

ABSTRACT

HISPANIC UNITED METHODIST CHURCH GROWTH: THE FACTORS THAT IMPACT GROWTH IN HISPANIC UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES WITHIN THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

by

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The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The research utilized participant questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Data was collected over a period of six months. This research attempted to identify church growth factors within a research population comprising seven Hispanic United Methodist church plants in the Kentucky Annual Conference. This population contained churches with an average attendance above fifty and churches with an average attendance below fifty.

This project attempts to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The identification of such factors will help pastors and leaders to identify the best church planting practices for Hispanic United Methodist church development in response to the rapidly changing, multicultural 21st Century American landscape. More specifically stated, this project identifies the contributing factors which allow Hispanic church plants in the Kentucky Annual Conference to grow beyond fifty frequent attenders. It also identifies the factors inhibiting the growth of Hispanic church plants in the Kentucky Annual Conference.

The literature review examines the biblical and theological foundations for encouraging growth and breaking down the barriers that inhibit growth. Throughout the Scriptures, we see that embracing change and breaking down barriers to growth is part of the journey to living out God's will and purpose for the people of God. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel embraced change and broke down barriers to growth to become the nation that God wanted them to be. In the New Testament, the early church embraced change and broke down barriers to become the light of the world, testifying to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

As a nation, Israel evolved from a single person (Abraham), to a family of twelve, then to a confederation of tribes, and finally to a kingdom. In all instances, breaking the barriers to growth was demanded to embrace God's mission for them: to be "a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised" (New Revised Standard Version Bible, Deuteronomy 7:6). The literature review also unfolds the adaptive changes that the apostolic church in the 1st Century went through to reach the world for Jesus Christ. Following the same line of thought, Jesus modeled for us the need to go through change to embrace growth. For example, Jesus reached first to the three in his inner circle, then to the twelve apostles, later to the 70, and lastly to the 120, leading up to exponential multiplication after Christ's resurrection, which heralded the birth of the Church as we know it. Lastly, the literature review also addresses the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, beginning broadly with North American church culture, and then focusing progressively on missional churches, ethnic churches, and finally on Hispanic United Methodist churches.

This study was a pre-intervention, qualitative study utilizing questionnaires,

interviews, as well as focus groups of the participating pastors from both growth-embracing and stagnating Hispanic United Methodist churches planted in the Kentucky Annual Conference. It serves as a means of identifying the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

This particular research project is different from other studies on church planting because the rapidly shifting growth of the Hispanic population in America is relatively new. This explosive growth has resulted in fields that are ripe for harvest. Because of the vast number of people involved, church planting is the most effective way to make disciples out of the fastest growing minority in the United States. By most standards, United Methodist conferences and host churches of Hispanic church plants are eagerly seeking ways to break the barrier of fifty regular attenders. This research seeks to reveal the major factors inhibiting growth beyond fifty members.

Five specific findings from the three research questions are presented in Chapter 3. The data gathered are analyzed in Chapter 4 thereby identifying the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The research instruments used, the questionnaire as well as the interviews and focus groups, revealed that vision, leadership, discipleship, evangelism, and cultural awareness are the main factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Chapter

The rapid growth of the Hispanic population during recent decades has brought about deep change in the American cultural landscape. The great giant of the 21st Century, called Globalization, has brought millions to US borders; people from all nations seeking a better opportunity for their own lives as well as a brighter future for their loved ones. The impact of this phenomenon, called Immigration, has been felt nationwide; and the church is certainly no exception. This study describes the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The United Methodist Church has been working hard to reach Hispanic people across the United States. Likewise, United Methodist Conferences all over the country have initiated many attempts to start new Hispanic churches to reach the Hispanic people in our communities with the love and hope of Christ. However, it seems impossible for these new churches to break the barrier of fifty adults in attendance.

This paradox of rapid Hispanic population growth versus slow church membership growth within Hispanic United Methodist churches has drawn the attention of many. This problem is a significant one across the board within the United Methodist denomination. Nationwide, many good United Methodist men and women with a heart for the Latino/Latina community are asking: Why are we not growing Hispanic United Methodist churches beyond fifty in attendance? The answer remains unknown and is crushing the missionary spirit of our church members and leaders at all levels. For example, conferences start a Hispanic ministry, recruit a church planter, recruit a mother church, and invest the funds only to reach the barrier of fifty in attendance. A desired

outcome of this study is to discover causes behind the inability to break the barrier of fifty in small Hispanic United Methodist churches.

This study made use of the research on small church growth and barriers, church development, and leadership. Simply put: how churches, as a small organization, can make the transition to a bigger organization beyond fifty members. Organizational behavior theories are used to describe the process of identifying the factors that impact the breaking of the barrier of fifty in Hispanic churches. Considering this, I have chosen to use a qualitative methodology, focusing on participant questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups as my primary data source. The research will be conducted using the Kentucky Annual Conference as context for the development of this project. The phenomenological approach is used to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, using the following instruments of data collection: questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups over a period of six months.

Autobiographical Introduction

My name is Iosmar Alvarez, and I was born in Cuba in 1974 when the country was experiencing the golden age of Castro's Revolution. Cuban socialism is a system that controls everything, especially people's minds. Children are very important to the system because they represent the future. As a child, I was important to the system. I was taught to think in such a way that I could question anyone and anything without fear and with facts. Everybody loved me and respected me, but at the same time, all the love and respect of others was not enough for me. I needed more, and I could not find anything or anyone who was [there](#) for me. The deep hole in my soul went deeper, until my pained

heart became immune to pain. Deep down, however, I was looking for someone with integrity. Integrity means for me that your words, thoughts, and actions are consistent, and that was the area where I was a mess. I needed to be loved into a family, into the arms of someone who was real. Finally, I hit bottom. I decided that I needed a better future than my past; and I decided to explore a new way to find happiness. All the while, God was there through His powerful prevenient grace, bringing me closer, seducing me through the Holy Spirit to respond to His calling in His justifying grace.

Conversion Experience

Unexpectedly, I was invited to a campaign in the Methodist church in Cuba. They were preaching the Gospel of Christ, declaring that He heals, saves, and delivers from pain and sorrow, promising that He would give me a new life. I am a curious person, and I test everything to see if it is true, no matter the risk or the consequences. I was inquisitive about that message about healing and hope for those who listen and accept it. The preacher looked at me and said with a loud voice, “God has a plan for your life.” I said to myself, “Right on time, here we go again! That’s not new. I’ve heard that before from other preachers.” I was skeptical and trying to find a reason to argue against it, to establish my case and win, as I was accustomed to doing.

I left that night wondering, “What was all that about, praying for people, them falling to the floor, and then getting back up saying, ‘That was a great experience.’ What could be good about being laid on the floor in front of other people?” I said to myself, “Either he is doing something to them, or they are hungry and dizzy, but tomorrow I’m going to find out.” I went back the next night, and to my surprise, I found myself lying on the floor, too, in front of my wife, family, some friends and strangers, laughing and

crying at the same time; I couldn't stop. As soon as I could pull myself back together, I left the church determined to never come back again (remember, whenever I felt involved, I ran). But no, this time there was something different. After that night, I felt peace beyond my own understanding. I found a Bible and started reading the Gospel to know more about that Jesus. I asked forgiveness from my mother and friends. Three months later, I went back to the church and gave my life to Christ. This campaign was better than my own campaign of "fixing myself," because for the first time, something in me really changed for good.

As a new Christian in the United Methodist Church, I was deeply impacted by the Wesleyan doctrine, and the way Wesley approached the most polemic issues in the Bible. As a veterinarian, my background helped me to understand the huge difference between thinking and believing. I started to study the Bible more and more, as well as the life and work of John Wesley. Wesley's life became a window for me to see what it means to be a real Christian in this world, without losing focus on growing to be like Jesus Christ.

This season of my life was full of love, light, dreams, expectations of life, and of what God might do. I was on fire, preaching the gospel to everybody: friends, family, neighbors, and strangers. The passion for inviting people into a covenant with God, the passion for challenging people into kingdom action in order to change the world, was ignited in me by the Holy Spirit. My search for true love had not ended with my wife; that love was only a door to know real love: the love of God, a kind of love that sacrifices itself for others, others like me.

After just a few months, I was ready to come to the United States. I was happily married, full of dreams for my wife and children, and, most importantly, I had received

Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of my life. Then I experienced my first test as a believer. To leave Cuba, one must have an interview with the police. The purpose of the interview is to answer questions like: “Why are you leaving the country?”, “Where are you going and whom are you going to meet outside the country?” and so on. They are very concerned about preserving the best interests of the Cuban revolution. Suffice it to say that, if one fails to respond to one of those questions properly, one is not going anywhere. They will deny any Cuban the right to travel outside the island in a heartbeat. It becomes an integrity test for all true Christians. During my interview, the words of my pastor ran through my mind relentlessly, “Jesus is the Truth; everything that is contrary to the truth is contrary to Jesus.” I answered with such honesty that the officer was left in a state of shock and miraculously granted me permission to leave the country.

The Ministerial Journey Begins

I arrived in the U.S.A. in December 2001, in Louisville, Kentucky. My heart was full of dreams about my future and the opportunities that this wonderful land offers to anyone who wants to prosper by working hard for a better position in life. When I left Cuba, I did not know anything about the plans God had for me. I just wanted to be a successful veterinarian in the U.S. As a new Christian, I prayed before leaving Cuba, “God, I just want a Methodist Church within walking distance from my sister’s house, because I will not have a car when I get there. Also, I don’t want to mess up my soul with the prosperity of that country”. Well, that was my prayer and no surprise, just two blocks from my sister’s house, Beuchel United Methodist Church in Louisville, KY was waiting for me.

I developed very good relationships in that congregation. One of the very special ones I still treasure today is the relationship with my friend Ann. She was so special and caring, and she connected me to other ministries in town. Ann, a solid Christian disciple of Christ, guided me into the congregation at Preston Highway U.M.C., where later I planted my first church. Ann and her daughter are Spanish teachers, so they invited me to go to ESL classes. However, when I got there I knew more English than the students and instead became a translator, a teacher assistant, and a friend. The students got excited with my teachings and testimony, and they asked me for a Bible study.

While all this was going on, Rev. Avis O'Connor, the senior pastor of Preston Highway U.M.C., was praying to start a Hispanic ministry. When she met me, she saw in me a leader, a gift from God, and the answer to her prayers. Rev. Avis O'Connor introduced me to Rev. Eliseo Mejia, who later also became a wonderful mentor in my life. At that time, I was already leading the Hispanic congregation in Preston Highway U.M.C. with great results. God blessed me and answered Rev. O'Connor's prayers in a powerful way. In just three months, there were around 60 new believers in church. Rev. Eliseo Mejia, who today is my Hispanic Coordinator and spiritual mentor, asked me to work with him as a church planter for the United Methodist Church. I was impressed that I had been approached so quickly to become a church planter pastor. I also wondered to myself and thought, "God, why me, when you have so many pastors already trained, who know your Word, who understand doctrines and have ministry experience?" I guess I was asking the same questions all Bible characters faced before God's calling in their lives.

In the end, I decided to trust God, to follow my heart and surrender to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, I decided to no longer doubt and vowed to do

only the little that I knew. I would never teach what I did not know, and God has been faithful until today. After that I said yes to Pastor Eliseo's request and began participating in the Incubator process, a process for leadership formation led by Spiritual Leadership, INC (SLI). I can say that it was a great formative experience in my journey with the Lord during those years. I've been in Incubator groups for a number of years now, and they have developed in me values, character, and an understanding of what it means to work, walk, think, and live as a team. They have also taught me how to love, to have confidence in people and trust them, and to offer spiritual support, no matter what happens in our journeys. And regardless of the status and condition of a person, I learned that I am called to serve them.

As I remember and share my story, it's clear that everything began while I served as a voluntary lay leader in Preston Highway U.M.C. I had to decide between my dreams and God's dream. He showed me the need in the Hispanic population, the fastest growing minority in the U.S. The Holy Spirit led me to a promise in Scripture that I still treasure deeply in my heart:

Then the Lord said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you." (New Revised Standard Version Bible, Exodus 34:10)

I answered, "Here I am, Lord" and He sent me to preach the Gospel to all nations. I have been a pastor for twelve years now, and I can say without doubt that my calling is not an emotion. It is a deep conviction in my heart that I was born for such a time as this,

and no one and nothing can stop me or make me quit. I have been beat down, and I have been praised in my ministry all these years. That is why I can say that in the name of Jesus Christ I will be winning souls until the Lord's coming or until I go to Him.

The Turning Point

In 2003, I suffered a great loss, my first wife Yanet Portela Castillo. We were a team, planting churches together, first in Louisville, and later in Hopkinsville, where many came to Christ through our ministry. One rainy day we were returning home from one of our usual powerful incubator meetings in Lexington. During the journey, I accidentally hit the side of the road and lost control of the vehicle. Yanet passed away instantly. I could not believe that one day I was happily married, and the next, October 14, 2003, I was a widower.

I was devastated. I questioned my faith, my God, and everything I had preached and believed up to that moment. I just quit fighting. I had no desire for words or explanations about God's love and grace. I was bitter, angry, and wondering, "How is this possible? We have planted two churches already, people are coming to Christ, and many are being baptized. How is it possible?" I, the evangelist, the man on fire, despaired and felt forgotten by God. Where was God? Why did He not protect my wife? These questions, and many others, I asked with no peace. In time God answered each one of them, but at that moment, I was just lost.

I will never forget my pastors and friends. They went to my house and spent days with me while I lay on the floor. They practiced what we often talked about in the incubator meetings; we were in covenant to cry together and laugh together. I thought the worst trial of my life was the day I lost my wife, but even worse was the day I buried her.

I remember that I was so weak, even crying like baby, so that some pastors helped me to get dressed for the funeral. They were holding me up on either side to help me make it from the parsonage to the chapel where my love was resting in peace. On the way, a powerful word from God came to my spirit. I did not know God's Word as well as I do now. The Holy Spirit was speaking to my spirit so loud that I did not stop to ask for a Bible. II Corinthians 5:1 was the word: "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

I looked into her casket for the last time and said, "Rest in peace, my dear, your soul is not here anymore." The Holy Spirit said to me: "Iosmar, Yanet is not in your past or your present anymore; she is in your future. Keep walking and you will find her. You two will meet again, because you and she are in me." The word was so powerful that I received an impartation from the Holy Spirit, strengthening me to preach the Word. So I got up and preached, and people came to Christ, and the journey continued. I had two funerals for Yanet: one in the U.S. and one in Cuba. For a time, I thought, "It's too much to endure two funerals." But God was with me all the time, making it possible for me not to faint, not to go crazy with pain and sadness. Finally, the day to take her to Cuba came, the day of facing my wife's family. I arrived in Cuba and took her to my hometown, where I met the family and we cried together, then went to the second funeral and finally to the cemetery. In the midst of the desert, God came over me with a salvation anointing; I preached, and I saw people being saved all over. Many saw and heard my testimony and came to Christ. Family, friends and neighbors saw the power and grace of God over me.

The redemptive love I experienced back in 2003 has been blessing others ever since. I have been offering them the same love God offered to me. All these circumstances divided my life wonderfully into “before” and “after.” I have never been the same. My understanding of God’s nature, of God’s kingdom, birthed in me a passion for Him and a passion for church planting and development. Every aspect of my journey informs what I do any time I plant a new congregation. Jesus Christ, the Hope of Glory in me, leads others to a genuine life transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit. Kingdom-led churches are planted out of broken leaders who choose to follow Christ regardless the circumstances, to bear fruit into the hands of the Father.

Statement of the Problem

For twelve years, I have been a church planter with some measure of success. During the winter of 2002, I was called to plant the first church in Louisville, Kentucky. I was called into the ministry of church planting by Reverend Avis O’Connor, lead pastor of Preston Highway United Methodist Church. Later on, I was formally introduced to the New Church Development office for the Kentucky Annual Conference, where Rev. Eliseo Mejia became my mentor as the director of Hispanic Ministry.

During this time, the Lord has used me to successfully plant three churches, however the challenge was always the same: breaking “the barrier of fifty.” The success I experienced planting these three congregations was the deep mentorship relationship that developed at a personal level with Rev. Eliseo Mejia and, within the context of the Incubator, with all the Kentucky Hispanic pastors. The Kentucky Conference has planted twelve Hispanic churches from 2002 to 2014. Fuente de Avivamiento, the church I am currently pastoring, is planting two new faith communities this year. Needless to say, I

love church planting, training leaders, and making disciples. I dedicate most of my ministry agenda to creating new things, developing leaders, networking, preaching, and teaching. I lead workshops and seminars nationwide on church planting on a regular basis.

In these settings, I have found that one overall concern is the consistent growth of Hispanic churches after reaching fifty members in attendance. However, I quickly discovered that church growth without the presence of the Holy Spirit is impossible. Therefore, I believe that the leadership of the Holy Spirit in church planting is a “must;” therefore the factors exhibited by fast growing churches and by struggling congregations are identified in this work in addition to the understanding that no church could be ever planted without the intervention of the Holy Spirit of God. God, who is the leader and executor of His own mission, demonstrated this unequivocal truth the day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.²

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-4)

In terms of church planting, we can find many models, theories, and ministry approaches to the art of church revitalization and development. However, an inclusive participation of the Holy Spirit is non-negotiable for those who seek the fulfillment of God’s commandment of making disciples through the planting of local churches. People

are afraid of creating space for the Holy Spirit of God to move, igniting with fire the hearts of the believers for the transformation of the world.

I understand that the abuse of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit without order has led to chaos in many instances. However, one should not prevent the Holy Spirit from partnering with the members of the church to bring a Kingdom mindset transformation to leaders and congregations in Christ. Likewise, considering the previous thought, it becomes very easy to arrive at the conclusion that the understanding of the Holy Spirit, the Book of Acts, and the *Missio Dei* are crucial for church development. The connection that Timothy Tennent, President of Asbury Theological Seminary, makes between the work of the Holy Spirit and the accounts of the Church's mission and growth, under the umbrella of the Mission of God in the Book of Acts, is magisterial. "This section seeks to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is the empowering presence of the *Missio Dei* in the world. As well as, what might practically mean for churches, mission agencies, and missionaries on the field" (Tennent 410). Tennent does a good job calling our attention to the indispensable presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. Tennent is also presenting the church of the Book of Acts as the model church for us today.

The Third Person of the Trinity's role and function is amply highlighted across the biblical and theological literature spectrum anytime we introduce the theme of church planting and development by many authors. For example, the executive role of the Holy Spirit is on display in the unfolding of the *Missio Dei* as God fulfills His promise to Abraham and Israel. More specifically stated, the Holy Spirit is the extension of the Incarnation, as He empowers the church for global mission and believers for witness. "The Holy Spirit extends the in-breaking of the New Creation through the powerful

manifestation of signs and wonders and holiness of life” (Tennent 413). Finally, the Holy Spirit empowers the Church with a divine authority through visions, words of revelation, and signs and wonders. “[T]he Holy Spirit leads the church, not only in effective evangelism and witness, but also into a deeper understanding of the *missio dei*” (Tennent 428,429).

Over the last 30 years, most Hispanic United Methodist church-planting efforts were made through the Hispanic National Plan. According to many leaders and churches, the results were few and the morale was low among the planters. However, over the last decade most United Methodist Conferences nationwide have accepted the call to plant new congregations. A new passion for church planting is born as we fulfill the Great Commission through church planting as the most effective way to make new disciples. As Peter Wagner writes, “[c]hurch planting is a major component toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the single most effective evangelistic methodology” (Wagner *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* 11).

This research identifies the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The research focused on participant questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups as a primary data source, collected over a period of six months. This research addresses the finding of those factors in two groups of church plants: the relevant churches represented by the group with a church membership above fifty in attendance; in comparison with those that are stagnant in membership of fifty or below.

Churches can grow by extension or by expansion according to conventional wisdom among church planting researchers and practitioners, from all backgrounds and

cultures. Therefore, I am not implying that churches under fifty members are not effective, healthy, or important. “Many millions of dollars are being invested these days by foundations, denominational organizations, and educational institutions to study and provide resources for a multitude of struggling smaller congregations” (Crandall).

Churches of fifty members or below will not meet the criteria for self-sustaining or chartering within the United Methodist system. The United Methodist conferences that plant Hispanic churches expect those churches to be able to support a local pastor within a period between three to five years. The reasons why a Hispanic church plant does not meet the criteria or expectations established by United Methodist conferences, or how the United Methodist system, financial requirements, and structure affect Hispanic church plants, would be an interesting study, but was not the focus of this research.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, focusing on participant interviews as a primary data source, collected over a period of six months.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The research focused on participant questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups as primary data sources, collected over a period of six months. I sought to answer three main questions to gain the necessary data and to process the discoveries found in regard to the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

This study addressed the following questions:

Research Question #1

What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is above fifty?

Research Question #2

What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is below fifty?

Research Question #3

What contributing factors, if any, stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference?

Rationale for the Project

The first reason this study matters is because of the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in America during the last 15 to 20 years. The need to reach the lost among the Hispanic population has become a priority for churches of all backgrounds and denominations. The field is ready for harvest. Christ called us to make disciples of all nations; therefore, it is conclusive that this calling includes the Hispanic people. Planting churches of different doctrines, structure, and color has become a great vehicle to preach the Gospel and make disciples. God calls us to respond to our community and serve them in love regardless of culture, language, and race. A failure in fulfilling this Kingdom obligation will result in the decline or death of any given congregation. Thomas Rainer writes about this subject, explaining that the symptoms of sick and very sick churches, which comprise forty percent of American congregations (150,000), include: significant numerical decline, prolonged times of apathy, an unawareness of people living in the

surrounding community that the church exists, new members as rare (the exodus exceeds the inflow), and a revolving door of pastors (pastoral tenure). (Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 93). Therefore, it is imperative to respond to the growing and rapidly changing multicultural community around us to be truly missional in nature.

The second reason this study matters is because planting churches, regardless of numbers, is the most effective way of making disciples according to conventional wisdom. Hispanic churches are being planted with some degree of success nationwide within the United Methodist Church. However, there is a growing degree of dissatisfaction among the United Methodist planting agencies due to the slow growth of the Hispanic plants after launching, as well as the inability to sustain their own pastor and ministry expenses. Likewise, after the Hispanic plant starts, a myriad of problems begins to surface. Thereby, this study will help many to understand the context and content of Hispanic Church plants in order to make informed decisions about Hispanic ministries in general, and particularly in the Kentucky Annual Conference.

The third reason this study matters is it will help Hispanic pastors identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches. Our pastors are great men and women of God, who want to make a difference, reaching people for Christ and bringing visible positive change to our communities. The limitations of the effectiveness in this endeavor of planting healthy Hispanic Churches are sometimes tangible, sometimes imperceptible. In many instances, pastors cannot discern why the church is growing; many others cannot identify clearly the factors that are hindering the congregation from reaching their maximum potential. Whatever the case may be, this study will help practitioners in the field to examine their ministerial practices considering

the findings of this project. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that I am not offering the findings of this project as the ultimate and sovereign formula for Hispanic Church planting in Kentucky, or in America.

The fourth reason this study matters is to help United Methodist conferences and churches understand the nature of Hispanic Church planting in the United States.

