|
| Q1.  | I think my church is a good place for me to belong.                      | True | False |
| Q2.  | People in this church do not share the same values.                      | True | False |
| Q3.  | This congregation and I want the same things from the church.            | True | False |
| Q4.  | I can recognize most of the people who attend my church.                 | True | False |
| Q5.  | I feel at home in this church.   | True | False |
| Q6.  | Very few in my church know me.   | True | False |
| Q7.  | I care about what this church thinks of my actions.                      | True | False |
| Q8.  | I have no influence over what this church is like.                       | True | False |
| Q9.  | If there is a problem in this church the congregation can get it solved. | True | False |
| Q10. | It is very important to me to belong to this particular church.          | True | False |
| Q11. | People in this church generally don't get along with each other.         | True | False |
| Q12. | I expect to belong to this church for a long time.                       | True | False |

### Congregational Questionnaire: Section 3

1. Name of your church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender (circle) M F
4. How long have you been associated with your current church? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you a member of your current church? (circle) Yes No
  - a. If yes, how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

Below are a number of questions about your church involvement. Please read each question and mark the one response that best represents your answer.

6. How would you describe your prayer life?
  - \_\_\_ I pray a few times a year
  - \_\_\_ I pray several times a month
  - \_\_\_ I pray regularly each day
7. How would you describe your church worship attendance?
  - \_\_\_ I attend worship a few times a year
  - \_\_\_ I attend worship about once a month
  - \_\_\_ I attend worship regularly each week
8. How would you describe your participation in your church's small group (small group is defined as a group of approximately 4 to 12 people, and involves some level of sharing joys and concerns, studying the faith, prayer, and/or serving others).
  - \_\_\_ I am not involved with a small group at this time
  - \_\_\_ I will meet with a small group a few times a year
  - \_\_\_ I attend a small group one or more times a month
9. How involved are you in a church's service ministry (for example: ushering, choir, food pantry volunteer, Habitat for Humanity build, etc.)
  - \_\_\_ I am not involved in a service ministry with the church
  - \_\_\_ I am involved in a service ministry a few times a year with the church
  - \_\_\_ I am involved in a service ministry on a monthly basis with the church

**Thank you** for completing this Congregational Questionnaire. Please confirm you have answered questions on all four pages, and return this questionnaire to the drop box located in the Narthex of Faith United Methodist Church, Hometown, WI or mail it (with no return address to maintain your anonymity) to: Sugar River UMC, 130 N. Franklin St., Verona, WI 53562. Please return by December 2, 2007.

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