Regardless of the geographical area, the challenge of planting Hispanic churches that grow beyond fifty and are self-sustainable is highly needed. There is an expectation that church planting efforts will be self-sufficient within the first three years of launching. Similar expectations are held for Hispanic churches; however due to the nature of the plant, culture, level of education, financial limitations, etc., Hispanic church plants take longer to be established as a charter church, if planted successfully in terms of size. In my twelve years of experience planting churches in the United States, I have seen that it takes five to seven years to start seeing tangible results toward self-sustainability. In this regard, this study will help conferences, churches, and leaders to take a look into Hispanic ministry, and to utilize the findings of this project as lenses to create a church planting methodology for a particular geographical area, taking into account the context and content of Hispanic church planting in 21st Century America.

The last reason this study matters is because it is biblical and theological in foundation. I believe that the Church as we know it will disappear in the next 100 years. The church will transmute into a new form of ministry, of being, and of presenting the Gospel. The church will be more alive than ever among the people and away from buildings, institutions, traditionalism, and legalism. The church will stop merely reading the Bible aloud from a pulpit, and instead will allow her actions to speak louder. The

children of God, from all nations, cultures, and languages will become living documents, waiting to be read by those who do not know God. The radical movement of the sons and daughters of God is about to be reborn. It will be a movement that Paul writes about in Romans 8:19, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.” We the children of God will be known as carriers of His glory, His power, and His presence. We will be known as a movement of children, completely possessed by Jesus, His character, His love, and His mercy. We will be known as a church that is both missional and multicultural in nature that lives in a balance between the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit; a church that lives in equilibrium with the works of piety and the works of mercy, a means of grace to serve the community around us. We will be known as a visible church that equals the invisible One, as the premonition of the army of God on earth; but also, soon to be the Army of Christ coming from heaven with Jesus, the Messiah to change the world, once and for all.

God’s fingerprints are found in all creation and certainly in the planting of new Hispanic Churches. Every new church that is planted in Christ, the Rock of Salvation, is neither small, nor big, it is of God. The God we serve is the God of new beginnings; therefore, no beginning in Christ is small or big. It is a new beginning of unlimited potential in Him who died for us for the Church to be born. A church that will never die regardless of the declining season we are in; the Universal Church will never die. Jesus told Peter that the church will never die in Matthew 16:18. Indeed the Church will never die, even though, according to national statistics, churches are dying. Rainer writes: “But churches have and are dying. As many as 100,000 churches in America are showing signs of decline toward death” (*Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 7).

However, the author is not talking about the Universal Church of Christ, a Church that Jesus described in Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” Therefore, Jesus keeps saying to us today what was said to Peter yesterday, “I’m building my church on me, The Rock, thereby, the gates of Hades will not prevail against it,” regardless of the times, the culture, the race, the language, the country or continent; regardless of the statistics, criticism, denominational doctrines, and dogmas. The Church will never die because all the previously mentioned are only blocks, bricks that humankind has built upon the foundation during the last 2000 years of Church history as Paul did, according to Romans 15:20: “Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else’s foundation.” In light of this text, I can testify we have been building on someone else’s foundation, meaning doctrines, dogmas, traditions of all kinds, theologies and church regulations and disciplines; however, the ambition of proclaiming the good news of Christ will never die. Christ is the true and only foundation of the Church, therefore in times of need and storms, the House of God built upon the rock will prevail regardless of the secular winds of the 21st Century or any other. Matthew 7:25: “The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.” Let us continue expanding the Kingdom of God by planting Hispanic churches of all sizes upon Jesus the Rock of Salvation.

Definitions of Key Terms

Words will never be able to express what the mind intends to unfold in every thought we have regarding any particular subject. This project is not an exception to this

universal rule; therefore, the following definitions will provide clarification for those seeking understanding of technical terms and definitions used in this study.

Church (Missional Church)

The church is a family of believers, united with one another and with God, through Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live holy lives. As the Body of Christ, they come to hear the Word of God, to serve, love one another, and partake in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. These powerful celebrations demonstrate Christ transforming communities to the world. The nature and mission of the Church are three-fold: to worship God, to equip the saints, and to reach out to a hurting and lost world. The church is called to share God's love and grace to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). It is a disciple-making community driven by a passion and a vision to transform lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In contrast, according to Rainer,

A church by definition is a body of believers who function for the greater good of the congregation. In essence, when church members increasingly demand their own preferences, the church is steadily not becoming the church. It is therefore neither surprising nor unexpected, at least from an observer's points of view, when the church closes its doors. The church really died before then because its members refused to be the church.

(Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 50)

Church Growth

Church growth is the natural development of the church in terms of numbers, disciples, mission, and vision. Church growth can happen by expansion, growing

numerically in one location, and by extension, planting new missional communities or new worship services.

However, church growth can also be unhealthy such as in the case of a church established around member needs instead of the vision of God for a particular congregation and context; or it can be an unhealthy church when built not on Christian doctrine and values, but on pleasing people's opinions about God, morals, and the Bible. To illustrate unhealthy growth, let us view it in comparison to the condition called elephantiasis, where parts of a person's body swell to massive proportions (Lerner and Lerner). This condition is a good demonstration of the fact that not all growth is healthy growth. Applying this analogy to church growth will lead to the understanding that a church is called to grow, not for the sake of "growing," but for the sake of Christ. Thereby, the kingdom growth strategy that God has established for His Church has always been to abide in Jesus (John 15:1-11).

Finally, dynamic growth in this study refers to breaking "the barrier of fifty," or church growth beyond fifty members in worship attendance. Church growth is not about the church seating capacity, but about the church sending capacity. More specifically stated, God is more interested in causing a mega-impact than a mega-church, or mega growth without purpose and vision. The Church of Christ is in fact called to reach the greatest amount of people possible; and equip them to be sent back to the world with a kingdom mindset.

Evangelism turned out to be the most important concept that was recognized in all the focus groups. The concept of evangelism, personal and mass, could be dealt with under the major theme of church. Further,

evangelism can be dealt with again under the major group theme of home groups and family, where the family and the small group meeting in homes could form the bridge to lead people to a salvation experience.

(Palla 125)

Successful Church Plants

The Church of God is successful, regardless of the size, context, race, and economical status. Therefore, we are not implying that churches with fewer than fifty in worship attendance are not successful. As I stated above, church growth includes: numbers, spirituality, discipleship, expansion, extension, health, and dynamism. However, for the purpose of this study “a successful church plant” represents a church that breaks the barrier of fifty.

Worship Attendance

Worship attendance represents the weekly adult worship attendance at a church’s principal worship service. For the purpose of this study, a regular attendance above or below fifty is the established criteria for data collection and analysis.

Church Development Strategies

Church development strategies represent the action steps, programs, and events based on careful planning to close the gap between a given church mission and vision. Church development strategies are result-oriented rather than task-based. Kingdom strategies lead people to experience salvation and life transformation in Christ. In the context of this research, a church development strategy refers to the factors that promote growth in small Hispanic United Methodist churches.

Church Development Barriers

The Webster Dictionary defines a barrier as anything that restrains or obstructs progress, or access; a limit or boundary of any kind. In the context of this research, a church development barrier refers to the factors that limit growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches.

Delimitations

By involving only Hispanic United Methodist churches in the project, I would be able to make sound recommendations to UMC conferences serving small Hispanic churches in a similar context as the Kentucky Annual Conference, based on the research findings. My decision to choose this conference is founded on my twelve years of experience planting churches in Kentucky. Therefore, I deem reasonable the use of this context as the laboratory for this project.

In this regard, I borrowed some of the research process ideas from Thom Rainer's book *Simple Church* (Rainer and Geiger) as the blueprint for this project. I have chosen the "pre-intervention" phenomenological method of research and chronicled the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The downside of choosing this method is that I will be unable to make broad research implications and applications for all Hispanic United Methodist churches nationwide.

The goal of this step is to make the research as objective and narrow as possible, therefore I made the following decisions:

1. The geographical area in which I will chose to do the research will be the Kentucky Annual Conference. This is an area with a high concentration of Hispanic

population, according to demographic data, and we have churches in this area that have either breached or failed to break the barrier of fifty in worship attendance.

2. Likewise, the survey and research will be conducted in the United States only to avoid the issue of "generalization of findings" (Rainer and Geiger, *Kindle Locations* 4449-4450). I aim to make applications based on the findings, and that would be difficult to do as the nature of ministry changes greatly as international borders are crossed. However, I do feel that many of the concepts may be applied internationally and cross-culturally.

Sample Identification

This study used "stratified sampling," which means I divided the potential church populations into two subgroups: a vibrant/growing church strata (50+) and a comparison/non-growing church strata (50-) or stagnate. The pastors who were chosen to participate in both groups were from Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference only, in order to simplify the research so that easy comparison may be made.

Reasons for Choosing the United Methodist Church (UMC)

The United Methodist Church is one of the largest mainline denominations in the United States, with well-developed organizations to address church planting and revitalization. By choosing the United Methodist Church, I was able to interact with several churches and leaders and had access to trustworthy historical data regarding United Methodist Hispanic church plants within The Kentucky Annual Conference. Additionally, I am an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church, therefore I am knowledgeable of the systems and organization of the denomination, and I am deeply

invested in its health and growth, especially of the Hispanic congregations.

Considering the previous thought and analyses regarding the United Methodist Denomination, I would say that the United Methodist Church in the US is neither dead, nor declining. We are transmuting into a new way of church; into a new form of living out our faith as United Methodists. This new form is missional in nature, and incarnational in practice. We were born out of one of the greatest revivals of the last centuries. Therefore, it is a fact that our DNA is one of fire, revolution, discipleship, small groups, church planting, and multiplication. In this season, God the Father, who is the missional shift commander of His own mission, is calling us to embrace our new multifaceted and multiethnic body expression in all nations. The complexity of the new era has also reached the Church. The new normal expressed through an also multifocal direction of values, customs, mentalities, and cultures that will engender transformation in all unimaginable ways possible is here.

There was a time, in the not so distant past, when the United Methodist Church was primarily represented by mainstream culture. Similarly, this reality was also found in the secular circles of influence anywhere in the country, by virtue of the fact that the previous 43 Presidents of this great nation were represented by mainstream culture. Notably, the whole country is currently shifting to embrace persons from diverse cultural backgrounds, sexual orientation, and gender. For proof of this, we very recently elected as President of the United States someone from the African American sub-culture, making the 44th President of United States a person of color. Indulge me, then, as I make my case that a call to embrace a season of inclusiveness and diversity is being made by God. This encouragement to openness is not a church world phenomenon, but one that

transcends our society and the world. Thereby, let us allow God to ignite our DNA of revival and reach the world by planting disciple-making churches that in turn will make more disciples for the transformation of the globe in Christ.

Therefore, the question remains: Are there ways in which the United Methodist denominational system—through its policy, structure, expectations, or culture—is creating problems for Hispanic Churches that contribute to the struggle to pass the barrier of fifty? In the way that our communities are multicultural, are we also open to being inclusive in leadership, including the leadership structures of our denomination, to reflect the imminent naked reality before our very eyes?

I will use the computer system “hardware vs. software” illustration to explain the current reality of the United Methodist Church in the US in relation to Hispanic Church planting development. However, I understand that all analogies break at some point, because words of the mouth will never be able to fully express what the mind and heart desire to express. The computer analogy unfolds as follows: rebooting the software solves computer software issues, but computers with hardware issues have to be replaced, most of the time. Considering that analogy, the question is: What would be a good software system to use for planting Hispanic UMC churches that will not only survive within the UMC system, but grow?

In this reckoning, as a Church, we have different options to respond to the current reality of rapid change in culture, liturgy, music, mindset, languages, and understanding of God, truth, church, and social behaviors that develop new interpretations and paradigms of sin, good, and evil.

In order to deal with any established system, there are three options:

1. Replace the system: In the United Methodist denomination, it is neither possible nor wise to replace the current system. It would require us to go back 250 years and prevent John Wesley from being born and the Methodist movement from being organized, according to the North American Colonial context. The fact is this: those 250 years of church history cannot be ignored, nor denied or undone.

2. Reboot the system: Create avenues within the system to facilitate growth. Create a setting where the UMC structure responds to the new changing multicultural reality of United States and not the opposite: the reality responding to the system structure. We must move with intentionality and urgency. A journey back to our Wesleyan roots is only possible under the atmosphere and presence of the Holy Spirit. If we continue putting more emphasis on reason, tradition, skills, and degrees rather than the Holy Spirit, experience, gifts, and fruits that nurture character then we will continue to experience stagnation and decline.

3. Relocate from the system: We are failing to provide a context for passionate, entrepreneurial, effective church planters and pastors to effectively serve in our denomination. As a result, many are leaving or have left the denomination to plant churches for other church groups who are being effective in providing a healthy environment for change and church transformation. This option will continue to perpetuate the decline of the UMC and other mainline denominations.

In terms of polity, structure, doctrine, and history, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the UMC system and it has been proven for 250 years that it works. In this regard, theoretically speaking, the best option for us as United Methodists would be to

“reboot” the system. The areas we need to review are the areas of process and functions to create new generative teams and operational structures in response to the new multicultural and multiethnic context of 21st Century America.

Review of Relevant Literature

The objective of the literature review was to hear from the conversations of others who are also puzzled by the same problem of “breaking the barrier of 50”. Although this dissertation focuses on Hispanic United Methodist Churches, the literature review reveals that the need for a breakthrough in church growth transcends denomination, race, culture, tradition and geographic placement. As a result of personal conversation, many churches, conferences, and church leaders from all backgrounds agree that the most effective way to make disciples is through church planting. A few decades ago, the church planting movement really grew significantly and practitioners from all over the world now have access to resources on church planting like never before throughout the history of the Church. Nevertheless, at this time resources and authors publishing resources on planting Hispanic Latino churches are rare, not to say scarce. On the other hand, statistics by the United States 2010 Census show that more than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population. The latter increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total population of the United States. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, which was four times the growth in the total population at 10 percent. All this to say that studying the

factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference is urgent and crucial.

In writing the literature review, I went from the general to the particular to demonstrate what has been said and supported by faithful sources and authors in regard to church planting and development nationwide. To accomplish this difficult task, I started by researching the most notable authors who speak to the subject of church growth among mainline denominations and Anglo churches, others who speak to the specific factors of growth, stagnation and decline of United Methodist churches in America, and finally, I researched literature dealing with ethnic church planting and development. To summarize the process that I followed for doing the literature review, I will delimit as follows:

The literature review begins with general literature, with a focus on Anglo churches regardless of institutional affiliation. Following the research methodology used by Thom S Rainer in *Breakout Churches* (Loc 165), I compared the five churches that I found with a carefully selected control group of Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference that has made the leap of breaking the barrier of fifty members in worship attendance.

Research Methodology

I elected to write a dissertation on the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. I focused on Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference that have either breached or failed to break the barrier of fifty members in average attendance. As I described previously, United Methodist churches stagnant under fifty members is a crude

and current reality nationwide, especially among the Hispanic/Latino ministries. We have many Anglo congregations in a state of decline or plateau, however the main concern I am addressing in this project are Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. We are serving God in a time of transformation, change, and opportunity in America, but also in times of uncertainty, despair, and distrust of institutions and people in general. Therefore, we need radically loving churches to equalize the current reality and balance society. To balance society will be our first step, but the ultimate goal is a sweeping movement of God that brings the Kingdom of God here and now.

We have the honor and the privilege to serve the minority with the fastest growth rate in America. Considering that, the United Methodist Church is investing a lot of time, resources, and leaders to reach the Hispanic/Latino community. Despite the great vision, the good intentions, and the tireless effort invested in planting Hispanic United Methodist churches, most of the conferences in the United States are struggling. We all have met the great brick wall: the barrier of fifty members in average worship attendance.

Following the research methodology used by Jim Collins in *Good to Great* (Collins) and Thom S Rainer in *Breakout Churches* (Loc 158), I compared the five churches that I found with a carefully selected control group of Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference that made the leap of breaking the barrier of fifty members in attendance.

The target area for the research will be the Kentucky Annual Conference. The comparison will include the group of two churches that made the leap and a second group of five churches that failed to make the leap. The goal of this contrast will be to identify

the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Drawing upon the *Breakout Churches*' terminology of "leap churches," I chose the selected groups of churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. This conference provided a good context for discovering churches that have made the leap of breaking the barrier of fifty members in attendance. The factors distinguishing one group from the other were carefully analyzed and compared with the literature, statistics, narratives, and reports from the Kentucky Annual Conference. In addition, with each participating pastor I utilized a questionnaire by e-mail, and then conducted individual interviews in person. Also, two focus group sessions were completed with the same group of participants in order to change the dynamics of the discussions with the purpose of creating a safe place and environment for open discussion about the subject of factors that impact growth of Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Likewise, I consulted and analyzed historical church documents: church attendance, narratives, demographic context, and statistics reports for each of the seven churches chosen to participate in the research. The purpose was to explore the perspective of pastors from different angles and compare data to enrich the findings.

Type of Research

I conducted a qualitative pre-intervention study because I was describing and exploring the context in which Hispanic United Methodist churches are planted or developed, as well as the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Furthermore, I explored through questions the factors that make Hispanic churches relevant (50+ in attendance) or

stagnate (50- in attendance) using a phenomenological approach. In this reasoning, the study was based on seven Hispanic United Methodist churches of the Kentucky Annual Conference, where I conducted an explanatory analysis to explore the symptoms of Hispanic churches that are not growing above fifty members in order to find the underlying principles or factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The study was conducted retrospectively in which criteria were established for the selected seven Hispanic churches based on historical records for inclusion in the study.

Participants

The participants were the pastors of the seven Hispanic United Methodist churches selected from within the Kentucky Annual Conference. I chose this conference because it has been successfully planting churches during the last twelve years of Hispanic Ministry development within the United Methodist Church in the US. Following this line of thought, I also applied my twelve years of experience planting churches in Kentucky. Therefore, I believe that the context and connections I have in the conference provided a solid ground for a good study of the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Thereby, the project was successful and accomplished its objectives according to the data research methodology, the process and the structure I have chosen.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for data collection were a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire (Question Set A, see appendix), a semi-structured personal interview (Question Set B, see appendix), and a focus group that was carried out in two sessions

(repeat Question Set B, see appendix). By most standards, research literature suggests the use of more than one method to guarantee validity and promote confidence in the future findings. “This *multi-method* approach to real-life questions is important, because one approach is rarely adequate; and if the results of different methods converge (agree, or fit together) then we can have greater confidence in the findings” (Gillham 2).

In *Research Design Third Edition*, Creswell offers advantages as well as limitations for the use of these methods. “Advantages: Useful when participants cannot be directly observed; Participants can provide historical information; Allows researcher control over the line of questioning. ... Limitations: Provides indirect information through the views of interviewees; Provides information in a designated place rather than a natural field setting; Researcher’s presence may bias responses; Not all people are equally articulate and perceptive” (Creswell 179).

The above description offered by Creswell informs us the reason behind choosing the three instruments that were chosen for the research and the strategy behind the data collection procedures. For example, the participants in the project are located geographically distant from one another, thereby there is considerable travel distance between the participants and the researcher. Therefore, the geographic limitations imposed by the participants’ physical location become one of the fundamental reasons for choosing questionnaires via online. The focus group was held in two sessions, one month apart, where all participants could be present at a particular time and place and the face-to-face interviews were conducted individually in a location most convenient for each

individual participant. These methods saved a considerable amount of time, energy, and financial resources usually related to long distance travel by automobile in the state of Kentucky.

Low cost in time and money. This is the overwhelming argument. You can send out a thousand questionnaires in the time it takes to do two semi-structured interviews. And pro rata the financial costs of mailing questionnaires are miniscule compared with the probable travelling costs, both in time and money, involved in interviewing. (Gillham 6)

Data Collection

Following the research methodology used by Jim Collins in *Good to Great* Collins and Thom S Rainer in *Breakout Churches* (158), I decided:

1. To use my twelve years of experience planting churches in the Kentucky Conference,
2. To use a research assistant to communicate with participants, collect questionnaires, coordinate and record interviews and focus groups, transcribe recordings, and organize data.
3. To compare data relationship between the churches that made the leap (growing congregations with above fifty members in attendance) and those that are declining or stagnant below fifty.

The first instrument used was the researcher-designed questionnaire. “The great popularity of questionnaires is that they provide a ‘quick fix’ for research methodology; no single method has been so much abused. This is a pity, because questionnaires have their place as one method, of most value when used in tandem with other method”

(Gillham 2). The questionnaire was conducted individually by email two weeks prior to each participant's one-on-one interview. In order to ensure completion within the established time-frame, a reminder email was sent to each participant three days prior to deadline, and additionally as needed until completed questionnaire was received. This strategy is well supported by authors in the research field who have encountered by practice that "follow up letters...can increase returns by as much as a third of what you have received to date, so they are worth the effort" (Gillham 47). On the previous page the author expands on the reasons that people respond to questionnaires effectively. In what follows, I will sum them up by highlighting only the reasons in connection with this research: "questionnaires sent by people known to the participants; well designed; for a research backed by a university have a good chance to be returned" (Gillham 46). The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather in-depth and honest reflections from the participants as each person will be free to complete the questions at their leisure, and are more likely to share personal responses through the computer in the first stages of the research.

The second instrument used was the semi-structured personal interview. Interviews are one of the very basic instruments used in research, therefore it was used in this research as one of the methods to collect the necessary data for answering the research question. "Interviewing, then is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (Seidman 8). Seidman does a very good job pointing to the importance of using interviews as a method of gathering data for qualitative research. In this regard, it is very important to restate the fact that this research project is indeed

qualitative research. Furthermore, it is qualitative research conducted within the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Accordingly, Seidman states, “The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the ‘others’ who make up the organization or carry out the process” (Seidman 10). Considering Seidman’s statements, experiences are a key element in qualitative research. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman 9). Thereby, the importance and validity of interviews as a method of inquiry to gather data is conclusive. One of the purposes of the interviews in this research was to put the experiences of the participants and their behaviors as leaders within the Kentucky Annual Conference in context, According to Seidman, this allows the researcher to better understand the meaning of these behaviors: “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (Seidman 10). By understanding the data in its context, the researcher aimed to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference and, furthermore, to identify best practices for church growth among these churches.

The interview helped the participants begin to form and voice their own opinions before having any outside influences in preparation for the focus group format. “A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience (Blumer, 1969, p.2)” (Seidman 10).

Finally, it is important to clarify that the raw interview data was kept confidential, but not anonymous, as clarified in the consent letters that each participant signed to participate in the research. This is based on Seidman's declaration on this matter: "At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. That's why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers, and why finding pseudonyms for participants is a complex and sensitive task." (Seidman 9)

The last instrument used was the focus group. "Any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999, p.20)" (Barbour 2). This instrument was particularly useful for identifying the factors that impact growth, but more importantly, it was useful for identifying which of those factors stand out as best practices for church growth, based on the participant experiences and understanding after interacting with the previous two collection methods.

One of the earliest and most frequently cited texts (Frey and Fontana, 1993) uses the term 'group interviews' but describes an approach that is more commonly referred to as 'focus group discussions,' relying on generating and analyzing interaction between participants, rather than asking the same question (or list of questions) to each group participant in turn, which would be the approach favoured by what is more commonly referred to as the 'group interview.' (Barbour 2)

The focus group included all participants together at a specific place and time. In order to allow adequate time for response and discussion, the focus group was scheduled ahead of time and conducted over a two-hour period in two separate sessions, one month

apart, using the same questions from Question Set B split between the two sessions. The questions from Question Set B, also used in the interview, were repeated in a focus group setting in order to allow the individual participants to interact with each other and further develop their opinions and expound upon their own experiences. “Since focus groups afford insights into how people process and make sense of the information with which they are provided, they are also especially well-suited to uncovering participants’ misconceptions and how these can arise” (Barbour 33).

The critique formulated by Barbour led me as the researcher to use this particular method with the ultimate goal of identifying trends regarding factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Additionally I desired to be able to later contribute—hopefully in a new way—to the third question on best practices for Hispanic church growth based on these factors.

“[I]ndeed, using a different method may allow you to make an original contribution to the knowledge base of your discipline, through highlighting previously unexplored aspects of the issue at hand by, for example, unpicking the reasoning behind certain types of behavior or beliefs” (Barbour 43). The focus group sessions were video-recorded with written consent from the participants for accuracy and later reference.

The Hypothesis

This project attempts to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

What I Am NOT Trying to Prove:

1. That the factors that impact growth in the sample churches that have broken the barrier of fifty in worship attendance are sufficient to be healthy. For we know

that only God can bring growth by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and many other metrics are needed to qualify a church as relevant in 21st Century America.

2. That the factors found through the onsite studies and the reviewed literature related to church growth or barriers in worship attendance are the only ones valid for Hispanic church planting or development in the US. There are many other factors and variables that are not included in this research. This research is an attempt to prove the relationship between applying the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches with attendance of over fifty members; as well as the factors that impact growth and hinder church attendance in Hispanic United Methodist churches with attendance of under fifty members.
3. Measuring the church's annual average weekly worship attendance measures the ability of the church to attach people, not just attract them. Therefore, I am not implying that churches that break the fifty-member barrier are necessarily vibrant or vital; my goal is to find the relationship between church leadership positions, practices, and priorities, and the ability of the congregation to grow beyond fifty in attendance and maintain sustained growth. (Rainer and Geiger Loc 4449-50)

Data Collection Stages

Stage 1: Define criteria. I will not claim that I have discovered the perfect set of factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. I believe, however that the criteria provide an acceptable screen for identifying factors that impact growth and best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

1. Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference that have made “the leap” (fifty members or above).
2. Hispanic United Methodist churches that failed to make “the leap” (below fifty members).

Stage 2: Find Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference which meet the criteria. I began the process of collecting data by recruiting a research assistant to help me during the arduous season of contacting the local pastors in the Kentucky Annual Conference. The potential participating pastors who assisted us in this project were contacted through regular mail, email, and by phone. The first attempt was to contact the Hispanic Director of Church Planting in the Kentucky Annual Conference to access official data and compare it with the local churches’ records.

For each church, I requested the following data:

1. Name of the Church, address, and GCFA numbers.
2. General demographic data of Hispanic/Latino population in the church area.
3. Available narrative describing the church history.
4. Name of the pastor and years serving under that particular appointment.
5. Pastor’s level of education and his/her ability to speak English.
6. Date and time of the church’s launching or foundation.
7. Sunday service attendance during the last five years.
8. Annual membership report during the last five years.
9. The church vision and process to make disciples.

List of churches that met the criteria:

Group 1: Relevant Churches (average attendance of above 50)

Churches A and B

Group 2: Stagnant Churches (average attendance of below 50)

Churches C, D, E, F, and G

Stage 3: Discover the factors that impact growth. The goal for this stage was to isolate the factors that impacted growth, whether positively or negatively in the selected churches. In like manner, special attention was given to those factors that repeatedly stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. During each step of the research process, I continuously asked these questions: “What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference?” “What is taking place in these ‘relevant churches’ that is not taking place in the comparison churches?” (Rainer *Breakout Churches* Loc 297).

Stage 4: Analyze the data in comparison with literature and experience. In the final analysis, I gathered all the data that came from the survey and compared them with the literature review conclusions regarding the factors that impact growth of small churches in general, and small Hispanic United Methodist churches in particular. Additionally, I presented the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, according to my twelve years of experience working with Hispanic Ministry in this area.

Stage 5: Apply what we learned. My heart and passion is in developing a simple organic model to produce Hispanic disciple-making leaders in the multicultural context of 21st Century America; the aim is to plant disciple-making churches by forming disciple-making leaders out of the fastest growing minority population in America. I

dream that this project will help pastors, staff members, laity, including American churches and conferences that are seeking to respond to the radical immigration shift that is shaping America's religious landscape. I want this research to become a practical tool for practitioners in the field. Many are applying the factors that promote growth in the Hispanic United Methodist churches without even knowing them in many instances. In other words, many of us can neither tell nor name pragmatically the factors promoting growth in our congregations. Sadly, it happens in the opposite case as well; many good intentioned pastors are putting into practice the factors that limit growth in our churches and, in many instances, we cannot define those factors either.

Hence, I would like to provide a well-informed set of factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The findings of these factors are validated by the sources of the research and the conclusions resulting from data analysis and processing. Hispanic UMC church planting and development look different in every United Methodist conference in the US. However, I am confident that the findings of this project will benefit and inform other churches and United Methodist conferences about what to continue asking regarding the factors that impact growth, as they lead new efforts to continue expanding the Kingdom of God in 21st Century America.

Data Analysis

Therefore, I focused on Hispanic United Methodist congregations below fifty in attendance that struggle to break this barrier, and on the churches, that have breached the barrier of fifty in worship attendance.

It is a well-known fact that Hispanic churches within the United Methodist Church nationwide are not growing while other faith groups are. The kingdom value of this project relates to planting and revitalizing healthy Hispanic United Methodist churches to be kingdom-led churches that are intentional on making disciples and leaders out of the fastest growing minority population in America; it aims to respond to the radical immigration shift that is shaping the America's religious landscape. In America, we all are working with the same social soil in terms of population, culture, language, education, and economic status. On the other hand, as we shall come to see, the Hispanic population traits across the US change according to geography. Therefore, depending on where the church will be planted, different generations of Hispanic people will emerge. The net result will be a change in culture, labor, and level of education. The landscape of many subcultures within the Hispanic population varies according to different States in which particular Hispanic groups have chosen to concentrate, seeking community among themselves. For example: Cubans prefer living in Miami, while Puerto Ricans and Dominicans prefer New York. Likewise, historically, Mexicans by heritage (but US born for generations) are mostly in Texas, while Mexicans who are born and raised in Mexico, along with Guatemalans, Hondurans and many other central and South American people come to Kentucky and other states with a rural setting. This fact is well displayed in many demographic studies conducted nationwide by different organizations.

Generalizability

The findings of this study have an unequivocal direct application in leading efforts nationwide to plant Hispanic United Methodist churches. The study focused on the Kentucky Annual Conference with the purpose of narrowing the scope to make the

project manageable. However, the findings are generalizable to evangelism teams, discipleship committees, church mission and planting agencies, and local churches with a heart for reaching Hispanic persons. Accordingly, church planters from all backgrounds of life will be able to make reliable, informed decisions regarding Hispanic church planting and development in 21st Century America.

I ardently desired this research to help pastors and leaders in the field to be effective in planting and growing Hispanic churches. To some extent, the factors found in the research apply to the wider population of churches as well. The research explored church growth factors, first from a main culture perspective, then from a missional church standpoint, and finally from the ethnic context. Therefore, anyone who is seeking to understand the different church transitional barriers and growth strategies will find in this project a meaningful tool. Hispanic United Methodist churches are struggling to break the barrier of fifty in worship attendance in Kentucky, however it is also a well-known fact that the United Methodist Church is facing the same barrier nationwide.

Project Overview

First, Chapter 2 includes the literature review to address the problem statement and the research questions pertinent to this study. Second, Chapter 2 also includes the biblical and theological foundations in regard to church growth and multiplication. I study different narratives in the Old and New Testament where either a change in mindset, structure, activities, behavior, or leadership style was demanded by their context to overcome growth obstacles. In the writing, organizational behavior and strategies to respond to God's mission and command are covered as well by the selected literature.

Chapter 3 unfolds the analytical framework of the project by restating the problem and purpose statement in summary form. In addition, a detailed description of the research method is included in Chapter 3 in terms of the following: research questions, instruments used to collect data, the procedure and criteria for selecting and collecting such data, as well as the participants to be sampled about small Hispanic church growth and obstacle factors. Finally, a display of the steps taken to intentionally insure that the tools for research align with the purpose and that reliable and valid RQs are offered.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study involving the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference are presented. To this regard, this chapter also includes the surveys and the analysis of the responses obtained because of the data collection questions at the end of the three-year period.

In Chapter 5, the net result of the major findings and practical implications borne out of the research results are delineated and discussed. In the final analysis, Chapter 5 also suggests insights on further study for the future.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The first part of this chapter pursues an understanding of the biblical theology of Christ as the Head and eternal foundation of His own church. This is the fundamental truth upon which all the factors that impact growth in the Church of Christ are embedded. This chapter later goes on to explain that the Body of Christ is the safe harbor where we can access all we need through God's means of grace. This section states that Jesus Christ is Lord and the Foundation Stone of His own Church. Considering this, we are called to plant and develop churches that make disciples. Disciples follow Jesus' example of *kenosis*, and are empowered to effectively embrace Jesus' mission, The Great Commission.

In what follows, this chapter unfolds the biblical theology of mission through a broad examination of the whole counsel of God: The Old and New Testaments. In the final analysis and with these thoughts in mind, I approached the topic of *Missio Dei* as the most practical way to unveil the triune nature of God in relation to the economy of salvation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Then the Son loves so much that He died for us on the cross. Galatians 2:20 says: "And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Finally, The Holy Spirit loves us so much that He came to earth to teach us and testify about Jesus as He leads us to

God's Kingdom through the Son. John 14:26 says: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." Considering that, this section will find that a Trinitarian understanding of God's own mission permeates all the biblical and theological foundation of this project.

The classical doctrine on the *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. (Bosch 390)

Furthermore, this section seeks to explore biblical evidence on how humankind as a people, and later as the Church of the Lamb, has failed more in responding to God's Great Commission than in obeying the Great Commandment. Church planting leaders and churches focus on the Great Commission rather than the Great Attraction. After all, "[t]he goal of planting churches is to reach people" (Stetzer 1). However, church planters need to develop a clear understanding of their mission focus, without narrowing their niche target so much that the vision of the church would be limited, and the community will not be reached entirely. Missional leaders will plant missional churches; church planters must be ready to learn, to adapt, to change, and to improvise to produce results and establish a solid, healthy church. Church growth must be based on reaching the last, the lost, and the least, not on transferring members from other churches.

In the like, let us walk through Scripture to see how the Church had to adapt to change to grow and break barriers inhibiting them. Congregational structure and

organization have been challenged in the whole Counsel of God in order to meet God's calling to share the gospel with the world.

Finally, this chapter explores the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. These are the common factors identified as hindering the growth in small churches of 50 people in attendance.

1. Congregations fall into distinctive size categories, and congregations of different sizes organize in different ways.

2. Congregations do not grow or decline smoothly, but tend to plateau at certain predictable sizes.

3. To successfully grow past a plateau, a congregation must deliberately break with familiar patterns of behavior and begin to act as larger congregations act.

"At this conceptual level, the theory no doubt applies not only to synagogues, but to all institutions. It is well documented that humans tend to form primary groups of twelve or so and clans of about 50" (Gaede 76).

Biblical Foundations

The Church of Christ is built and established upon no man but Himself. Jesus' declaration in Matthew 18 unveils the roots of the foundation of the Church in Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of the World. Matthew 16:18 says: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Therefore, all the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, or any other church, regardless of the

culture, language, race or creed, are found and analyzed based on this scriptural fundamental truth. Jesus Christ is the only foundation, Lord and Savior of His own Church. Thereby, no growth factor will be considered outside this basic Christian doctrine for the turnaround of the Church, the Body of Christ. Let us keep in mind this truism, as I unfold the fundamental biblical foundation for this project. Also, keep the clear distinction that the vision of God for the Church is not to become an end in itself, but to exist as a colony of heaven on earth to model before others our love for God and our neighbors. In this regard, Darrel L. Guder et al. explain:

This Trinitarian point of entry into our theology of the church necessarily shifts all the accents in our ecclesiology. As it leads us to see the church as the instrument of God's mission, it also forces us to recognize the ways in which the Western church has tended to shape and fit the gospel into its cultural context and made the church's institutional extension and survival its priority. As we have used the tools of biblical scholarship carefully, we have begun to learn that the biblical message is more radical, more inclusive, more transforming than we have allowed it to be. In particular, we have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness. God's mission embraces all of creation. (Guder , Barret et. al 5)

On the other hand, in his book *Planting Missional Churches*, Ed Stetzer affirms this declaration as follows: "The Christendom model of church kept the church from interacting in a missional manner" (32). According to Stetzer, the Christendom model is ineffective, dysfunctional, and archaic. We do not live in the 1900's, instead we are in a

missionary setting where the unchurched are not overseas anymore. They walk, breathe, and work around us. Conclusively, for the author, “[c]hurch planting is the most effective way to reach those outside the faith” (Stetzer 32). God is calling a new generation to not only have a missiological mindset, but also to start a missiological movement for the transformation of the world from the houses, to the communities, to the nations.

Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Manifestation of God’s Grace for Humankind

Grace can be understood as God’s unmerited favor to humankind. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). God offers us the free-gift of everlasting life through Jesus Christ. God our Father and Creator initiates this relationship through prevenient grace. The Holy Spirit seduces us, attracts us, and calls our attention through people, good or bad events in our life, nature, and creation. Everything around us is used by God to redirect our attention to Him. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). The Word of God gives us a fine example on this verse about the first level of grace, prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is a term John Wesley used to describe the spiritual fact that even when we are living in darkness, the love of the Father, by grace, enables us to respond to Him with a truthful and joyful heart in Jesus, who is the maximum expression of God’s grace on earth. In the words of Bishop William Willimon : “Prevenient (literally, “coming before”) grace is the gift of God’s work in us before we know that God is working in us” (74).

Grace is not only favor, it is also power; power to live out our faith in Christ;

power to participate and practice the means of grace offered by God through Christ: prayer, communion, the confession of sins, fasting, serving the poor, and reading Scripture. These means of grace function as channels through which the precious grace of God reaches us and enables us to change our life from the inside out, through His Church. Kenneth L Carder and Lacey C Warner in the book *Grace to Lead* state:

Salvation through grace extends beyond the forgiveness and reconciliation of individuals to themselves and to God. God's healing, reconciling, and transforming presence and power extend to society and the social structures and dimensions of human existence. Grace is more than a reality in the inner lives of individuals; it is present as the power of healing and reconciliation in relationships. (Carder and Warner)

When we minister the sacraments in the Church, we are exposing ourselves to an ocean of grace, open and available for those who willingly walk to the table of the Lord with faith in Jesus. Only after justifying grace finds us, are we truly able to have confidence and assurance of salvation, assurance of deliverance from judgment and the power of sin. We are still sinners, but we are delivered from the power of sin, which is everlasting death. Everlasting life in Jesus is the good consequence of justifying grace operating in our hearts. We are not a slave of sin any more, by grace we receive the power to say "no" to sin, allowing God to restore our sinful nature to the original state before the original sin.

We should not confuse this understanding of grace as being several types of grace. Grace is One! Grace comes from God, and its full manifestation is found in Christ Jesus, "the ultimate manifestation of grace." Wesley used the term "means of grace" as

the best way to explain this precious mystery. At the end of the day, names do not change the essence of things. I am Iosmar Alvarez, from Cuba. When I became a citizen of the United States, the government offered me the option to change my name on my certificate of naturalization. I could have chosen to name myself Peter, or John, but still my family values, beliefs system and character would be the same. Therefore, one could choose to change the term “means of grace,” or “prevenient grace,” or “justifying grace,” or even “sanctifying grace” for another one, but still such an action will not change the truth behind this sublime mystery.

Jesus Christ is Lord and the Cornerstone of His Own Church

According to Colossians 1:16-18 and Ephesians 2:20, Jesus is the Head and Lord of the Church, the cosmos, and of the individual Christian. The renowned author Allan Hirsch affirms this fundamental truth:

The first step in the recovery of the Apostolic Genius is thus the recovery of the Lordship of Jesus in all its utter simplicity. It is also the place to which the church must constantly return in order to renew itself. He is our Touchstone, our Defining Centre, our Founder, and therefore he has preeminence theologically and existentially in the life of his people.

(Hirsch)

The Lordship of Christ has its supportive argument in the powerful event of the “Incarnation.” Jesus Christ is one hundred percent human and one hundred percent God. The simple declaration, “Jesus is Lord,” has changed the world for good, claiming one God over every aspect of life. If we truly have an encounter with God, we will surrender to him our weaknesses, bad habits, and hurts to be healed. Recognizing that we are poor

of spirit, expressing our commitment to him through true worship and service to his people, as Roland Allen states, “What is necessary is faith. What is needed is the kind of faith which uniting a man to Christ, sets him on fire” (83). Thomas’ declaration in John 20:28, “my Lord and my God,” reveals this understanding. This is the core of the Christian call: To become like Jesus by embodying His message and His mission to the world, allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through us to bring the life of Jesus to our life. In addition, the Holy Spirit will enable and empower us to walk like Jesus and obey God’s commandments. This principle must be structured in the DNA of every church in order to be effective in fulfilling the Great Commission. We must live out our faith in Jesus in the community, engaging other people and cultures by fulfilling the mission of Christ in the world. Our God is a “missionary God”.

Jesus is the example, the greatest expression of the Word made flesh among us. Therefore, we will follow Jesus, allowing the Word of God to be manifested through us to the community, that they may have an encounter with God’s love.

Jesus is Lord (Act. 2:32-36)

A. Engage in an encounter with God, through Jesus. (Acts. 2: 37-39)

B. Engage in authentic worship. (Acts. 2:40-42)

C. Engage others through practical love (Acts. 2:44-47)

In ancient Israel, the title to describe “Lord” was Adonai, described as “master of the house,” the one with all authority over the household, worthy of honor and submission to his will. The family was an extension of the possessions, and honor of the head of the house was represented in the male figure, Adonai, the Lord. This contextual reference affirms the Church of Christ as His own, an extension of His own possessions.

Jesus Christ is our Adonai. He is the head of our household, the United Methodist Church, and any other Christian church in the world.

We are witnessing the Lordship of Christ overtaking the lives of our Hispanic pastors who are serving people from different Latin American countries: Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Salvadoran pastors serving Mexicans, Central Americans, people from the Caribbean, and Americans from mainstream US culture. We are experiencing a new community, a holistic transformation where both pastors and members are willing to surrender their own nationalities to create something new, called the Body of Christ. In simpler terms:

When practicing the missional discipline of incarnation, we need to always have our eye to the Lordship of Jesus and the exclusive claims consistent with his nature. How far is too far? I suggest that it is when we refuse to bring aspects of our cultures and lives under the lordship of Jesus—that simple. (Hirsch)

In light of such a powerful declaration, it is conclusive that a genuine Christian life is not possible without the understanding that Jesus is Lord over all creation, and the Chief Cornerstone of His Own Church, which is also His body. We become the Body of Christ by receiving Jesus in our hearts as Lord and Savior. We become His hands and feet on earth to minister to the world by embracing God's challenge to become disciples of the Son of God. All these mean that Jesus is worthy of our worship and is the object of our adoration, for He is the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord of the Church, to whom we must subject ourselves. He is not only the Savior of our souls, but also the Lord of our lives. Accordingly, it's conclusive that in Jesus Christ, the Church is never small, nor

irrelevant, never unsuccessful, and certainly never dead, regardless of the size, above or below fifty members. However, a price is demanded to be paid to truly respond to the Great Commission. Gary L McIntosh explains in his book *One Size Doesn't Fit All* that “[a]ll large churches were small at one time and grew from small to medium to large” and that many have had to “face the decision of having to adjust their ministries to continue growing into a large church” (33).

Thereby, in order to grow the Church, smaller churches must follow Jesus’ example of emptying Himself, and embrace the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in complete surrender, emptying themselves of the benefits and comforts of a small church in order to transition to the next size. We will now turn to Jesus’ model of *kenosis*, emptying Himself to seek God’s glory and not His own. The application of this principle will prevent us from striving to apply the growth factors found in this research for the sake of our own ambitions to be a mega-church; or to become a mega-pastor who is filled with his/her own ego and ministry agenda.

Outline of Philippians 2:5-11 (Meeks and Bassler)

“A Hymn about the meaning of Christ’s carrier”

CHAPTER 2 “Christ’s role in God’s reconciling work.”

I. Christ’s life and death in obedience and humiliation.

A. A Shared Mind-Set in Christ. (5)

B. Christ emptied Himself to be born in human likeness. (6,7)

C. Christ’s obedience and humiliation till death on the cross. (8)

II. Christ's exaltation above all things with a Name above all names.

A. Christ's exaltation above every name on earth or heaven. (9,10)

B. Christ's central status as Lord of humankind. (11)

I found five key words crucial in this passage: 1- Emptied; 2- Servant; 3- Death; 4- Humbled; and 5- Lord (exalted). Here is an explanation of the Greek term *kenosis* as found in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*:

The importance of *kenosis* ("emptying") arises from its use in an ancient hymnlike text found in Phil. 2:5-11. According to Phil. 2:7 Christ Jesus "emptied himself", an action which contrasted to equality with God.

...Three participles, which depend on the verb *ekénōsen*, define the verb's meaning in this context. Christ emptied himself by "taking" the form of a servant, "becoming" in the likeness of a human, and "being found" in the form of a human. The parallel phrase "he humbled himself" in Phil. 2:8 further helps to clarify the meaning of *kenosis* as Jesus' self-emptying, by becoming human, in order to die on the cross in obedience to the Father.

(Freedman, Myers and Beck)

Division 1: Christ's life and death in obedience and humiliation. According to Paul J Achtemeier, Joel B Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, in the first part of the passage from vv. 5-8 Paul "included what may be an early confession or hymn centering on" the significance of Christ's work and ministry, "a segment of early tradition Paul has adapted to his purposes in this letter" (395). Scholars are not in agreement on the shape of

the original tradition, nor on how it is to be divided into strophes as a hymn. This confession or hymn is placed with very practical intentions, and that is the unity of the Christian community in Philippi, a unity grounded in the willingness of its members to defer to one another.

Division 2: Christ's exaltation above all things with a name above all names. Because of Christ's self-denying obedience, God exalted him to a higher level than He had before the incarnation and crucifixion by giving Christ God's own name "Lord," a term used in the Hebrew Bible in place of the personal name of God. Paul carries forward from Chapter 1 his concern for unity to this glorious hymn full of adoration to Christ. It starts with an exhortation to share one mind-set. It denotes more than feelings or thinking in general. It involves centering one's thinking on something and to steer one's actions by this mind-set, encouraging the Christians in Philippi to live differently than the unbelievers.

I would like to start this study by addressing Christ's equality with God as the beginning point for the biblical foundation of this project. The hymn declares the pre-existence of Christ in the form of God. The author starts to unfold the meaning of this powerful statement: that Christ, having all the right of keeping His glory, surrendered it all by *kenosis* or emptying Himself. Paul then continues to explain Jesus' journey from Heaven to Earth. Christ renounced His glory, His status in heaven, and emptied Himself. This meant taking the status of a servant, a term related with slavery, and directly related with the incarnation of Jesus. I see a movement from divine authority and sovereignty over the cosmos, to slavery, and within it a radical change of roles: from heaven to earth, from master to servant. The main idea is that He who was equal with God now became

equal with man, sharing the status of humankind. Later, verse eight speaks of Jesus' self-humbling as the shape of obedience, obedience to the point of death. Jesus humbled Himself by dying on the cross. The hymn specifies the degrading character of Christ's death. He gave up His human life on the cross in obedience to God (v.8). Christ, who was fully divine, nevertheless, in obedience to God sacrificed all for the good of sinners. Scholars argue that it is not clear who is being obeyed, whether God or the cosmic powers, but what is clear is the fact that Christ is being obedient to His call, mission, and destiny.

The second half of the hymn begins at Jesus' self-humiliation. The hymn celebrates God's intervention, declaring that God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him His own name, a name above all names that is "Lord." The self-humbling is answered by the exaltation by God; the role of slave is answered by the role of "Lord," which literally means master. The celebration of Jesus as Lord of the entire cosmos continues in verses 10 and 11, declaring that all the cosmic power structures under whose authority Christ humbled Himself, now confess that He is "Lord."

Jesus' time with the Father in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is what made Jesus' ministry successful. He emptied Himself of all His power and glory as the hymn says, when He became human, but His divine nature, His love, His essence was active and at work on our behalf. He did not need power or glory to accomplish His mission of dying on the cross of Calvary. Bryan D Sims, in his study for the School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship at Regent University, concludes in terms of kenotic leadership:

Paul understood that the only way to follow such a model is by imitating someone who lives it. Thus, his own imitation of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit became an example for others to imitate. This kenotic, sacrificial servant leadership is not a leadership style per se but more a way of life and leading that focuses primarily on positive attitudes and is motivated by love for others. (Sims 32)

Having defined the functions/roles of the process of kenosis in the life of Jesus, our primary model, as well as the influence of such a radical kingdom style of leadership in the life of a prominent Christian leader like Paul, we can now look at how kenotic ministry exerts its influence. Let me begin by applying the kingdom principle of kenosis to church growth and development. It is a well-known fact according to research that churches need to empty themselves of personal agendas, egocentric visions, programs and ministries in order to grow. According to Robert Schnase in his recent work, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, published in 2007, there are five practices that churches and their followers must practice to become fruitful: radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission, and service and extravagant generosity. The five practices mentioned by Schnase involve a total surrender of congregational self to embrace strangers with a warm welcoming heart.

Congregations offer the invitation and embrace of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; the gracious welcome that creates genuine belonging that brings people together in the Christian community. Churches characterized by radical hospitality are not just friendly and courteous; they also exhibit restlessness upon realization that so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community. That is the maximum expression

of kenotic ministry. In the first chapter of the book about radical hospitality Schnase states that “Christian hospitality refers to the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ” (Schnase). According to this concept of hospitality in relation to kenosis, the congregation is called to emulate Christ and imitate His kenotic leadership style through voluntary and radical acts of love, empathy, and mercy. Kenotic ministry creates a space where we are seduced by the Holy Spirit to empty ourselves for transformation to take place from the inside out.

In this manner, a church that is operating in kenotic ministry inevitably breaks any growth barrier faced in 21st Century America. Thereby, it is conclusive that a powerful combination of kenotic leadership and ministry will advance the kingdom of God and will reveal Christ’s image and model so that we may become true disciples with the heart and mindset of God the Son. Kenotic leadership is a lifestyle as we learned before, therefore all we do and practice, as Christian sons and daughters of The Living God, should flow from this radical understanding of the kingdom principle of kenosis. We are more than a cross and a flame on the corner of a street; we are the army of Jehovah Nisei to conquer cities and countries with the powerful Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The Great Commission

Historically, we find human resistance to the commandment of the Great Commission from Genesis to Revelation. The divine concern for the fulfillment of this task is genuine based on the various occasions in Scripture of human resistance to going into the world. Our God is a generational God, a God who loved the world, and

descended to the world to transform it. God the Son came into the world with the goal of complete human restoration; however, he also came seeking the redemption of all creation. The mission of God is a holistic, comprehensive, and global mission. The book of Romans declares that creation groans as one, awaiting the glorious manifestation of the sons of God.

When we speak of the world that God so loved, as mentioned in the frequently recited verse John 3:16, we speak of the Greek word “cosmos,” which refers to the systems and powers that control the known world, according to Dr. Myles Munroe in his book *Rediscovering the Kingdom*. Dr. Myles goes on to say that this world includes all the governing structures that rule the different earthly “worlds” within it:

The World of Politics (The process to enter national government)

The World of Government (The system that controls a nation)

The World of Legislation (Laws and social norms)

The World of Economics (money, wealth, poverty, markets, investments, sales)

The World of Culture (Customs, values, food, life principles)

The World of Civics (Construction and development of cities, states, and nations)

The Social World (Family and social life)

The World of Entertainment (Music, art, sports, movies, dance)

The World of Education (local and global educational systems)

The World of Medicine (Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health)

The World of Business (Corporations, small businesses)

The World of Religion (The Church).

To be clear, creation has to do with the earth, and we must emphasize that there

has never been a problem with the Earth. The Earth will be restored to its natural state in the last days as part of the final plan of divine restoration. It is necessary to make a distinction between the Earth and the world in order to understand the theological biblical reflection behind the understanding from history and affirmation of the following: we have failed more in the fulfillment of the Great Commission than in the Great Commandment. It can be drawn from Myles' teachings that God wants us to go to the world carrying His glory to multiply his DNA through all the Earth. Guillermo Maldonado also teaches in his sermon series "The Supernatural Power of God Now" that we have been created in God's image to carry the culture of the Kingdom to all the Earth. Therefore, the task of colonizing the Earth with the mentality of the Kingdom is still at hand. The Church's love for the world has manifested itself in many ways throughout the history of the Church. Among the acts of love by which the Church has been most characterized, we find: visiting the widow, financing the poor, giving food to the hungry, clothing the naked, etc. These are practices that have been done for more than 200 years. It is conclusive that although the Church has been accused of lacking relevant love, the true affirmation is that we have failed more consistently in the value of the Great Commission than that of the Great Commandment. That is why we have been sent by God to enter the world and affect its structures and leadership with kingdom values. We see this principle demonstrated throughout Scripture.

The Great Commission in Genesis

Genesis is the beginning of all creation and God's relationship with man. It is full of principles and divine announcements that must be understood considering the other 65 books of the Bible. For this project, we will concentrate on the fundamental principle of

the seed and the sower, which will be useful as an analogy to clarify the principle of the Great Commission.

Seed: The fundamental part of every plant in which its DNA is stored. Within the seed is the potential for the plant's growth, in the correct environment. Each seed has wrapped in itself the potential to be a plant, a tree, a forest. For this reason, Jesus uses the analogy of the mustard seed in comparison with the Kingdom of God.

³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” (Mark 4:31-32)

The same analogy is used by God to describe the various types of hearts and how each responds to the Word of God. The idea is to teach us that we must sow, and scatter the seed and allow each heart to bear fruit according to the quality of its soil. We see that the seed is not the problem, but the land upon which the seed, the Word of God, falls.

²⁰ And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:20)

It is interesting that Jesus does not only use parables of seeds and sowers to teach us about the Kingdom of God, but He actually declares Himself the Seed of God.

²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

This human and divine seed must be buried and die to bear much fruit: a generation of Sons and Daughters who bring the kingdom of God to Earth, and live as an

example of how the kingdom culture manifests to colonize the Earth and make of it a piece of heaven. “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

In light of these biblical principles we understand that we are God’s seeds, with all the potential of God, His DNA, to do great things in Christ. We are made in the image of God; His natural, political, and moral image.

Wesley speaks of the Image of God as threefold:

1. The **NATURAL IMAGE** consists of those endowments given to the creature which make us capable of entering into conscious relation with God (notably, understanding, will, and freedom). The natural image has been lost in part after the fall in such a way that all our faculties have been impaired. Our understanding does not function properly, so we make mistakes. Our will does not function properly because we have lost our freedom and are now in bondage to sin. However, God intervenes by his prevenient grace to restore a measure of freedom to fallen humanity.

2. The **POLITICAL IMAGE** consists of God’s endowment of the creature with faculties of leadership and management, making us stewards of creation. Though this is expressed as “dominion” over creation, note that because this is an aspect of the image of God, human dominion over creation is to reflect God’s love. In other words, we image God politically insofar as God’s benevolence is reflected in our stewardship of creation.

3. The **MORAL IMAGE** is not a capacity or a function but a relationship, marked by love. In other words, the moral image is not, in the first instance, about a kind of legal status. It is about being filled with love, as God is filled with love, and having our

capacities and functions directed by love. Because God is love, we are to reflect God's love, continually receiving it and reflecting it back to him in love, obedience, prayer, praise, works of mercy, and so on.

Therefore, it can be concluded that we, as God's seeds, have this divine image etched in our soul. With this understanding, we go back to the beginning, in the book of Genesis. This is the divine image that God has wanted to scatter for centuries, but mankind, yesterday and today, the primitive and modern church, resists until the Second Coming of Christ.

Established Principle: As God's Children, We Are Seeds with a Divine Nature.

³ His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by^a his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Based on everything we have seen according to Scripture, the process of bearing fruit from the seed is as follows:

1. Die
2. Be Born
3. Produce
4. Multiply
5. Spread Out.

First Cycle of Resistance to the Great Commission: Genesis 1-3

According to Genesis 1, God creates with His Word; God speaks and it is done. The Word is the seed by which all things are created. With this principle, God created the heavens, earth, stars, plants, animals, and man. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind^[a] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^[b] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’” (Genesis 1:26). Once He blesses His most precious creation, He orders it to multiply and fill the earth: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Genesis 1:28).

God’s process of creation for the whole earth was completed with each order to multiply given by God through His Word. However, we see that the process of man’s creation was not completed; instead it was interrupted just before the multiplication in Genesis 3 with the appearance of the serpent. The serpent’s strategy included an attempt to contaminate the seed, or “the Word” by casting doubt on the Word of God which is the seed. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?’” (Genesis 3:1).

With this attempt, Satan sought to contaminate the seed before the multiplication to keep the earth from being filled with the glorious image of God. As a result of this contamination, we see the race that multiplied was not the Divine Image of God, but the nature of the fallen First Adam.

¹⁴ Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those

whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ...¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:14, 17)

Since then we have been on a spiritual journey to reconstruct our image in God; a journey of faith, which starts with the first Adam, and ends with the complete glorification in Christ, the second Adam. The fall of man closes with a promise of restoration of human nature where the seed of God rests. Nevertheless, it is necessary to notice that mankind delayed the fulfillment of the order given by God to multiply, or simply he did not have time to fulfill it. Whichever the case, we see a forced exit from the Garden of Eden, obligating man to fulfill the command of Genesis 1:28 to fill the earth. This forceful commission commences with the expulsion of man from the Garden of Eden: “²⁴ He drove out the man; and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:24)

Second Cycle of Resistance: Genesis 9-11

It is emphasized that the constant error is human resistance to obeying the eternal commandment to go, multiply, and fill the earth. God wants to multiply His glory, His spiritual, moral, and political image. For that reason, he sends us time and time again to colonize the earth with kingdom culture. In every case, man resists, seeking his own comfort and security before obedience. In the first attempt at resistance, we already saw that man prefers the comfort of the garden, before obeying the command in Genesis 1:28.

This same resistance we see in Christians today, that we seek the comfort that the four walls of the church offer. In the first cycle of Genesis 1-3, we saw that the seed must die; Christ is the perfect seed and example of death in divine obedience. Christ learns obedience on earth during his ministry and mission: Hebrews 5:8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

Christ teaches us what it means to live as a son on earth and die in obedience. God the Son knew all about divine and human existence. The only thing that he had to learn was to be “under authority,” to learn to live in absolute obedience to the Father from a human condition. God the Son was not created, for being God and part of the eternal divine council, he lived eternally in mutual submission and obedience within the Trinity; the only thing he truly needed to learn was to be under absolute obedience. Finally, we learn that the seed has two ways to die; we can choose to die in obedience like the second Adam who is Christ, or in disobedience like the first Adam. Let’s look at the following comparison:

1st Adam

1. Dies in disobedience
2. Content with the earthly condition
3. Chooses to listen to the Devil instead of the Father
4. Eats and falls into temptation
5. Refuses to leave the Garden of Eden and fill the earth
6. Ultimately expelled from the atmosphere of glory
7. Loves himself and his woman more than the Father

2nd Adam

1. Dies in obedience
2. Is transformed and transfigured, manifesting heaven on earth
3. Listens and does what he sees the Father doing, and refuses to listen to the devil
4. Fasts, resists the devil and does not fall into temptation
5. Voluntarily leaves heaven due to his love for the Father and for mankind, in complete willingness to fill the earth
6. He is not expelled, but sent from an atmosphere of glory
7. He denies himself, loves the Father, and then man, to his death.

In this cycle of resistance, we find in Genesis 9, 10, and 11 man receiving the second commandment to go to all the earth. In this instance, it is Noah who receives the command in Genesis 9:1, “God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’” Noah and his descendants demonstrate in Chapter 11 that they had no intention whatsoever of obeying the commandment to go to all the earth. As Adam, they had become accustomed to the comfort found in unity, speaking a common language, and having common values and customs.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.² And as they migrated from the east,^a they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.³ And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

(Genesis 11:1-4)

Human resistance to the Great Commission is historical! God's failed attempt to move man's heart to a kingdom vision leads him to the incarnation of God the Son, in Christ Jesus. Once again, the answer to the Great Commission in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 is ignored by man and the divine correction comes by force, forcing us to go out to all the earth once more. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth and they left off building the city.⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:8-9).

It is clearly demonstrated in this second cycle and in the first, that the order to go out and fill the earth comes by divine force. In both cycles, the human resistance is broken by the hand of Jehovah, and the divine will of filling the earth and all its plenitude with the culture, laws, and economy of the kingdom.

Third Cycle of Divine Resistance: Genesis 12 to Exodus 12

This third cycle begins in Chapter 12 with the call of Abraham to leave everything and go out to the Promised Land.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham begins his journey of faith towards the Promised Land, but his

descendants in Jacob remained in Egypt, where God frees them with a mighty hand. We understand that slavery is not voluntary, however Israel as a nation stays comfortably in Egypt under the leadership of Joshua, and his favor which transcended even his own death. Instead of leaving in search of Abraham's promise, even though Joseph himself asked them to take his bones upon leaving Egypt to reach the promise; once more the people chose the comfort of "Goshen" until they were forced to leave again due to slavery imposed by a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph.

⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." (Exodus 1:8-10)

This oppression unleashes the chain of events that ultimately lead to the deliverance of the people of God by Moses' hand. Nevertheless, it is again demonstrated that the people's exit was not voluntary, only by the arm of Jehovah are the people of Israel freed with signs, wonders, and marvels. "Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment'" (Exodus 6:6).

This cycle closes with a powerful act of the hand of Jehovah, just as in the previous two cycles. In each case, the people are forced to go and fulfill the divine will to impact the entire earth with the testimony of the One and Only Sovereign God, holiness and love.

Fourth Cycle of Resistance: The Gospels and Acts

Jesus the perfect seed, after dying, rising from the grave and testifying for more than forty days and forty nights about the kingdom of God, gives a commandment to the disciples in the four gospels to go out and take the good news to all the nations of the earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The disciples had to wait in Jerusalem for the Father’s promise in Acts 1:8, before going and being Jesus’ witnesses in all the earth. However, once again they disobey and after receiving the promise in Acts 2 where the Church is born, they stay in Jerusalem and resist leaving and taking the gospel to all nations. We see a clear pattern from the Old Testament to the New: Eden, Babel, Egypt, and Jerusalem. In every case there is a tendency to stay in the comfort of the places that God chooses for us to have an encounter with Him, the places of refreshment to experience his glory. This mentality of conformity is occupying the minds of the sons and daughters of God today just as it happened since ancient times. We have an example of this with Peter in Mark 9, who even prior to the resurrection, facing the revelation of God’s glory in Christ, his answer is to make three shelters to stay on the mountain. The God of the mountain wants to descend to the valleys where there are the spiritually dead, the fearful, the demonically possessed, the hopeless, the sick, but man refuses. “Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’” (Mark 9:5)

God expects of us to go down to the valleys, that we go to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The disciples also resist the commandment in

Genesis 1:28, 12; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8 and are forced to leave due to the persecution that God permits at the hand of Paul, who was the instrument used for the Church to be extended to all the nations.

And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.² Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him.³ But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

The apostles stayed too long in Jerusalem, something that we have already seen as a historical human tendency. Persecution on this occasion becomes the powerful hand of God which allows the disciples to extend to Judea, Samaria and then to all the earth. Christ the perfect seed, with his death and resurrection gives us the perfect environment for the Holy Spirit so that we can bear fruit thirty, seventy, and one hundred to one. When we give our heart to Jesus, it becomes fertile soil; by the blood of the Lamb of God, the covenant, the promise, the commitment to persevere to the end, we are restored to our original state of innocence prior to the fall of Genesis 3. This is the restoration process of the corrupted seed within us due to misinterpretation of the Word of God.

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor

shall you touch it, or you shall die.” (Genesis 3:1-3)

We understand that the seed being the Word can only be contaminated with word, hence Satan’s strategy includes putting doubt with words of deceit and of unbelief. Therefore, the best and only way to restore that seed (promise) is by regenerating the seed through the very same Word of Truth, in our mind and heart. “[H]e saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). This correction is made by the Holy Spirit, the Teacher and Comforter of all humankind: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13).

Nevertheless, dying continues to be a condition for bearing fruit. We continue being God’s seed. We continue seeking to die like the lamb to our flesh and renewing our understanding to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God which is our reasonable service, according to Romans 12. Only a church that receives this revelation will be able to be missional and effectively embrace the Great Commission. The only warning for every leader who has proposed in his heart to make disciples is to not forget mankind’s historical resistance to the Great Commission, as we have seen that this resistance is not overcome by human hands or strength but by the Holy Spirit of God. “He said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts’” (Zechariah 4:6).

In conclusion, God is the initiator and executor of his own mission. The Triune God leads the mission to restore man and all creation. Through this process the

incorruptible seed of God, Christ Jesus, embraces our corrupted seed and restores it to its original state:

A relationship with Christ by voluntary decision is

1. Connection with God in Christ
2. Commitment in Christ through the Word
3. Communion through the Holy Spirit
4. Covenant through the Blood of the Lamb
5. Commission through the Church.

The nature of God is missionary, focused outwardly, in search of the lost, the poor in spirit and the needy. The Church today continues resisting, but God keeps working, moving millions to the streets with a kingdom mentality, with a missionary spirit and a heart for outreach. Responding to the Great Commission continues to be a challenge for the Church to be able to grow, whether by expansion or by extension. The resistance barrier to going out and impacting the community constitutes one of the strongest and most determining factors in the growth of the Church towards its missionary destiny to prepare the nations to receive the Second Coming of their Savior.

The New Testament Church: Growth and Change

The Apostolic Church's Challenges of Growth and Change in Acts 6, 11 and 15

It is next to impossible for anyone to believe that the Church of God, the Holy Spirit, and the final truth expressed in blood through the cross belong to anyone other than the Christ. God has never stamped His seal of approval upon any particular denomination. Thereby, it's conclusive that God's mission, however we define it, is neither an Old Testament invention nor a New Testament idea. Furthermore, God's

mission is not a human idea, regardless of its church affiliation. The idea of God's mission began, and remains, in the mind of God; God gave birth to His Church by the Lamb in Christ before the foundation of the World. "[A]nd all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered." (Revelation 13:8)

In the writing, we begin to see the manifestation of the Church throughout the New Testament. Acts Chapter 2 unfolds the birth of the Church during the Feast of Pentecost; and from that miraculous moment forward we see a Newborn Church growing in love, holiness, communion, grace, persecution and pain: 2[P]raising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). It is natural for the church to grow day by day, because God adds new people to the Church day by day. Jesus Christ declared himself "the bread of life," also "the tree of life," and finally, the "true life." It's a well-known fact that all that is alive grows and produces fruit.

Growth—"is growing" continually. Here an additional thought is added to the image; the Church has the growth of a living organism, not the mere increase of a building. Compare 1 Pe 2:5; "lively stones ... built up a spiritual house." Compare Eph 4:16; Zec 6:12, "The Branch shall build the temple of the Lord," where similarly the growth of a branch, and the building of a temple, are joined. (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown 210)

Farmers base their life on this sole principle: they plant the seed, take care of the field, wait for the rain, and keep the noxious bugs out expecting to reap a great harvest, not according to "the law of luck," but to the principle of "sowing and reaping." In Acts

6:7, we see that the Church, full of life, continues growing in numbers: “⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” The Scriptures give ample support to the notion of “growth and change” being a natural part of the life of the Church of Christ. In fact, everything we know about our God involves growth. For example, we have the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, the Great Tribulation and so on. However, to embrace these “great challenges,” God also demands “great changes.”

The early church faced growth pain barriers in terms of: theology, practice of the Law, and congregational behavior. In all cases, the issue of growth and change was resolved by inclusion of the Gentiles so that the mission of Christ would continue reaching the whole world for God

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task. (Acts 6:1-3)

In what follows, we see that even though growth is what is expected, we must be ready and organized as a church to face the challenges that come with the growth of the church. The issues here were resolved by a change in roles and structure, and by recruiting new leaders upon which old tasks could be delegated so the old established

leaders could continue visioning, preaching the Word, and praying. Today many churches are facing the same dilemma. We have pastors and leaders neglecting the word of God and prayer to “wait on tables,” or in other words, to attend to other ministry tasks, rather than recruiting and training the saints for the work of the Church:

Acts 6/7: The Legacy Leader. While very few church leaders achieve even Acts 3 leadership, an even smaller number become Acts 6/7 leaders. These leaders, like the Twelve in Acts 6, seek to equip others for the work of ministry while deflecting recognition for themselves. Like Stephen in Acts 7, they are not concerned only with the church during their lifetime, but make decisions that will benefit the church after they are gone. They are quick to praise others and equally quick to accept responsibility for anything that may go wrong. All of the breakout church leaders in our findings achieved the Acts 6/7 level (Rainer, *Breakout Churches* 367-70).

In summary, church growth and change are part of the life of the church from the beginning of its conception in Acts 2. A healthy church will grow naturally, just as a mango tree will naturally grow mango fruits, in time and season. When growth shows up at our church doors, and it will, we must follow the principle of Peter in Acts 6. We must focus on the root of the problem (leadership) rather than on the symptoms (the need “to wait on tables”). The church is called to serve the needs of the last, the lost and the least. Needs are our everyday challenge; therefore we have to identify and equip leaders to answer to those needs effectively. As we shall come to see, this issue of growth along with the necessary changes to embrace such growth was required by God in Chapters 11

and 15 for the Church to continue being effective in reaching the lost.

The apostles in Act 11 faced another church barrier in terms of theology and practice. The issue at hand: allowing the Gentiles to join their fellow Jews as part of the Holy Spirit movement of God without keeping the Law of Moses.

¹⁹ Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. ²¹ For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues. (Acts 11:19-21)

I often wonder what might have transpired, had they said, “No! The Gentiles must keep the Law of Moses as we do.” I believe that the growth of the church would have stopped and the expansion of the “gentile church” as we know it today would be completely different. However, they placed the Great Commission of Christ foremost, and made the right decision.

²² Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions

from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds,²⁵ we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,²⁶ who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials:²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”³⁰ So they were sent off and went down to Antioch. When they gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.³¹ When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. (Acts 15:22-31)

In direct relation with this historical decision, Sullivan affirms:

The congregation size choice point is of great significance because of the implications of the Great Commission. It's not possible for a congregation to obey the Great Commission without facing the issue of church size. (Sullivan 49)

We Are All Included in Christ

Following the same trend of thought, I conclude that the gentile inclusion in the Gospel determined a great deal of the successful growth experienced by the Church during the first century. In Romans 11, the apostle Paul in writing to the Gentiles, uses the image of the wild branches grafted in the olive tree to appeal to the Jews and Gentiles for unity in God's original plan of salvation.

²³ And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. (Romans 11:23-24)

Inclusion in Christ in the New Testament

The maximum revelation of inclusion is found in Trinitarian theology, where we experience God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit inviting us to be part of the community through Christ Jesus. In Him we are included, and are collaborators of God's own mission: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The Gentiles Included in Christ as One People with Israel

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2:13-14)

God's ardent desire is for all cultures, denominations, and non-denominations to be inclusive. Inclusivity is a kingdom principle of being welcoming of those outside the walls; walls we ourselves have built over time with bricks of prejudices, jealousy, fear, distrust, and anger. The Hispanic church is also part of God's dream for the salvation of humanity and creation. However, to respond to the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in 21st century America, we have to make changes. We must embrace growth

beyond our own perceptions, understanding, and rules. God is expecting us to place the Great Commission foremost, as the early church did in Acts 11 and 15, where a multicultural church was born to answer a rapidly changing, multicultural world.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

The Church of Acts 13 is the best example of a multicultural leadership to respond to a multicultural community, by the inclusive power of the Gospel. It requires the church to not only be bilingual, but bicultural. A change in values, behaviors, likes and dislikes have to transmute into a common desire to please God rather than men; to be possessed by God’s agenda for the kingdom rather than personal hidden agendas that seek personal rewards, self-affirmation or self-promotion. The principle of growth, change, and adjustment is found also in the Old Testament, to where we now turn.

The Old Testament and Congregational Growth and Change

Israel from Genesis Chapter 1 forward to 50

They went from family, to family extension (3 brothers), to tribes, to a nation. The tendency to limit growth is found in Scripture as a reminder that to grow, we need to make decisions in terms of: theology, inclusion, and organizational policy change. This is found in Acts 11 to 15 with the barriers against inclusion of Gentiles into the Church as well as in chapter 6, where church conflict arises because of growth. Regarding this line

of thought, McIntosh states:

The biblical books of Exodus and Numbers describe a period of discontinuous change in the life of the people of Israel. Despite the clear vision of God's purposes given to Moses, the people were frequently confused, frightened, and angry. Every new circumstance demanded of them a radical trust in God and a profound cooperation with their leaders. The fifteenth chapter of Exodus verses 20 to 27 describe the very beginning of the wilderness experience. In verse 21 we can still hear the tones of Miriam's song, celebrating God's mighty act of liberation. By the end of verse 22, the people have been without water for three days and are angry with Moses for bringing them into this unknown and insecure place. (McIntosh 114)

Here is an example of inclusion: Do not harvest to the edges of your field so that the traveler can find food: When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 23:22). Is the Methodist church applying this powerful inclusive hospitality practice? Are we as a church, or as a country, living by it? Another example is Ruth who, through inclusivity, not only became part of Israel, but the genealogy of Christ.

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son....¹⁸ Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron,¹⁹ Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab,²⁰ Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of

Salmon,²¹ Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed,²² Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David. (Ruth 4:13, 18-20)

Also Matthew 1:5 states, “and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse.” In Genesis 13 we see a conflict between two congregations or groups.

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.³ He journeyed on by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.⁵ Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,⁶ so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together,⁷ and there was strife between the herders of Abram’s livestock and the herders of Lot’s livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land.⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred.⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” (Genesis 13:1-9)

There was strife between the herders of Abram’s livestock and the herders of Lot’s livestock because the land could not support both of them living together. The

solution they found to resolve the issue was total separation. Mainly, the problem was resolved by Abraham's initiative, in which he confronted Lot about the conflict between their shepherds because there were not enough pastures for their livestock. However, according to verse 6, the root of the issue was the prosperity of both leaders, "6 so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together."

This passage shows that when growth strikes a congregation, conflicts also arise as a result of growth. Considering such circumstances, leaders have to be proactive and address the issue by identifying the cause and the symptoms, and then prescribing solutions that are consistent with the challenge at hand. The scenario displayed here is also shown in the Book of Acts 6:1, where the number of disciples grew exponentially, "1 Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food." As a result, conflict also arises between the congregational members. In that narrative the leaders, in that case the apostles, also were proactive by identifying the cause ("the equal distribution of food") and the symptoms ("the Hellenist widows were being neglected"). However, the solution used by the apostles in this case is significantly different than in the case of Abraham and Lot. The apostles addressed the issue by evaluating it and choosing new leaders to address the problem, so they would remain together as one church. Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13, and the Hellenists and the Hebrews in Act 6, all faced the same challenge: "insufficient food." In the former, there was insufficient food for their livestock, while in the latter, there was insufficient

food for the Hellenist widows, or at least the distribution of food was not equal among the church members.

Hispanic churches nationwide face the same challenges that Abraham, Lot and the apostles had in their times, due to the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in America. Hispanic churches are planted in the context of American churches, where this same dynamic occurs in many instances. In many cases, separation is the solution and in other cases a multicultural church is born as the solution to keep unity. Considering these narratives, we can see that conflict arises regardless of the nature of growth: number, economic or cultural differences, prosperity or limitations. The narratives also reveal that leaders are to be equipped in conflict resolution, as well as in managing congregational behavior patterns that develop due to growth in number of any group.

Theological Foundations

A Biblical Theology of Christian Mission

As we involve ourselves in mission, we need to approach the whole Bible, as a missional message for humanity from cover to cover, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Reading the Scriptures under these lenses will change dramatically the familiar passages we often assume we know and understand. Mission must be biblically informed and validated to grasp the whole picture of global mission, which involves the universal Church and the subordinate mission of a particular church, group, or person. Simply put, our mission should reflect our commitment as God's people, as we respond to God's invitation and command. Where God himself is the initiator, visionary and executive planner in Jesus, God intervenes in our history for the redemption of God's Creation by the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Christopher Wright proceeds to establish the basis of a sound missiological understanding of the world, which is God's mission field (230). God's people are sent for the transformation of the world, including humanity, cultures, and the nations. Wright aims to expand our understanding of Christian mission to go beyond solely the redemption of humanity to include all creation. Wright's is a missiological understanding in which traditional wisdom of the Old Testament informs theology and ethics, as the eternal Law informs natural law, to infuse wisdom equally to humanity. From this wisdom we can all reflect on the biblical theology and missiology of human cultures.

The Old and New Testament and Mission

Michael W Goheen, in the book *A Light to All Nations*, analyzes the missional identity and role of the Church by tracing its roots all the way back to the Old Testament in continuity to the New Testament. He exposes mainly the importance of understanding our missional calling as a community, rather than as individuals, as we relate the gospel to culture and the church's mission in public life. Goheen also points out that Jesus did not send to make disciples of individuals, but of communities. Jesus did so based on the experience of His life, ministry, death and resurrection. In like manner, Jesus' purpose of gathering Israel and restoring God's purpose and people was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus as He tore the veil to open the path to the holy of holies, to all nations.

The message of the cross is the central theme of the disciples' community in Jesus' time, as it is today. The power and meaning of the cross would be neglected if we dilute its message in programs and human agendas, scanting attention to the narrative context of the crucifixion, and finally de-emphasizing the communal and cosmic

significance of the atonement. As a result, Goheen uses a strong biblical analysis to show us a community deeply immersed in the surrounding culture while still carrying the mission of God as a continuation of the message given first to Abraham, then to Moses, to the prophets, and then to Christ. The power of tradition brings together a messianic community that can go into the future, without neglecting or rejecting their past.

In addition, I understood from Chapter 7 of *The Mission of God* the power of images to self-generate a vision inside us, a vision that eventually will bring us to action, calling us into reflection in all the meanings behind each image used in the New Testament (Wright 65). Among the purposes cited by the author concerned with the church's place in the world and its participation in the new creation, we find connecting the church with its heritage and tradition, and displaying the Church's eschatological order, Christological images, and pneumatological and communal images. That is the power of using the biblical story as the divine vehicle to establish our Church's identity, centered in Christ and filled with the Spirit, has an invaluable missiological importance to being truly self-aware of God's mission within human history.

Additionally, the missional focus book *The Forgotten Ways* unfolds the hallmarks of a missional church, according to Hirsch's definition, so we can evaluate our own churches in this light. In summary, he agrees with many other authors on this subject, encouraging the missional incarnational impulse rather than the evangelistic attractional model. The first model is what we find today in what Hirsch calls the "Christendom mode" (34), where consumerism drives the Church away from its mission by focusing on programming, where the principle is "COME" instead of "GO." A church operating in

the attractional model will change an authentic deep worship experience for performance, the message of the kingdom, which is based on Christ's mission, for a motivational talk; and finally, it will change disciples for attendants and visitors, participants for spectators. The incarnational impulse will bring the church to a kingdom level, with a signature mission statement in the community, focused outward instead of inward, finding people where they are, and taking Jesus' message to them in a way that truly communicates to their life and context.

A Trinitarian Approach to Missions

The Mission of God (Missio Dei)

Mission and Church growth is not something that the Methodist Church invented or designed. It comes from the heart of God; we get to have a role, but it is always God's mission. Therefore, my plan is to apply Trinitarian missional theology to this project, which traces God's missional work in humanity from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Thereby, knowing that we are invited into God's mission as collaborators, Dr. Timothy Tennent proposes a re-contextualization and a reconceptualization of missions within the Trinitarian framework in his book *Invitation to World Missions*. It changes the way the *Missio Dei* and missions have been perceived and understood for centuries, as well as the way we see ourselves as the object of God's mission, as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. "It is the *Missio Dei* which constitutes the church. The mission of the church needs constantly to be renewed and reconceived" (Tennent 101).

On the other hand, Tennent clarifies the role of the local church and the missionary's agencies. Both structures have a role in God's redemptive mission. The local Church should be recognized as the sole mission agent, sending and supporting

missionaries. Consequently, the author argues that independent mission agencies are cooperative bodies to help the local church fulfill God's redemptive work. For example, the Book of Acts gives accounts of Paul's missionary journeys. His accountability to the church was brought out as the holy, healthy, and prescriptive way to clarify the relationship between local churches and mission agencies. The church was called to bear public witness, to go out and testify to the community the love of God in Christ. Therefore, the Church was never meant to stay in Jerusalem or inside the four walls, but rather to lead beyond the walls a missional and radical movement. In His mission, God deals with the worst part of a human being, which is our fallen nature. We are called to incarnate the Word to penetrate the community, to interact, to get dirty in the messy *Missio Dei*. We are called to go out and get involved in missions on the streets, rather than in the pews. Therefore, the theological goal of this project will be to discern how Hispanic church planting fulfills the *Missio Dei*, and answer the question: how does God work in the Hispanic Community?

In seeking to answer this question, a distinction between missions and mission is necessary. Simply put, missions are more what we do locally as churches and communities, groups or individuals, while mission refers to the *Missio Dei*: "God's redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His Creation" (Tennent 54). As I reflect on all the principles and theological understandings of the Mission of God in connection to the missions of the world, I seek to find the theological framework in which the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference will be embedded.

First, we are to start teaching and preaching to our congregations that it is important to see the mission of God from the perspective of the Triune God, that the doctrine of the Trinity is not an isolated, impractical, lingering doctrine, but instead a very missional and practical one. In like manner, the understanding that the *Missio Dei* proceeds from the Father, who because of love and not need or anger, gave His only begotten Son to the world, changes the whole contemporary approach to missions. Consequently, God is still reaching out by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to a dying decadent world. This study sought to keep in mind the truism that the doctrine of the Trinity is more alive than ever in the economy of salvation for 21st Century America.

Conclusively, to become a more missional United Methodist church, we must learn to read our context in regard to the Hispanic culture. We must find where God is at work in the context of Hispanic Ministries, and join what God is already doing in our midst. The Spirit-led labor of exegesis of our congregations and communities will help us find a vast forest of missional opportunities to engage in mission with God by planting Hispanic United Methodist churches. It will be an opportunity to make a commitment by responding to God's invitation to His mission within the Hispanic community, and to the world's missions to restore God's Creation.

Tennent points out 7 major megatrends confronting the church in two thousand years: The Collapse of Christendom, The Rise of Postmodernism, The Collapse of the "West-Reaches the Rest" Paradigm, The Changing Face of Global Christianity, The Emergence of a Fourth Branch of Christianity, Globalization: Immigration, Urbanization and New Technologies, and the last, A Deeper Ecumenism. All these trends demonstrate that the Church is a "tapestry of diversity" (Tennent 50).

This Trinitarian theological approach also inspires us to give more freedom and opportunity for the Holy Spirit to be embedded in the church. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to infuse His passion and love for souls and Christ in us, making from each newcomer a member, a disciple, a leader, and finally a church planter to continue expanding the mission of God on earth. This theological approach invites us to create a movement where every church is a sending and receiving church. Where the missionary agencies do not compete with the Church, but complement the work of the Church as the true authoritative missional sending Body of Christ. The task at hand is not simple at all. We are called to find alternative ways to renew the Church. One has to be aware of the context, the historical tradition, the doctrine, and organizational structure of a particular church or denomination—in this case, the Hispanic community nationwide, but more specifically in the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Today, living in a pluralistic, segregated, segmented, and compartmentalized society, we are called to be aggressive, genuine, and authentic with our faith values, and stand for what we truly believe. Planting churches with a Trinitarian framework is mainly a call to not be conformed to the status quo, regardless of the denomination or culture, but to the image of Christ. These powerful principles found in these biblical-theological works challenge us to make a shift from the pews to the community and from a ministry in the church to a mission in the world. They challenge us to develop the ability to learn to hear the voice of the community as well as the voice of God as we are directed in this new missional opportunity resulting from the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in the United States. The emphasis must not be only the evangelization of the individual, but the preaching of the kingdom for repentance and faith in Christ. Furthermore, to

accomplish the ultimate task of the fulfillment of the *Missio Dei*, emphasis must be placed on the role of the church as a sending body and on the mission agencies as supportive bodies.

The lack of accountability for results of church planting in relation to Hispanic and ethnic church planting in general, not to mention the principal culture, is killing many church plants and burning out church planters within the first three to five years of launching, according to conventional wisdom. Paul was successful in many things because of his humility in submitting himself to authority, to the body of Christ, and to the apostles in Jerusalem. I envision creating a system of experienced men and women who will provide aid, direction, and advice to younger clergies and leaders and lead new efforts to develop good relationships with missionary agencies like the New Church Development of the Kentucky Annual Conference and cabinets, not as rivals, but as partners in the *Missio Dei*.

Gaps Analysis in Literature

Church planting has become an essential part of the life of the Church in the 21st Century. Churches are being planted at a rate never before experienced by previous generations, during the past two thousand years. Thereby, literature regarding the subject of church planting and development is quite extensive. However, how to respond effectively to the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in 21st Century America remains veiled for many churches, conferences, and denominations in the USA.

The national phenomenon of Hispanic churches unable to break the barrier of 50 continues at the heart of the matter within United Methodist churches and other mainline denominations as well. This study sought to close the gap in literature regarding Hispanic

church planting and revitalization in America; the gap will diminish by finding ways to change our current reality through a radical shift into a new paradigm for Hispanic church planting and growth in the multicultural landscape we are in. Likewise, this new paradigm fed by this research will inform the practice of church development as the most evangelistic tool to respond to the Great Commission with passion and urgency.

General Literature on Church Growth and Barriers in Mainstream Culture

Church as we know it will disappear in the next 50 to 100 years. The church we know today as a visible, almighty institution will transmute herself into a new form, paradigm, and way of life in terms of: mission orientation, financial management, authority, and criteria for the ordination and function of its ministers. Closely related, the same truth will apply to seminaries, mission agencies, and the like. A glance at society and church will reveal that many churches are making a conscious vision and missional decision to train their own people for ministry. The authority for teaching and training the laity is coming back to the church; seminaries, soon, will not dictate how the laity and future clergy will be formed and trained for ministry. In the like, mission agencies that are disconnected from the local church will no longer survive. Nowadays, the distrust for institutions of all kinds is reaching its climax among the younger generations. After all, the most effective way of making disciples I have previously discussed is through the local church. The bride of Christ is claiming back her right to be treated with honor and recognition as the undefeated champion of faith for centuries against Satan. Therefore, the near future will reclaim the old paths of the ancient Apostolic Church to again become a Church led by the Spirit of God in prayer, fasting, the Word of God, and the

breaking of the bread of Christ as we partake communion at the Lord's table for reconciliation with a dying world.

General Literature on Church Growth

The words of God in Hosea 4:6 will never cease to amaze me, “⁶My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

According to God's account in Hosea, one of the greatest enemies of humankind is “ignorance,” here referred to as “the lack of knowledge” where God states that a voluntary decision to reject knowledge will result in a divine rejection of us. As a result, we will be captive in those areas in which ignorance reigns, affecting not only ourselves but also our offspring. Rather than seeing this passage as judgment, God encourages us to embrace it as motivation to learn all we can in all areas of our life. A person seeking a better position in life should apply him/herself in the subject of personal development; a person who wants to be wealthy needs to study the subjects of wealth, accounting, marketing, and real estate. Conclusively, a person who is a disciple of Christ, and wants to collaborate with God in accomplishing His mission, needs to study church growth and church planting as the most effective way to respond to the Great Commission. “¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Following Jesus' steps in ministry, as well as his obedience, is the priority task at hand for those who call themselves “disciples of Christ.” The identity of discipleship is founded in the revelation that we are children of the Living God. As we are transfigured and transformed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we become Jesus' hands

and feet on earth. “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid” (Matthew 5:13-14).

Our identity in Christ separates us from the darkness of this world, and connects us with the Light of this world. As many preachers have said, “many call Jesus Savior, but only a few can call Him Lord.” The statement in Matthew 5, for us to be the light of the World and the Salt of the Earth, has pragmatic implications for mission and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. For example, when the light is too amplified or too bright it can hurt your eyes, damage vision, or produce burns. This happens because in most cases light is created to be scattered. Additionally, when salt is concentrated, such as in a food dish, it can be too salty and rejected by those who delight themselves in a delicious and enjoyable meal. Applying these two analogies to evangelism and mission will reveal that when the church’s focus is concentrated inward instead of outward, it hurts the ability of the church to be a place of sweetness, and a fragrant offering in Christ. We are called and established in Christ to be sent out to the nations, to bring flavor and color to a bitter world. People are filled with insecurity, lack of love, loneliness, uncertainty, despair, and unbelief, which leave them with a bad taste in their mouths. Many come to the church seeking answers, only to experience a similar salty taste. Instead of encountering believers filled with the Holy Spirit in love, patience, perseverance, and faith, what they find are believers full of hate, judgment, selfishness, and pride. They meet disciples who have stopped seeking transformation in Jesus; who have lost their first love and refuse to spread out to light the world and season the earth.

Hitting the Fifty Mark or Barrier

There was once a time, and not so far in the past, when the megachurch phenomenon was not around. Most of the churches in the last 2,000 years of ministry were small churches. The research on the subject of church growth and barriers is also relatively new. History has proven that it is not enough to have good intentions and godly desires to plant and grow a church successfully. A successful church plant takes a lot of intentional planning in addition to leadership preparation and development. Many church planters and established churches experience some sort of barrier or plateau during their ministry life. Researchers agree that the first numerical barrier for churches of all kinds is fifty adults in regular worship attendance. As Sullivan has put it, “Only one growth barrier can be discerned from statistical reports of church attendance. One-third to one half of all churches average fewer than 50 in worship attendance. It appears the 50 barrier is the first and only statistical growth restriction that many churches encounter” (Sullivan 45). However, after much reading and research, it is a historical fact that the issue at hand in terms of church barriers is not leadership only, but a myriad of variables. “Many reasons can be given for the tendency of churches to remain small. Limited leadership, vision, and resources usually top the list. But other factors, such as good characteristics and relational preferences are also cited” (Sullivan 45).

The first barrier of numerical growth, 50, finds its source in many facts:

Most people appear to prefer the intimacy, security, and accountability of small-group relationships, and they resist organizational structures and practices that work against that preference. In a small church everyone knows everyone else by name, face, and many other characteristics. As a

church increases in size, it becomes increasingly difficult to know everyone. (Sullivan 46).

Nevertheless, it's necessary to mention that many other barriers are found throughout the natural life of the church, and that each barrier has its particular variables or obstacles.

One example is the next barrier to church growth, the "200 barrier" in regard to which Sullivan writes, "There are many social and psychological insights that are useful in leading the church in growth." (Sullivan 78).

Considering the previous statement, one can determine that regardless of nationality, culture, or language, when the Church of Christ focuses inward instead of outward, it winds up imploding rather than exploding. "It's important to remember that just as God has not created any two people exactly alike, no two congregations are photocopies either. However, there are enough similarities among churches that common barriers to their growth and development are easily listed according to size" (McIntosh 129).

Obstacle 1 for smaller churches is a "small church image." Studies suggest that the primary difference between growing and declining churches is their attitude. The result of the "small church image" is a low level of congregational morale: leaders set the church up for failure by establishing unreachable goals; victories are not celebrated; leaders lose the trust of the congregation; church wide decisions are manipulated; promises are left unfulfilled (McIntosh 130-31).

Obstacle 2 for smaller churches is ineffective evangelism. Many, though not all, small churches find it difficult to win people to Christ. "One approach to evangelism that is usually unsuccessful in small churches is the training class" (McIntosh 147).

Obstacle 3 for smaller churches is inadequate programing. Every pastor of a small church has experienced the sadness of losing people due to the lack of programing. A contributing factor to inadequate programing in small churches is the cutback syndrome. Limited resources encourage small churches to put a premium on efficiency and economy. Regrettably, cutting back to save money reduces potential for reaching new people and assimilating them into the church (McIntosh 133).

Obstacle 4 for smaller churches is downward momentum. Once a church begins declining, retreating inward, and cutting back on ministry, it becomes next to impossible for the church to focus on anything but survival.

Obstacle 5 for smaller churches is ingrown fellowship. This obstacle may be the primary one confronting small churches. As a rule, during the first seven to ten years of a church's life span, it has good success at reaching, attracting, and assimilating newcomers. However, the longer the church remains small, and the longer it is in existence, the more ingrown the fellowship structure becomes; groups, classes, and circles become so full that they can no longer absorb outsiders (McIntosh 133).

A careful analysis of McIntosh's obstacles leads to the conclusion that the root cause rests upon the fact that the "inward focus" is not consistent with the nature of God and the nature of passionate leaders who represent God's heart on earth.

The passionate leader is not just outwardly focused, but is also so enthused and sold out on his and the church's mission that his leadership motivates many to follow. Peter and John modeled this type of leadership so much so that it landed them in jail—and then empowered them to be set free

(Acts 4). This level of leadership is very rare among pastors and ministers.

(Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 58- 59)

Spirit-led leaders understand God as a missional God. The mission of God is first divine, flowing from the triune God, and then human, in direct relation to our cultural, political, and social context. A mission that does not engage with God's world and people is not a godly mission; in fact, it is not a mission at all.

When a church ceases to have a heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death. Whenever local churches are mentioned in the New Testament, they are always exhorted to be other-centered Phil. 2:1-4. Vibrant and living churches took after the interest of others. They are concerned for their communities. They open the door for others. But dying churches are concerned with self-preservation. They are concerned with a certain way of doing church. They are all about self. Their doors are closed to the community. (Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 17)

My understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity gained a new meaning during my seminary years. I moved from explaining the Trinity from an analogical perspective (using water, light, etc. to explain the Trinity), to a missiological perspective. This theological shift changed my ministry radically for the good. For example, we as a church moved to a more intentional approach into the community by starting house churches, getting to know and building relationships with unchurched people, and caring for those who are hurting. We started to be intentional also in following Jesus' model of evangelism by seeking out and saving the lost where they are, instead of bringing them to church. I was so impacted by this missiological understanding of God, because we have

the tendency to stay inside the four walls of the church. It is also proven in ministry that when the leader is focused inward instead of outward, the church stops growing and is imploding rather than exploding. “That’s what happens to churches that die. They spend for their way of doing church. Their comfort. Their possessions” (Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 33). This occurs because we do not have a missional understanding of God, rather a philosophical conception of the triune God, which doesn’t help anyone.

The God we know and serve is a God who is always inviting the outsider to be part of His life; for example, when we are invited to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, it’s an invitation to be part of the divine family.

One response begins with the Great Commission (Matt.28: 19-20) and moves on to add that evangelism is a central teaching of the Christian faith. By definition, a Christian congregation must seek to bring others to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. (Schaller 24)

We are invited through the Spirit of God into His inner divine circle. The fact that we as fallen human beings can connect with our Creator at that level challenged all conventional wisdom. The natural man cannot understand spiritual wisdom: “¹⁵ such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy” (James 3:15-17). Thereby, a Trinitarian approach to mission for church planting and growth is vital to be effective at church planting and revitalization in the 21st century. This missional understanding of God also reaffirms that “Church planting is a major component toward the fulfillment of

the Great Commission and the single most effective evangelistic methodology” (Wagner *Your Church Can Grow* 86).

One of the strongest philosophies of leadership today states, “everything rises or falls upon leadership.” However, I truly believe, after reading meticulously very prolific authors in this field, that many variables beyond church leadership (pastor and staff) can hinder a church from growing to its maximum potential. In turn, our response to this phenomenon is made elusive and complex. According to research, the complexity of churches not growing goes beyond the traditional church leadership positions: pastors, deacons, elders, bishops, superintendents and etc. In order to respond to the Great Commission effectively, we have to activate the whole Body of Christ; the movement of the children of God will transform the earth in the years to come. Creation and society are crying out for the manifestation of God’s children. It requires the laity to take responsibility and exercise the priesthood of all believers.

Many people love the small church paradigm because it is comfortable: “That was the result of moving ‘one big happy family’ (with the intimacy and security that comes from being small enough to watch out for each other and take care of each other) to an *organization*. Resistance to this change is the most fundamental aspect of the 200 barrier” (Sullivan 48).

Then, resistance to any barrier always boils down to resistance to change, resistance to losing privileges, and resistance to paying the price of growth; so the congregation will fight the new season of growth consciously or unconsciously:

Dr. Crow suggests *congregation size* as one of the major choice points congregations face. Sometimes the choice point regarding size comes in

the *context* of other issues or dilemmas and often in *contrast* to the more routine decisions congregations make. The decision regarding congregational size may be made unconsciously and will tend to become part of the congregational culture. ...Once these decisions are made, congregations appear to cycle up and down within the size range allowed by the organizational issues of the choice point. These decisions tend to prevent losses that would cause them to decline below the chosen range, and they resist additions that would move them significantly above that range. (Sullivan 20)

Research states that it takes time for a small church to make the transition to a bigger church: “Earlier research, based on membership instead of attendance, had indicated that churches tend to break the barriers within three years” (Sullivan 69).

However, the church must fight resistance to growth from members who might be saying “yes” to growth with their words, but “no” in action. To state it more bluntly, by their words and votes, people may suggest they favor growth, but by their actions they usually endorse the status quo (Schaller 25). Nevertheless, paradoxically, to grow a church effectively, the bigger the church, the smaller it must become in order to keep the sense of intimacy and discipleship that people experience in small churches. However, bear in mind that any church that grows larger and sustains growth and at the same time ministers to its people will have within it small groups. People do not escape accountability when they attend a larger church—their accountability is merely organized differently (Sullivan 49).

For this study, I focused only on the factors that impacted growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference to break the “50 barrier.” Alice Mann describes the first, well-known barrier to growth:

The first plateau zone occurs between 50 and 70 in attendance. This is an important boundary area to understand because it could potentially affect the growth of 70 percent of the Christian congregations in North America. The second plateau zone occurs between 150 and 200 at weekend worship. ...So, the majority of congregations grappling with a growth plateau, are stuck in one of these two zones. (Mann 12)

Mann gives us a description of a small church of 50 to 70 people as a big single cell, organized as a big family, from which the term “family congregation” is born.

The family size church (up to 50 people attending) is a single-cell organism—a social system resembling an extended biological family in ‘we all know each other’. ...Given the small membership numbers, clergy are usually part time and short term in such churches. ...[T]he leadership that holds these churches together comes from the matriarchs and patriarchs—anchoring figures who maintain stability through their tacit authority. (Mann 4)

Pastors from all denominations need to acquire leadership skills to respond to the leadership challenges of small churches presented by the patriarch and the matriarch of the congregation. The fundamental issue is the fact that seminaries and theological

schools are training them to be teachers, preachers, and theologians, but not leaders. They are thereby unequipped to lead the congregations effectively into a brighter future.

The key role of the patriarchs or matriarchs is to see that clergy do not take the congregation off on a new direction of ministry. Clergy are to be the chaplain of this small family. When clergy do not understand this, they are likely to head into a direct confrontation with the parental figure. It is generally suicide for clergy to get caught in a showdown with the patriarchs and matriarchs within the first five years of their ministry in that place (Mann 53).

Thus, when they are sent to a small church, they find natural leaders within the congregation, whom Mann classifies as “the matriarchs and patriarchs” of the congregation. Failure to make them allies instead of your enemies will impact the pastor’s ability to break the barrier of 50 in any congregation. This research data applies to the Hispanic congregations as well and is one of the factors that will continue to be explored in future research.

The itinerary system of the United Methodist Church is broken. One of the issues is with the appointment process. Successful pastors are moved up into better positions with better salaries, then small churches cannot afford them.

In all the churches we autopsied, a financial pattern developed over time. The pattern was one where the funds were used more to keep the machinery of the church moving, and to keep the members happy, than funding the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The money, though, was symptomatic of a heart problem. The church cared more for

its own needs than the community and the world. And no church can sustain such inward focus indefinitely. It will eventually die of heart failure. (Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 35)

Paradoxically, these are the leaders who are equipped and able to lead churches out of the plateau into exponential growth according to research. “Generally speaking, pastors of larger churches have come to feel that they can get the job of evangelism and Christian nurture done better than pastors of small churches” (Mann 78). Consequently, because of their high credentials and the clerical system’s benefits, they cannot serve in a small church. Concurrently, this pandemic fact perpetuates the current reality of a myriad of small churches nationwide within mainline denominations. The other dramatic challenge is the short-tenure leadership (four year appointments) which guarantees no growth at all. Another church barrier becomes leadership’s lack of understanding concerning cultures and church planting models for 21st century America. Understanding requires exegeting the culture, moving from the superficial and visible aspect of the culture to the unseen or hidden values, history, beliefs and group psyche of a particular culture (Stetzer 115-117).

We are living in a multicultural world; the traditional norm of right or wrong is broken by the different cultural values and perceptions of life that every culture brings to the table called “Community.” In America, we are experiencing what is called “the new normal.” In simpler terms, the key questions are the following: What is normal? Who establishes the criteria to measure right or wrong, or the most complicated social issues? Whom do we seek for direction to respond to the challenges of today’s society in regard to: abortion, homosexuality, human rights, and the like? Stetzer, in chapter nine of his

book, *Planting Missional Churches*, explains that “[e]ffective church planting is missionary work” (115). Therefore, the healthiness of the life, faith, conviction and calling of the leader is key to developing healthy missional congregations. However, the missional leader has to go beyond those basic building foundations into a deeper understanding of the culture they are trying to reach. In addition, chapter nine explores the need to develop a worldview that is consistent with the context we are called to serve. “Missional church planters should learn distinctives about generations, races, and ethnicities as guidelines for understanding the people God is sending them to reach” (Stetzer 122).

Building Critical Mass

Church size is one of the most useful frames of reference to use when seeking to understand the internal dynamics of congregation-styles in regard to church organization, leadership, communication, and planning that are functional in that congregation. The style of planning that will work best in a congregation is to some degree bound up with how large or small the church is. When we know what size a church is, quantitatively speaking, we also know that we can probably draw some qualitative conclusions about the way people will tend to function in that congregation (Gaede 59).

Critical Mass Concept

Stephen Usry describes the concept of critical mass as:

[T]he minimum amount of a given fissile material necessary to achieve a self-sustaining chain reaction. Sociologically, this sustained chain reaction begins when enough individuals have adopted an innovation so that the innovation’s further rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining.

Organizations build towards the achievement of critical mass in the hopes of sustaining continued growth. Critical mass can be lost. (Usry 12)

Critical mass is the “number of people needed to allow a service to continue to grow beyond the first six months” (Mann 51). It is recommended to start a church targeting a critical mass of 200 or 250 to avoid failure or a premature launch that will diminish the congregational morale. E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, and elsewhere, establishes that “[Church planting strategies should begin] with the premise that a new congregation should be established as a program congregation, [51 to 150] so it will not have to go through the difficult transitions that have often limited the growth of new congregations that started out as family or pastoral churches [1 to 50]” (Gaede 5).

Planting a church starts first with a dream; a dream that comes from the heart of the leader and the congregation, and then a critical mass is required for starting a service. In God there is no such a thing as a “small church”. In God no beginning is big or small; it is a “beginning in God,” and in God all beginnings are great, good, and perfect. After all, there is no doubt that God loves what we call “small churches.” One must question why there so many small churches. If we interpret church attendance statistics the way sociologists generally interpret research projects, we will conclude with the need to have small churches, because that is what we have the most. God must love small churches because He made so many of them (Sullivan 35). Nevertheless, in practice we do not diminish the importance of the critical mass. The potential to be a successful church plant is limited when we do not pay attention to this principle of church planting. I identified

six major findings according to Usry's research that provide an understanding for building towards critical mass growth in the life of a church. Critical mass can be better understood through these guidelines or principles: Precept 1: Critical Mass as a Dynamic Recurrence and as Perceived in Various Ways; Precept 2: Critical Mass as Accomplished through a Commitment to Process; Precept 3: Critical Mass as Achieved through a Series of Purposeful Actions; Precept 4: Critical Mass in the Context of Ministry as Relational in Nature; Precept 5: Critical Mass as Time Sensitive; Precept 6: Critical Mass Development within a Spiritual Community as Requiring an Inherent Dependence upon God" (Usry 201). Thereby, navigating church barrier transitions is very difficult according to conventional wisdom and research that "[s]ize transitions are far more complicated than many believe and are often filled with pain, resistance, outright sabotage, and inevitable membership disruption" (Gaede 25).

The Power and Significance of Leadership

For the 21st century, God is looking for leaders borne out of his presence rather than doctrines and dogmas. These are leaders who move in an atmosphere of grace, who lead by grace and also extend grace to those following their steps, leaders who know who they are in Christ, and have a strong sense of urgency and destiny. "A fundamental mark of leaders formed by grace is a strong sense of identity as a beloved child of God bearing the *imago Dei* and redeemed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit" (Carder and Warner).

On the other hand, in terms of the vision of God for the Church, when the pastor in charge hands out the vision of God for a church to the church leadership and laity, the response they get is not effective in most cases in producing motion. However, when they

involve all the leadership in the visioning process, momentum is created; people get excited as they consider themselves heard, important, and a valuable member of their home church and of the kingdom of God. Interestingly, this fundamental truth applies to established churches as well; regardless of the starting point, a critical mass needs to be defined to start planting a church or breaking a numerical barrier in any given congregation. Mann believes that at the end of the day:

At a plateau point, someone is apt to say, “We’re interested in spiritual growth, not mere numbers.” But as it turns out, matters like hospitality and outreach orientation are quality-of-life issues as well; spiritual growth and numerical growth are close cousins that tend to show up in the same congregations. (Mann 41).

Hence, there is no such a thing as “Our church is small, but we have faithful and mature Disciples of Christ who are committed members of our congregation.” True disciples multiply themselves, making more disciples who plant disciple-making churches in response to the Great Commission in Christ, the Master of all believers. However, we are talking about the healthy beginning point, the critical mass to start a church. “The attendance goal of at least 50 people or 35% of the largest present service (whichever is greater) in attendance will constitute the right critical mass. Most new services that begin with less than 50 don’t survive the first year” (Mann 41).

The United Methodist Church, is continually challenged by a culture with a clergy-centered and maintenance-oriented philosophy. As we perpetuate the same philosophy’s error again and again, we all know that no clergy could be ordained to reach all the lost in the world by him/herself, regardless of skill. The traditional model of doing

church is powerless; we need a laity movement that will reach the people in the community, as George Hunter says, “people to reach peoples.” On several occasions I have found myself playing what Hunter calls the “GAME PLAN” in the book *Radical Outreach*. This plan meant attending church, Bible Study or Sunday school, and other church programs, serving on committees, going to denominational meetings, having a daily devotional, and finally having regular pastoral care by an ordained pastor or priest. No wonder many churches are not growing nowadays. The church growth strategies are based on this basic principle of “radical outreach.” Therefore, when we fail to go out and preach the Gospel to others, growth stops; and what is not growing is fundamentally dying. We want to grow churches, not to be bigger for the sake of becoming recognized leaders, but because growing in any capacity or area is healthy. God calls us to grow as a sign of healthy discipleship in Christ. However, the ultimate question of why some are growing while others do not remains the heart of the ministry puzzle for many researchers. Schaller asks this question and gives us some direction about what he thinks the answer is to this fundamental question, “Why do so few [churches] move up off that plateau? An unwillingness to change; the attractiveness of the status quo; a reluctance to pay the price” (Schaller 61).

Conversely, Rainer’s quote reveals how this ministry decline can be addressed with the right leadership: “The researchers found that the leaders discovered vision through intersection of three factors: the passion of the leader; the needs of the community; and the gifts, abilities, talents, and passions of the congregation” (Rainer *Breakout Churches* 395-396). As we see here clearly, the true sources of our passion are God Himself, God’s vision, gifts and talents bestowed to us to do ministry, and the needs

of the community we are called to serve. In contrast, we devote our time to do the opposite of the aforementioned, instead of cultivating the sources of our passion for a greater ministry impact.

I have heard so many people talking about the ineffectiveness of the traditional methods of doing church, but never have I seen it so well described and simple to understand during my reading for this research. We need to change our mindset if we are ever going to be effective in the 21st century. We need to change the paradigm from sitting and listening to equipping and sending. We must encourage and challenge our people to move to a more radical mission mindset: from members, to missionaries; from come, to go; from ask, to give; from tradition, to mission; and from measuring the church size by our seating capacity, to measuring by our sending capacity. As I have said before, missions as we know it is no longer overseas, rather the mission field is right here in our midst. We need more bold leaders; leaders who are not afraid to challenge the status quo.

The bold leader is willing to take incredible steps of faith and make the tough calls that few others will. The bold leader knows the church's mission and purpose and is willing to take whatever steps are necessary to keep the church on track. Peter exemplifies this type of leadership with his bold confrontation of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Perhaps fewer than 1 percent of church leaders reach this level. (Rainer *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* 363,66)

No wonder this level of church leadership is in demand, even in the time of Jesus, but God will continue sending workers into His vineyard. Matthew 9:37-38 says, “³⁷ Then

he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” We need leaders who are willing to pay the price for the sake of the kingdom of God; for the Bride of Christ to be healthy, and effective in her mission. “Our research shows clearly, though, that the intentional effort to bridge the gap between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’ comes at some cost to the leader” (Rainer *Breakout Churches* 379-85). Vision driven leaders are bold to ask the right questions and confront their reality; rather than living in denial, they choose to fight for their dreams.

The leaders of the breakout churches, seeking to close the gap between what the church is and what God desires it to be, typically responded by addressing three issues simultaneously. First, they asked what the purpose of the church really is. Second, the leaders sought to get the right kind of people on board to move the church to a more purpose-driven posture. Often, they brought laypeople and staff to positions of leadership even before they knew exactly what these leaders would be doing. In other words, they were more concerned with who the leaders were than with a precise job description for them (Rainer *Breakout Churches* 408-09).

The story of “The Lone Ranger” in Exodus 18:13-26, in which Jethro confronts Moses’s philosophy of leadership, is a wonderful scriptural example of God’s philosophy of ministry. In this passage, Moses was tired, after ministering to the congregation all day; so far Moses has been carrying the entire weight of the vision of God for the people of Israel by himself. In light of this common ministry paradigm, Jethro interjects with heavenly wisdom, saying, “^{17b} What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do

you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening? What you are doing is not good.¹⁸ You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone” (Exodus: 18:17b-18). As a result of this coaching conversation, one of the best leadership strategies is born. This principle has been used and taught by many effective pastors who are skilled in leadership. They all have Jethro’s leadership principle in common, which is, dividing the ministry tasks among many leaders to be more effective and prolong the leader’s ministry life:

The example of Moses delegating authority to others is a fitting reminder that within the life of the church we need to share tasks so that no single individual is unduly burdened. Christians in positions of leadership should also be prepared to entrust others with meaningful responsibilities.

(Carson et al. 106)

Moses is not alone in this ministry practice; Ron Crandall in his book *Turnaround Church* identifies several obstacles leaders find hard to overcome to grow the church:

Although all the obstacles faced by smaller churches are too many to mention, some problems seem to show up repeatedly. Turnaround churches’ pastors in our study [100 pastors & Churches] who had successfully overcome many such snares along the path listed their top ten. ...

1. A lack of vision for doing God’s will
2. A defeatist attitude draining energy from people
3. Members attached to old ways and ideas

4. Inadequate finances
5. Inflexible older members
6. Inadequate or rundown facilities
7. Low levels of faith commitment
8. A cold shoulder toward outsiders
9. Power cliques that create conflict
10. A survival mentality. (Crandall 72)

Bible commentaries agree that Moses represents Jesus in the Old Testament, a type of the Coming Christ in the New Testament. For proof of this unequivocal leadership principle taught by Moses' father-in-law, Jesus himself models Jethro's principle:

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ... ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-12 and 16)

Thereby, the ministry of the ordained elders is to be conceived as both: a call made directly by God and by the Body of Christ, the universal Church, and the United Methodist denomination to serve in any leadership capacity as God and the Church directs, and also, to equip the saints to be sent to the world. In this reckoning, to be ordained is a special privilege, honor, and selection by both God and the Church for one to serve in special ministry of Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order. Ordained ministry is

not only a call, but also a gifting of God by grace through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as set forth in the New Testament in Ephesians 4:7-12. The primary product of everyone who is called to ordained ministry is to prepare the people (laity or whole body of Christ) for works of service so that the body of Christ will be built up to be sent to the nations.

Visionary initiating leadership involves: First, someone must have a vision of what God is calling the congregation to be and to do in the years ahead. Second, that vision has to be translated into a strategy that can be implemented. Third, leadership is required that can enable the people to see the vision and to mobilize the resources required to implement that strategy. (Schaller 61)

The Church is a family of believers, united with one another and with God through Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live holy lives. As the Body of Christ, they come to hear the Word of God, to serve, love one another and to partake in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. These powerful celebrations demonstrate to the world Christ transforming communities. The nature and mission of the church are three-fold: to worship God, to equip the saints, and to reach out to a hurting and lost world. The church is called to share God's love and grace to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). It is a disciple-making community driven by a passion and a vision to transform lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision, while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ. Deceased churches, somewhere in its history, forgot to act upon the Great Commission. So, they stopped going, and making disciples, and baptizing them, and teaching them (Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 36).

The primary tasks of the church today are: to offer hope as a redemptive agent in the world; to minister and mitigate the rapidly changing needs of different people-groups beyond constraining walls; to share life-transforming ministries to people in spite of age, race, socio-economic conditions, and sexual orientation; to assist people to discover their divine potential, gifts, and abilities; to equip saints so that they proclaim the gospel verbally and holistically; and to focus on spiritual formation and transformation through individual and corporate worship. Reclaiming its place in the world, the Church is the presence of Christ in the world—a community of resurrection and new life.

The 21st Century Phenomenon: Churches Declining and Dying

The Church of Christ has been growing for 2,000 years, from the moment it was born in Acts 2, to the persecution in Acts 7 where church growth became exponential, and beyond to the present. “The missionary task itself was undertaken, not only by Paul and others whose names are known—Barnabas, Mark, et al. —but also by countless and nameless Christians who went from place to place taking with them their faith and their witness” (Gonzalez). However, it seems that in America the Church is imploding rather than exploding in contrast with past centuries.

But most of the traditions regarding apostolic travels date from a later period, when it was believed that the apostles divided the world among themselves, and the church in each country or city sought to claim apostolic origins. In truth, most of the missionary work was not carried out by the apostles, but rather by the countless and nameless Christians who for different reasons—persecution, business, or missionary calling—

traveled from place to place taking the news of the Gospel with them.

(Gonzalez)

In similar fashion, America became the largest missionary agency in the world by sending missionaries globally to continue expanding the kingdom of God. Missionaries sent from America planted the seed of the Gospel around the world, and now we are reaping the harvest as many Christians from all around the world are coming to America seeking a better future. It seems like God is using the same strategies from the past, persecution, business, and poverty to bring about the same result, which is the expansion of the Kingdom of God. Thereby, although the Church in America continues to decline, God continues raising disciples to study the barriers to church growth in 21st Century America. This is the case of Thomas Rainer who conducted an excellent study on fourteen dying congregations in America revealing the sad reality of patterns of churches that move slowly from plateau to decline, and then to death.

As I looked at the deaths of fourteen churches, I saw a common pattern.

Obedience to the Great Commission faded; it usually faded gradually. It's not like one day the church was sending out dozens of members in the community and it suddenly stopped. Instead the decline in the outward focus was gradual, almost imperceptibly gradual. That is why the autopsy results concluded that the Great Commission became the great omission.

(Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 40,41)

Considering the data coming out of this study, it is not odd that numerous churches are declining or dying in North America today; America is considered the third largest un-evangelized nation in the world. The study of church growth and barriers

becomes crucial today to face the imminent challenges of distrust of institutions, unbelief, and uncertainty. In *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, Thom Rainer writes about four types of churches—healthy, symptoms of sickness, very sick, or dying—and their symptoms, prompting the reader to evaluate their own congregations (86-89). This is an evaluation we all should complete at some point in our ministry and in the life of the church.

This unprecedented question— “Why are churches dying?” — demands to be answered by all-church leaders, regardless of their doctrinal position or denomination. Rainer writes about the indicators that a church is very sick: Significant numerical decline, prolonged times of apathy, the church is not known in the community, new members are rare (the exodus exceeds the inflow); revolving door of pastors (pastoral tenure) (Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 89). When our theology is not able to respond to the real current issues and challenges, it is time to re-examine our theology and practice, and become social theologians of today to find answers and provide direction to the people of God. We know that the Church of Christ will never die according to Jesus’ promise to Peter in Matthew 16:18. Indeed, the Church will never die. Nevertheless, churches have died and are dying. As many as 100,000 churches in America are showing signs of decline toward death (Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 9). As we shall come to see, according to the research, the issue of church decline and death is not overnight failure, because there is no such a thing as overnight success or failure. Instead, 6 million years of human existence on earth has proven that the law of sowing and reaping continues to govern our results. Small errors in judgment repeated every day lead to disaster. “Most of the churches in America that close don’t shut the

doors over a single or few cataclysmic events. In most the cases, indeed all of them I studied, the issue was slow erosion” (Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 7).

Indeed, dying churches, declining congregations, and churches facing a plateau of 50 to 70 people in worship attendance exhibit the same symptoms. “The ministries and programs for dying churches tend to be shifting more and more for members of the congregation rather than those on the outside” (Rainer *Breakout Churches* 435-37). In simple terms, as the Church moves from an outward focus to an inward focus, the symptoms of dying congregations start showing up in congregational life as they cut back the budget, focusing on church needs rather than vision. One of the main characteristics of dying churches is that they focus on satisfying the members’ demands over the kingdom call to reach, baptize, and disciple the nations. Thomas Rainer, along with many other researchers, describes the expectations that members of small churches have from their leaders as a negative element against church growth.

In the dying churches, the staff is expected to almost exclusively be on call for church members. That means staff members aren’t reaching out to others beyond the church. That means they aren’t involved in the community in an incarnational sense. That means they are mostly hands for church members. In dying churches the last expenditures to be reduced are those that keep the members most comfortable. (Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* 28,29)

Church Growth and Revitalization Principles

We now turn to strategies for Church growth and revitalization in contrast with church decline and plateau. Jesus declared in Luke 2:49: “Why were you searching for

me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Other translations read "in my Father's business," such as the King James version: "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Jesus'

entrepreneurial approach to ministry led me to a study conducted by T.J. Peters and R.H. Waterman to find common factors among successful American companies. These are the factors they discovered impacted growth and success: 1) Having bias for action, 2) Being close to the customer, 3) Encouraging autonomy and entrepreneurship, 4) Engaging productivity through people, 5) Being hands-on and value driven, 6) Stick to the knitting, 7) Using a simple form and lean staff, and finally, 8) Keeping simultaneous loose-tight properties (13-16).

According to this study, even though the church is a non-profit organization, many of the principles still apply. A careful reach and comparison of each growth factor displayed above will reveal how similarly successful business are run in comparison with Church management. Hispanic church plants experience an exponential growth after launching; however, they start to drift off onto a plateau of "the barrier of 50" due to a failure in implementing these growth factors in a church setting.

About this congregational behavior, Schaller writes, asking the following question: "What are the indicators that suggest the numerically growing congregation is about to drift off onto a plateau in size or begin to experience a decline in numbers?" Schaller then offers several signals, including the following: When "[t]aking better care of today's members moves ahead of evangelism and outreach to the unchurched on the local list of priorities"; when "[t]he average attendance at worship, which has been showing an increase year after year, begins to drop when compared to the same months a

year earlier”; when there is “[a] decrease in the number of baptisms”; when “the new minister spends more time with individuals than with groups of people”; and when “there is an inability to design and implement a five-year plan for ministry, program and outreach” (42-46). Schaller describes “[p]erhaps the most useful single indicator” which “is the contrast between two terms: cut back and expand. The decision to cut back on programming: the Sunday morning schedule, staff, finances, weekday programming, outreach, benevolences, or office hours, is often an early warning sign of future decline. By contrast, the decision to expand ministry is the most effective, single antidote to institutional blight and to numerical decline.” (46).

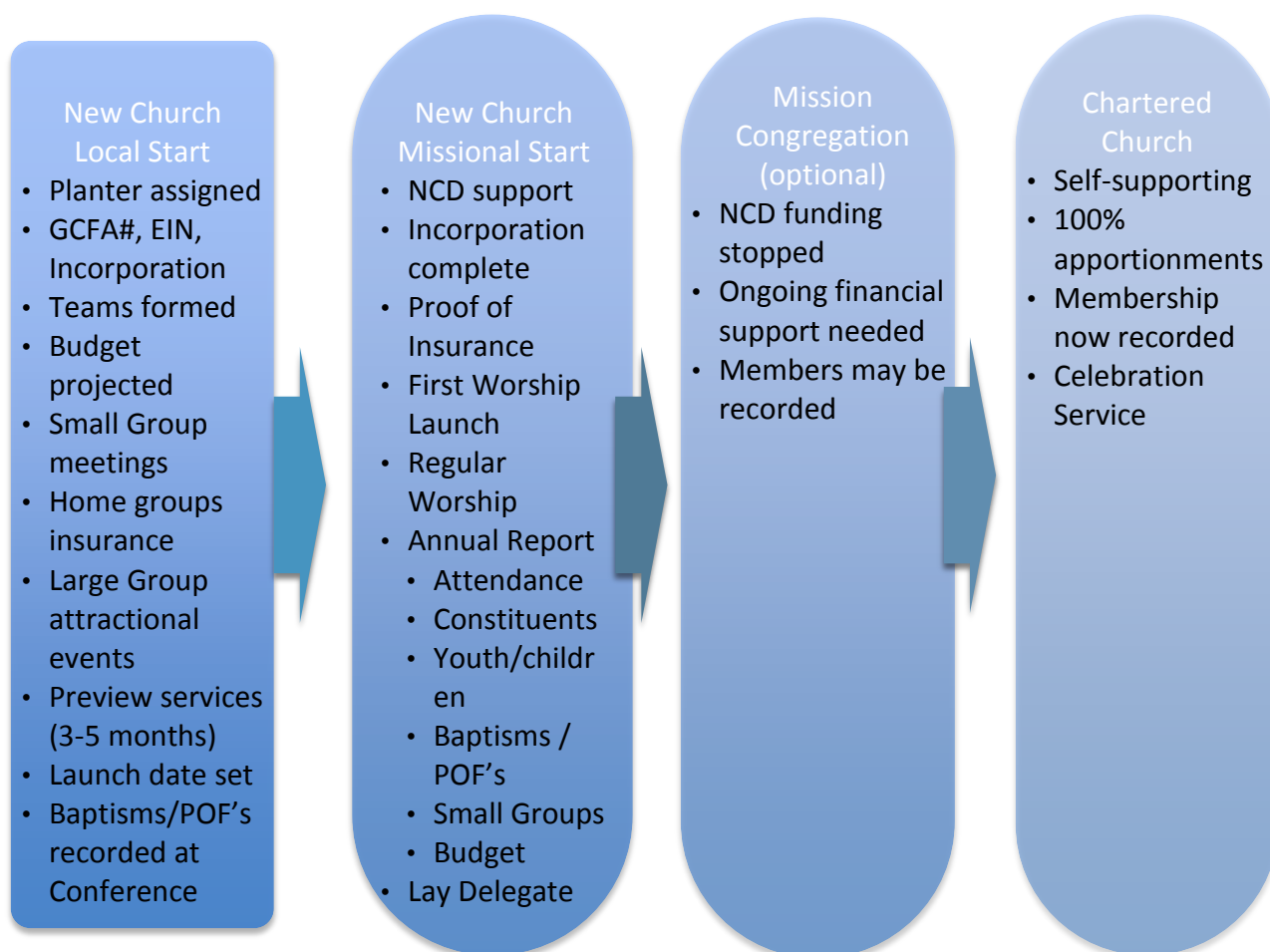
Growth Strategies for Small Churches

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, God calls us to be fruitful and multiply after our creation. The power of this blessing transcends cultures, context, and languages, thereby regardless of the size of the church, we are called to grow, be fruitful, and multiply. Considering the understanding of The Church as the bride of Christ, claimed as His in Scripture, there is no such thing as an unsuccessful small church. Churches established in Christ, cleansed by his blood, and immersed in the power of the resurrection could not be small, or weak, or insignificant in God’s kingdom. Calling the Church of God unsuccessful under such terms becomes next to impossible. The recent myriad of thoughts and definitions on church metrics to measure congregational growth and maturity reflects this tension. Often churches do not know how to determine when they have produced a mature disciple, when a church service is relevant to its context, or how to measure the effectiveness of a Christ-centered church. Metrics commonly used to

evaluate congregational development include: baptisms, professions of faith, membership, numerical growth or people active in ministry.

In the 21st Century, the United Methodist Church and many other denominations are facing a dramatic decline, Churches of all backgrounds in response to the rapid decline of mainline churches have opted out of planting more churches, and revitalizing existing ones. However, in the process of obtaining tangible results, similar controversies in the definition of a church arose as well. For example, The Kentucky Annual Conference regards several categories and definitions of church for funding as a new church according to the “Church Planting Manual” written by Paul Brunstetter in collaboration with the Conference New Church Development team.

NEW CHURCH CATEGORIES
(KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE INTERPRETATION OF ¶ 259 BOD)



The Church of Christ is adapting to the new changing realities of our times. The old philosophy of “build it and they will come” is not as effective as it used to be. The many church growth strategies found around the world substantiate this fact. For example, Path1, one of the fundamental instruments for church planting within the United Methodist Church, categorizes churches based on their church planting and funding strategies, as follows: Partner Church/Multiple “Parent”; Classic Missionary; Multi-Site Expansion; Church-Within-a-Church; The “Elijah/Elisha” Strategy; Vital Merger; and House Church among many. These definitions can be found at www.path1.org emphasizing that each strategy has benefits, challenges, and tempting shortcuts.

All churches can grow regardless of the size. As McIntosh has put it, small churches turn around and grow by implementing the following church growth strategies. Growth strategy 1 for small churches is to renew a sense of purpose. Focusing on a renewed sense of purpose restores a healthy, outward-focused viewpoint. Growth strategy 2 for small churches is to begin new ministries. A small church needs to add only one new ministry each year to remain open to new persons.

In addition, multiple worship services aid the growth of a small church by: providing options, expanding space, increasing the church's faith, enlarging ministry, and reaching new people. Growth strategy 3 for small churches is to cultivate evangelism. To find a small church effectively involved in outreach without the personal efforts of the pastor is rare. Growth strategy 4 for small churches is to celebrate victories. Growth strategy 5 for small churches is to start new groups and classes. Rather than fight their way into being accepted by people who have been together for years, new people prefer to join a new group, class, or circle. Growth strategy 6 for small churches is to involve new people. A major part of the problem is directly related to the single-cell family orientation found in most small churches. To bridge the gap between membership and a sense of belonging, small churches need to focus on involving newcomers as quickly as possible, but always within six months (McIntosh 143-50).

God is leading emerging leaders and churches to go deeper and explore strategies to turn around churches so Christ's Second Coming can be fulfilled once and for all. The growth strategies mentioned above are consistent with Crandall's research in this subject: Twelve Emerging Turnaround Strategies for Small Churches (Crandall 12):

1. Enhance congregational confidence and hope for the future.

2. Stimulate concern for unreached persons in the community.
3. Engage in proactive and effective pastoral leadership.
4. Encourage an open, loving atmosphere in the congregation.
5. Clarify your own personal vision and be an example.
6. Help develop a clear, shared, congregational vision.
7. Work and pray for spiritual renewal among the members.
8. Provide high quality preaching and inspirational worship.
9. Lead the effort to reach new people and grow.
10. Emphasize and practice prayer.
11. Develop new programs, especially for children and youth.
12. Plan to take risks and take them.

The Barrier of Fifty in Hispanic United Methodist Churches

Hispanic United Methodist churches in America are not growing beyond fifty members in most cases. The target area of this study, Kentucky, is a fine example of such a sad national reality. According to research, Hispanic congregations are considered “family-size churches” in terms of numbers.

A family-size church (up to 50 adults and children at worship) is a small church organized around one or two matriarchs or patriarchs who often are the heads of extended biological families in the church. A pastor who challenges the authority of the family-size church patriarchs or matriarchs or presumes to be the primary leader of the congregation generally will not stay long. (Gaede 77)

Hispanic Pastors from all Latin American nations find themselves struggling to break the “50 barrier.” United Methodist Conferences’ statistics reflect many Hispanic

churches, missions, or missional congregations that never charter because of insufficient numbers and finances to support their own ministry. The expectations are set high, but the reality and context where the churches are planted challenge the set goals of planting charter Hispanic churches. As we learned before, the first barrier a congregation encounters in its transition to becoming an established church is the “50 barrier,” a barrier caused by a myriad of factors as Beth Ann Gaede explains:

Two things can prevent a congregation from making that transition. The first barrier is found in the clergy. When clergy hold on to the need to be connected in depth to all the active members, they become the bottlenecks to growth. The second barrier is found in the lay leaders who are unwilling to have many of their spiritual needs met by anyone except their ordained leader. (Gaede 38)

Pastors who are very relational reach new people very fast, around twenty or twenty-five during the first year, according to my experience in church planting during the last twelve years. However, pastors who are not able to move from what I call “the initiator approach” to church planting to “the consolidators” approach get stuck, unable to break the barrier. “[R]elational skills continue to be important to a pastor in any size church, but the changing complexity of the church creates a need for additional skills” (McIntosh 62). Again, this quote is important because it reveals that pastors who are very relational will grow a church to 50 very quickly. However, the church will plateau if the pastor does not invest in his personal development and grow into a better administrator, organizer, teacher, preacher, and supervisor. In other words, “as the size of

the church increases, the perception of a pastor changes from an emphasis on relational skills, to functional skills, to leadership skills” (McIntosh 63).

Many people ask the same question, “What is holding back the Hispanic churches from growing beyond fifty? The question is asked, awaiting a single, short answer that identifies two or three factors in relation to one’s understanding of mission, church planting, and leadership. However, the factors that impact growth in any church plant are multiple.

Yet, the truth is there are numerous obstacles or barriers to a church’s growth. Some of these are invisible but many can be seen if we look for them... Some visitors may see the name of the church as a barrier. Perhaps they experienced the pain of rejection in a previous church with a similar name... A visible barrier that is common in older churches is a stairway. Numerous steps are obstacles to some people who might attend church.

(McIntosh 128-129)

For example, the most commonly mentioned growth factor is leadership. Much has been said on this subject during the last 30 years. In conversation with various conference leaders, they all point to the weaknesses of the pastors as the primary reason why churches are not growing beyond 50. There isn’t any doubt that a transformation of the leader and the church leadership is prerequisite to experiencing church growth. Nevertheless, research also reveals that although leadership is a fundamental variable in the equation of church growth, it is not the only variable. According to a study directed by Crandall, he found many major causes that prevent growth in small churches, the

conclusions drawn from the result of interviews with church pastors and focus groups of small churches.

Lessons Learned through Mistakes (Crandall 26)

1. I tried to do too much alone.
2. I was impatient.
3. I made decisions without waiting for the congregation.
4. I believed they would follow me before they claimed the vision.
5. I forced my vision rather than helping them discover their own.
6. I offered inadequate or no job training.
7. I overworked the dedicated few instead of reducing the pace or recruiting more widely.
8. I allowed myself to get negative and focus on the failures.
9. I misunderstood the members' actions and/or words.
10. I ignored the reality of original sin.
11. I didn't address problems or confront problem people early enough.
12. I ignore prayer and the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
13. I took other people's anger too personally.
14. I didn't pay enough attention to visitation and follow up.
15. I tried to please everybody.

Although all the mistakes revealed by Crandall's research are huge in terms of growth and turnaround in small churches, mistakes number one to six affect early church plants the most. Many Hispanic church plant initiatives have failed because the conference, the local pastor of the American host congregation, and the Hispanic church

are not in alignment. Therefore, the factor registered here as “impatience” affects us all. The passion and excitement to start a new Hispanic ministry takes over, all the leaders agreed, but they ignored the host congregation. The net result is a consuming conflict that suctions up all the positive energy, passion, and kingdom environment of the new plant. Additionally, the leadership spends more time redirecting the energy and attention to church growth rather than to administrative consensus.

In contrast Crandall also offers the factors that could turn around churches if properly followed and understood.

Growth Factors in Smaller Churches (Crandall 84).

1. An atmosphere of love and acceptance
2. Pastoral initiative
3. New programs and outreach ministries
4. Alive, open, inviting worship
5. An attitude of faith and grace
6. A strong bible focus
7. An emphasis on children and youth
8. Hard work and desire to grow
9. Inviting friends to church
10. An evangelism emphasis
11. Prayer
12. Emphasis on gifts and discipleship
13. Laypersons involved in visitation
14. Laypersons involved in ministry

15. The blessing of God's Holy Spirit
16. The church location and the growing community
17. Special outreach and evangelistic events
18. Using a strategic planning process
19. Using new people in leadership
20. A pastor willing to stay.

The growth factors found by Crandall are present in the Hispanic Church plants as well as in small main culture churches. The difference comes from the fact that frequently Hispanic church planting is done using the parachute model and with much less resources than sister church plants as with the main culture or Anglo-Saxon, African American, and other ethnicities. The parachute model does not contemplate structure and people to correlate many of the factors mentioned here. However, I would like to emphasize that for small Hispanic church plants during the first one to three years all the factors delineated above apply one-hundred percent according to research.

It becomes next to impossible after so much research to single out any one factor as the archenemy of church growth in 21ST Century America. The literature review reveals that the factors that impact church growth transcend the human being involved in this divine enterprise. Human beings in the natural establish churches for God's glory. Therefore, a desire to grow is a sign of life ingrained in the church DNA. We want to grow not to become mega churches, nor to be mega pastors as many argue. We want to grow because it is natural for us to do so. For example, a pastor of fifty wants to grow their church to a hundred because the growth represented in those numbers is a positive sign of ascending life. Research already has proven that not all-numeric growth results in

healthy growth. Thereby, the previous example does not contemplate unconventional growth neither supported by the Scriptures nor consistent with the kingdom message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “All churches have barriers or obstacles that exclude people” (McIntosh 128). Therefore, the question about barriers and growth are legitimate because all churches have them. In contrast, growth is also natural—everything that is alive grows. For example, trees grow, animals multiply and grow, children grow. In fact, we all desire to grow—in knowledge, love, faith, academically, and in all areas as a person. Thereby, it is conclusive that the lack of growth in any area will cause us wonder, frustration, questioning etc. I don’t know the first human being who does not want to grow and be successful. In fact, I don’t know the first pastor who wants his or her church to not grow or decline.

Church growth is a complex subject for the 21st Century Church. Church growth can happen in the context of small churches in different ways according to research. We already discussed that churches can grow by expansion, meaning growing in the same place; the church can also grow by extension, meaning starting new worshipping congregations, or planting new faith communities to reach and to serve a different demographic group from the mother church. That other kinds of growth like transitional growth continue to be highlighted by researchers is remarkable.

It is helpful also to remember that congregations grow in two different ways: incrementally and transitionally. Incremental growth in a congregation will increase the number of members in a congregation incrementally but it will not accomplish a transition from one type to

another. Basic church growth techniques produce incremental growth.

Transitional growth in a congregation will not only increase the number of members in a congregation, but will also accomplish the transition from one type to another. (Gaede 26)

Transitional growth is a special kind of growth that focuses on size rather than other metrics like: congregational maturity, baptism, profession of faith, giving, facilities etc. Transitional growth helps us to see by phases how a church can grow by expansion by breaking different growth barriers. In fact, a careful study of these sizes informs us why pastors do their best to start the church with the growth mark of two hundred people in worship attendance. A church that launches with two hundred in attendance already skipped the previous barriers, which are fifty to two hundred in worship attendance. McIntosh's Typology of Church Sizes unfolds in a magisterially way the importance of understanding transitional growth to break any growth barrier before us.

McIntosh's Typology of Church Sizes (McIntosh 38)

Factors	Small church	Medium Church	Large Church
Size	15-200	201-400	400+ worshipers
Orientation	Relational	Programmatical	Organizational
Structure	Single cell	Stretched cell	Multiple cell

Using McIntosh's typology of church sizes, I can say based on the observation of the Hispanic United Methodist churches in the Kentucky Annual Conference for the last twelve years that our sizes vary in contrast with the main culture, but the orientation and structure are applicable to our context and culture. However, the role of leadership

continues to be a fundamental factor to leading the church through these variable size transitions.

For my experience, most pastors who are competent enough to lead a congregation into substantial growth will also be informed enough to know of the classic growth barriers and how they must alter their style of pastoring at each of those stages. What is not well known is how that pastor must first change on the inside to be able to alter the style of pastoring. The key finding of the study is the degree to which pastors of growing churches must deal with the internal issue of control. As pastors grow churches, they can reasonably expect to have a difficult time surrendering control of the ministry to others. (Kearns 117)

Considering the cultural context of Hispanic Church planting in Kentucky, McIntosh's Typology of Church Sizes looks like this based on conference data.

Kentucky Annual Conference

Factors	Small Church	Medium Church	Large Church
Size	15-100	101-250	250+ worshipers
Orientation	Relational	Programmatical	Organizational
Structure	Single cell	Stretched cell	Multiple cell

Regardless of ethnicity or cultural context, church growth seems to be natural in the Kingdom of God. The warning around the subject of church growth according to research would be that pastors, leaders, and UMC conferences need to seek understanding of growth as a by-product of obeying the Great Commission and not as a

ministry goal or personal pastoral agenda. “Always remember that church growth is a journey not a destination” (McIntosh 113). Failure to do so will frustrate God’s original intention to reveal the culture, the values, and the environment of Heaven on earth through the church of Christ.

Multicultural Leadership: A Factor that Either Promotes or Limits Church Growth

Acts 2:42-47 offers the biblical framework for natural church development. The research project “Implementation of Turnaround Strategies for the Maquoketa United Methodist Church Based on Natural Church Development” revealed the effectiveness of these factors: “Churches grow warmer through fellowship; Churches grow deeper through discipleship; Churches grow stronger through worship; Churches grow broader through ministry; and, Churches grow larger through evangelism” (Dadisman 54). The factors addressed by the author are consistent with many other authors’ findings within the subject of church growth. The 21st Century is demanding churches that are able to move and testify like Book of Acts churches. In an era governed by reason, individualism, distrust, and uncertainty, people are thirsty for the true essence of the Gospel. The message of God’s love and acceptance continues to be at the core of the needs of humankind. The message of the Kingdom of God in Christ through repentance and change is as radical and confrontational as it was in Jesus’ time. As Sullivan puts it, “[t]hese factors were common to all four churches in the study in the turnaround process. Changes made in the worship style; Outreach to the community; Structural changes; Visibility in the community; Staff and pastoral changes; Leadership training; A new missional focus; Acceptance of loss of the past” (Sullivan 95).

Based on a case study at Park United Methodist Church, Michael B. Allen suggests the following courses of action to develop church growth, direction and apostolic ethos: personal evaluation, leadership development, apostolic environment, affirmation of strengths, and consistent proclamation of intentional prayer (M. Allen 143). Once again, the core practices of Christian life are recalled as evidence of personal and communal transformation. On the other hand, another powerful study conducted by Gray targeted other important areas of church growth and development in relation to church leadership as a whole. The study identifies the need for leadership development not only among the clergy, but for the laity as well. In this regard, Gray's finding reveals:

Within the realm of support, four areas were investigated: finances, conceptual freedom, personal support, and training. Significant discoveries were found in each area of sponsoring agency support. The support offered by a sponsoring agency had a great impact on the church plants involved in this study. Finances: financial support for a church plant is a must; Conceptual freedom: the freedom to make choices on the mission field, cast the vision for the church plant, target the audience. (Gray 157)

Both authors are thereby suggesting that church leadership development does not rest upon the pastor only, but the whole congregational body. The factors mentioned above unveil the crude reality that there is not genuine transformation without the involvement of the whole community of faith. Therefore, in order to engender a Christological transformation of a person to become a leader that evolves into a transformational community life, a missional understanding of God is crucial. Mike Breen, author of *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, describes this type of leader as a

Missional Leader: “someone who mobilizes God’s people to join his redemptive work in the world.” (8). He goes on to further to assert that “the most effective leaders do this by creating a system of relational discipleship through being in an extended family on mission (Breen 8).

In similar manner, Palla affirms Breen’s statements, since according to Palla’s findings in regard to effective ways to break growth barriers in any church setting, the research reveal that

[e]vangelism turned out to be the most important concept that was recognized in all the focus groups. The concept of evangelism, personal and mass, could be dealt with under the major theme of church. Further, evangelism can be dealt with again under the major group theme of home groups and family, where the family and the small group meeting in homes could form the bridge to lead people to a salvation experience (Palla 120).

Research Design Literature

The Qualitative Research Design

The research design will consist of the following: sample identification, data collection using questionnaire, interview and focus group as instruments, and finally analysis of data findings. I decided to include Hispanic United Methodist churches only, with the purpose of providing a useful tool for Anglo United Methodist churches seeking Hispanic ministry strategies for their context; churches that have a heart for the foreigner, and want to start Hispanic ministries or plant Hispanic churches. However, the main purpose will be to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist

churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The net result of the research will inform church leaders and conferences that are exploring church planting, revitalization or renewal within the United Methodist Church in America. Nevertheless, the reader is encouraged to always pay special attention to the fact that this project does not seek to apply the theory that “one size fits all.” Thereby, readers interested in Hispanic United Methodist Church planting or development will have a reference to help them in their endeavors to identify the factors that impact healthy growth within their own context; but also in any other context outside of the research sample identified data, which is the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Therefore, I will focus on Hispanic United Methodist congregations within the Kentucky Annual Conference of fifty or less in attendance, as well as churches that have breached the barrier of fifty members in worship attendance. Hispanic churches within the United Methodist Church nationwide are not growing, while other faith groups are growing.

In America, we all are working with the same soil in terms of population, culture, language, education, and economic status. Hispanic population traits across the United States change according to geography, labor, and level of education. The landscape of many subcultures within the Hispanic population vary according to the different states in which particular Hispanic groups have chosen to concentrate, seeking community among themselves. For example: Cubans are in Miami; Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York; Mexicans are mostly in Texas, Kentucky, or other states with a rural setting. This fact is well displayed in many demographic studies conducted nationwide by different organizations. For this very reason, I chose the Kentucky and Northwest conferences for

the case study.

By involving only Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference in this project, I would be able to make sound recommendations based on the research findings to United Methodist churches serving Hispanic churches in a similar context, which is rural and urban Hispanic population concentrations in the US. Finally, I will use the twelve years of experience I have planting churches in Kentucky and leading leadership development training as the laboratory for this project. After three to five years, United Methodist Hispanic church plants either stagnate or die. Hence, I am thereby suggesting that the multicultural reality of multiple nations within any given Hispanic United Methodist congregation, become the context where the factors that promote or limit healthy growth are embedded, regardless of the size, economic, geopolitical, social, and language expressions.

Summary of Literature

This chapter offers biblical and theological perspectives on God's mission and church growth built upon a Trinitarian approach for the Local Church in 21st Century America. Globalization has brought the whole world to America; thus, postmodern America has become the biggest mission field in the world. The king of many, called "Opportunity," has summoned people from all nations, races, and languages to an encounter with Jesus Christ, upon realization that "Opportunity" is filled with empty promises. This radical geographical change has impacted the understanding of missions in a very significant way. The historical picture of "missions" as an overseas trip to a foreign country has shifted dramatically to our backyard.

Surveys in church planting today has demonstrated that churches who focus outward instead of inward will grow and multiply. On the other hand, the “evangelistic/attractional church is ‘extractional’ by nature, meaning converts are brought out of their cultures and assimilated (Stetzer 1966). However, regardless of the approach, Jesus Christ is still the Lord and Savior of the whole earth, and the Chief Cornerstone of His own Church, therefore a biblical framework unfolding this fundamental truth will be found in this chapter as well.

In what follows, the theological implications of the *Missio Dei* for church growth is explored. Pointing out the fact that in order to respond to the Great Commission effectively, we have to respond to it honestly. Moreover, we must respond to the Great Commission in a holistic way, as an attempt to restore all creation and the social structures worldwide that supports it, and not as the economy of salvation from an individual perspective. In parallel with this missiological understanding, the chapter also explores the historical resistance of humankind to the Great Commission found in the Scriptures in both the Old and the New Testament. This existent reality in today’s church affirms Stetzer’s statement that “The church planter must become intentionally evangelistic” (1966). Thereby, the Great Task of reaching people for Christ will not happen by accident. We are called to partner with God as collaborators of His own mission to change the world and restore humankind.

Finally, this chapter sought to explore the relevant literature in terms of church growth and barriers. Much has been said about church growth and barriers nowadays. Therefore, beginning with the Scriptures as the original source for the subject of

“growth” and “change,” I stressed the pattern of change in congregational and organizational behavior. The rationale for gathering the literature unfolds as follows:

1. General literature for church growth and barriers in mainstream culture.
2. The missional approach to church growth and its impact in breaking growth barriers, regardless of the culture.
3. The factors that impact growth in the Church of Christ.
4. The particularity of church growth and barriers for ethnic churches in 21st Century America.
5. Finally, the characteristics that make the Hispanic church unique in terms of church growth and barriers.

In summary, this project seeks understanding and meaning of the field in which Hispanic church planting and development take place in Kentucky. In this regard, Tim Sensing states:

Furthermore, qualitative research systematically seeks answers to examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experiences. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth. (Sensing 57)

This statement shines light upon the reasons behind the decision to choose “qualitative research” as the fundamental method for this work. This research focuses on

the life of the Hispanic church in Kentucky, including its various cultural contexts from urban to rural, and the lived experiences of the practitioners who are seasoned local pastors in the study region. “Qualitative researchers are interested in accessing experiences, interactions and documents in their natural context and in a way that gives room to the particularities of them and the material in which they are studied” (Flick X). In addition, it must be stressed that I have been a pastor and church planter in Kentucky since 2001. In the process, I have planted and developed several churches in this context during the past fourteen years. As the researcher, I acknowledge that this experience causes bias toward my own context. Research literature affirms that the personal experiences of the researcher among other factors affect the choice of one method over another for the design of the research proposal.

Researchers’ own personal training and experiences also influence their choice of approach. An individual trained in technical, scientific writing, statistics, and computer statistical programs and familiar with quantitative journals in the library would most likely choose the quantitative design. On the other hand, individuals who enjoy writing in a literary way or conducting personal interviews or making up-close observations may gravitate to the qualitative approach. (Creswell 19)

Additionally, authors mention that another important variable to establish the criteria for selecting “qualitative research” for this project is the “audience.” In this case, Asbury Theological Seminary faculty for the Beason Doctorate Program is the department leading us as students to conduct research in our context. The research team of this department amply supports qualitative and quantitative research as reliable

methods for our projects. “Finally, researchers write for audiences that will accept their research. These audiences may be journal editors, journal readers, graduate committees, conference attendees, or colleagues in the field. Students should consider approaches typically supported and used by their advisers” (Creswell 19).

One of the hallmarks that separate qualitative research from its counterpart, quantitative investigation, is the practice of synchronizing the research methods with particular research questions. In stark contrast, the quantitative approach pairs research questions with methodological orthodox concepts, disconnected from social behavior often found in qualitative research. “The classic qualitative-quantitative debate has been largely resolved with recognition that a variety of methodological approaches are needed and credible, that mixed methods can be specifically valuable, and that the challenge is to appropriately match methods to questions rather than adhering to some narrow methodological orthodoxy” (Sensing 52). Therefore, as the author of this project I have decided to follow Sensing’s advice of not spending much time defending the methodology I chose nor defending qualitative research over quantitative but rather giving my attention to the substance of my research as explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Church growth is at the heart of God. It is a kingdom value that cannot be disregarded if we are truly responding to the challenge of the Great Commission with integrity of heart. To remain indifferent or stagnate when a group of disciples of Jesus Christ says yes to Him is next to impossible! Regardless of denomination or church affiliation, the invitation to go and make disciples of all nations is a must for all those following Jesus as Lord and Savior.

There are many factors that determine the growth of churches, in any given context. Within the Church, by most standards, we all want to grow and pastor a radical, vibrant church. However, the reality of ministry, the reluctance of people to receive the message of the gospel, and the financial and occupational instability of the congregants set the tone for a crude reality. The reality is this: Hispanic United Methodist churches are not growing significantly in comparison to the rapid increase in Hispanic immigration and resulting growth of the Hispanic population in the United States. As the Hispanic population in the US is ever growing in like manner, the task at hand of planting and developing Hispanic Churches nationwide to respond to our missional responsibilities in relation to the Great Commission will never end.

The impact of growth factors on church attendance has significant influence on church size. In this study, the evaluation of the factors that impact growth revealed the effective practices and postures that may enable the Hispanic churches in Kentucky to become churches that grow and multiply, making more and more disciples. According to

the literature review, churches can grow by expansion, meaning continued growth in a specific geographic area until most growth barriers are clearly identified and overcome. Churches can also grow by extension, meaning multiplication of the church's presence in places beyond their immediate geographic area. One example of growth by expansion would be the so called "mega" churches, while an example of growth by extension would be the multisite approach that is becoming more prevalent as church leaders and pastors are beginning to understand that the mega church model of ministry is no longer sustainable in 21st Century America.

The more effective way of interpreting our ecclesiology is growth by extension. This sole proposal of growth by extension entails unlimited possibilities for the church of Christ to continue growing regardless of church size. The literature review informs us that there are barriers that impact growth in the Hispanic Churches in 21st Century America. Some authors encourage us to launch as big as possible (i.e. 200 people in attendance) to avoid the significant growth barriers of 50,70 and 120 in attendance.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference have exhibited significant growth in terms of the number of churches. However, a cause of concern in the numerical growth of the Hispanic churches is breaking the barrier of 50 people in attendance.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of these factors, three basic instruments were used to gather the data: a researcher-developed questionnaire, followed by a semi-

structured interview, preparing the participants for the focus group where the same questions asked individually during the interview were repeated in a focus group setting and format. The questionnaire, the interviews, and the focus group were created to help determine the factors that impact growth in growing Hispanic United Methodist churches in comparison to those that are not growing. The research was conducted within my own organization, the United Methodist Church, which is why three instruments were chosen to ensure validity and create confidence. Creswell calls this type of project “Backyard research,” encouraging the use of more than one method to diminish the researcher biased factor at the moment of analyzing data.

‘Backyard research’ (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) involves studying the researcher’s own organization, or friends, or immediate work setting. This often leads to compromises in the researcher’s ability to disclose information and raises difficult power issues. Although data collection may be convenient and easy, the problems of reporting data that are biased, incomplete, or compromised are legion. If studying the backyard is necessary, employ multiple strategies of validity (as discussed later) to create reader confidence in the accuracy of the findings. (Creswell 117)

Research Questions

This is a qualitative, pre-intervention, phenomenological study to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, and in discussion with key pastors from our churches, evaluate the

factors that contribute to church growth, to identify those that stand out as best practices for planting and developing Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The collection procedures for this qualitative study involved the implementation of three basic methods of gathering information that will be mentioned and explained in meticulous detail later in this chapter.

RQ #1. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is above fifty?

The answers to this question reveal the factors that impact growth in research churches with an average attendance above fifty. The instruments used to answer this question were a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire (Questions 1, 3, 4 and 6 from Set A, see appendix), a semi-structured personal interview (Questions 1 and 2 from Set B, see appendix), and a focus group carried out in two sessions (repeat Questions 1 and 2 from Set B, see appendix).

RQ #2. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is below fifty?

The answers to this question reveal the factors that impact growth in research churches with an average attendance below fifty. The instruments used to answer this question were a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire (Questions 5 and 7 from Set A, see appendix), a semi-structured personal interview (Questions 3-5 from Set B, see appendix), and a focus group carried out in two sessions (repeat Questions 3-5 from Set B, see appendix).

RQ #3. What contributing factors, if any, stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference?

The answers to this question reveal the contributing factors, if any, which stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The instruments used to answer this question were a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire (Questions 2 and 8 from Set A, see appendix), a semi-structured personal interview (Questions 6 and 7 from Set B, see appendix), and a focus group carried out in two sessions (repeat Questions 6 and 7 from Set B, see appendix).

Ministry Context

In 2001, there was not a single Hispanic United Methodist church presence within the Kentucky Annual Conference whatsoever. However, as of 2015 there are now 12 established Hispanic United Methodist churches within the conference. The openness and love of our conference leadership for the strangers in our land have been critical factors in the development of the afore mentioned churches. Love and an environment of cooperation are necessary for the birth and development of churches from any kind of church effort, regardless of denomination.

Mission Insight reveals that there are 130,000 Hispanics living in Fayette County, Kentucky alone, yet the Hispanic ministry is not serving even 10 percent of that population in any of the 120 counties in Kentucky. Furthermore, the second phase of Hispanic United Methodist church planting in Kentucky has been stagnating, showing slow growth in recent years. Churches that were successfully planted in the first 10 years rapidly grew to 50 or 60

in attendance, but then growth stopped. Only a handful of churches have been able to break the barrier of 50 in attendance. In most cases, churches plateaued at 50 during the first two years after launching, and then a myriad of problems began to surface, such as the issue of dealing with: an undocumented population, preventing pastors from being able to process members and key leaders into the United Methodist system; low levels of education; manual workers with two or more jobs, working long hours without days off or vacation time; as well as issues of gender, low income, and transient or nomadic populations.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

Reasons for Choosing Participants from the United Methodist Church (UMC)

1. The United Methodist Church is one of the largest mainline denominations in the US. This allows me to interact with as many churches and leaders as possible.
2. The United Methodist Church has developed strong organizations to address church planting and revitalization, i.e. Path1 and The National Plan. Accordingly, records are kept. These organizations are highly trustworthy sources for readily accessible historical data regarding United Methodist Hispanic church plants.
3. The UMC highly believes in church planting, growth and revitalization of Hispanic Ministry, therefore we constantly seek to develop better strategies and solutions to break church growth barriers.
4. The UMC gives freedom to Hispanic Churches to operate missionally in different styles, as deemed most appropriate and effective in the areas of worship, evangelism, and discipleship programs.
5. I am an ordained elder of the UMC, therefore the health, revitalization, and

growth of my denomination, especially in Hispanic Ministry, is one of my deepest concerns.

Seven Hispanic Local Licensed Pastors were selected from among the twelve Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, representing a variety of geographical and cultural contexts to ensure a broad representation of the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the conference. Pastors were chosen specifically as the participants because general literature on leadership, including John C. Maxwell, who in his book the *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* and others affirms that everything starts or falls with the leader. Therefore, leadership has a dramatic impact on the health of the church and organization. Though it is not determinative, it highly affects the outcome of church growth.

The pastors chosen to participate in both groups were from Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The selected pastors represented either of the two sub-groups of the potential church populations: a vibrant/growing church strata (50 or more in average attendance) and a comparison stagnate/non-growing church strata (50 or below in average attendance). The reason for this criterion is due to the problem of breaking past the barrier of fifty members in average weekly worship attendance for the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Description of Participants

Participants were recruited from among the pastors of the twelve existing Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, representing congregations with an average attendance of above 50 and below 50 members. The

participants were seasoned Licensed Local Pastors of the United Methodist Church. All were Hispanic males with the exception of one Hispanic female. This is because there is only one Hispanic female Licensed Local Pastor among those currently serving these 12, Hispanic Congregations. The participants were between the ages of 30 and 50, native Spanish speakers, serving in both rural and urban contexts. Educational backgrounds varied from a minimum of a high school diploma up to a master's degree. All participants were in a satisfactory mental and physical states of health.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were each presented with a consent letter translated into Spanish, their native language, which outlined the nature of the study, the responsibilities of the researcher and of the participants, and that participation was explicitly on a voluntary basis.

Confidentiality was ensured through the following practices: 1) All names of the participants and the churches they represented were replaced with coded identifiers (Pastor A, B, C... from church A, B, C..., and so on) on all data collected. The key to the coded identifiers was maintained separately. 2) All paper records were stored in a locked cabinet in my home office and all electronic records were stored on two, password protected, MacBook computers belonging to me and to my research assistant. All recorded data was transferred directly from the recording device to the computer immediately upon completion of recording, and then deleted from recording device. 3) Access to all raw collected data was limited to me and my research assistant, and was not shared with any entity outside of the research team. Participants were aware of the identity of other participants during the focus group sessions, but access to information was limited to what they heard during the sessions. 4) All paper records were destroyed by shredding, and electronic records destroyed using

both the Mac internal secure erase feature and additionally a reliable third-party computer software.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for collection of evidence from participants were a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire (Question Set A, see appendix A), a semi-structured personal interview (Question Set B, see appendix B), and a focus group that was carried out in two sessions (repeat Question Set B, see appendix B). Due to the primary language of all participants being Spanish, all materials provided to participants were translated into Spanish. Additionally, interview and focus group discussions were also conducted in Spanish only.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

According to Sensing, issues of generalizability, validity, and reliability are essential to ensure credibility of the project and the understanding of the experiences being studied (214). Therefore, in establishing the reliability and validity of this study several actions were taken into consideration for the reader to trust the findings.

External Validity: “External validity or generalizability is the degree to which findings derive from one context or under one set of conditions may be assumed to apply in other settings or under other conditions” (Sensing 215). I believe that concepts, principles, and future findings of this research could be applied outside of the context where the study was conducted. The Kentucky Annual Conference reflects the reality of Hispanic ministry nationwide: small churches struggling financially, led by first generation Hispanic pastors who lead first generation Hispanic congregants. This research is extensive in terms of description of context, characteristics of leaders, and the

literary review on church growth; but also, specific about the factors that promote growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

However, the responsibility lies with those reading the research to adjust the results, as well as the application of concepts and growth factors, to their own particular context.

The research provides general principles that are transferable to other contexts; however, some may not be transferable in every instance as every context is different. In regard to the aforementioned statement, Sensing clarifies that “[o]nce a rich description is provided, it’s up to the reader, secondary researchers, or other practitioners to decide if the models described could be transferable to other contexts” (215). Other practitioners will be able to see themselves and their ministerial situation and context in the accounts presented in this research based on the thickly detailed descriptions offered in this chapter.

Internal Validity or Credibility: “Likewise, the rich ‘thick’ descriptions of the study are deemed credible when they present the experiences of people in such a way that the participants would recognize them as their own” (Sensing 219). In order to accomplish this, subjects were chosen from one group of seven Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference: the seven senior pastors of churches with either above or below 50 members in average attendance. These seven are representative pastors from among the twelve existing Hispanic congregations within the United Methodist Kentucky Annual Conference. The chosen churches are experiencing factors that have impacted their growth positively or negatively from the moment of launching to date. Results from each of the questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups were verified by sharing the transcripts with the participants and continuously seeking

their feedback to ensure that the definite purpose of their answers was not lost in transcription and translation. In his eighth edition of the book *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction*, William Wiersma and Stephen G. Jurs state that in qualitative research “[v]erifying results and conclusions from two or more sources or perspectives enhances internal validity” (215).

Three data collection instruments were used in the research study. The first instrument used was a researcher-designed questionnaire administered to each participant individually by email. Then a personal interview was conducted (using a different set of questions than the questionnaire). To finalize the data collection procedure, a focus group met over two sessions, where the seven participants interacted about the factors that promote growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference (using the same set of questions as the personal interviews). The questionnaire, the interview, and the focus group questions were prepared beforehand as open-ended questions in a semi-structured fashion and administered to the same group of participants at separate times in order to ensure the validity of the study.

The participating senior pastors have been chosen from the 12 Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. They represent more than half of all established Hispanic local churches in our conference. By choosing these specifically, the findings can be generalized to other populations within the Hispanic church community in Kentucky. “The purpose of qualitative research is to gather depth of insight about the particulars of a setting;” therefore, by choosing participants from seven churches from our context, the research guarantees a large enough data source from which insights and findings will feed the conclusions by providing a rich description and

process of the church growth context of the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference (Sensing 216). Other practitioners and researchers will be able to draw a clear understanding and application of the results for themselves, as well as for the particular context of the research.

Reliability: According to Sensing, “[t]he question is not whether the findings will be found again, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. It must be possible for an external person to audit the progress of the work and find the path to be sound” (219). Thereby, the different methods used to collect the data during the research procedures (questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups) guarantee the validity of this qualitative study, making it replicable and dependable. This chapter provides a trail that clearly describes the process of collecting and analyzing data. For example, all the research questions have been aligned with a particular method according to the original intended purpose for each question. One of the hallmarks that separate qualitative research from its counterpart, quantitative investigation, is the practice of synchronizing the research methods with its particular research questions. In stark contrast, the quantitative approach pairs research questions with methodological orthodox concepts, disconnected from social behavior often found in qualitative research.

The classic qualitative-quantitative debate has been largely resolved with recognition that a variety of methodological approaches are needed and credible, that mixed methods can be specifically valuable, and that the challenge is to appropriately match methods to questions rather than adhering to some narrow methodological orthodoxy. (Sensing 52)

Finally, the consistency of administering the questionnaire, interview and focus group to the same group of participants is also part of the reliability. On the other hand, the study using participants from these particular seven churches is limited in terms of replication, which addresses the issue of external validity previously mentioned, due to the fact that they are focused on unique aspects which involve the factors that impact growth specifically in the particular context of the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. All that said, the fact that after being a practitioner in the area of church planting and growth for the past fourteen years in Kentucky, I am intrinsically biased, therefore the research tools identified avoid the inclusion of the biases, emotions, and values of the researcher. However, according to literature “[n]o research methodology or data collection method gets the researcher out of the way” (Sensing 41). For example, the fact that I am pastorally connected to the research participants creates by default some common sense, preconceived ideas, and predispositions at the time of interpreting the data.

Thereby, I openly acknowledged biases and the consequent actions I took to clarify assumptions and diminish the impact of those biases were to be consistent with the use and application of the three elected methods to the same group. Furthermore, I utilized predetermined questions and the transcription of the answers to reflect and measure exactly what the research questions were designed to describe and measure from the very beginning of the research process and analyses. By most standards, given a similar context and theoretical assumptions, other researchers and practitioners can follow the proposed research recipe and obtain the same results. After careful analysis of

one's own context, the major features of this study are replicable, and therefore, trustworthy.

Data Collection

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Thereby, seven churches out of twelve existing congregations were the population sample for this project. As previously examined this research focused on healthy Hispanic church growth to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

In this reckoning, the qualitative research method was chosen as the fundamental approach to develop this project as stated in Chapter 2. It is a project that is practical in nature, focusing on the life of the church, its leadership—specifically the senior pastors, who play a fundamental role in church development—in addition to other issues loudly calling for attention. This project seeks understanding and meaning of the field in which Hispanic church planting and development take place in Kentucky. In this regard, Sensing states:

Furthermore, qualitative research systematically seeks answers to examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experiences. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth. (Sensing 57)

This statement shines lights upon the reasons behind the decision to choose “qualitative research” as the fundamental method for this work in which the research focuses on the life of the Hispanic church in Kentucky, including its various cultural contexts from urban to rural, and the lived experiences of the practitioners who are seasoned local pastors in the study region. “Qualitative researchers are interested in accessing experiences, interactions and documents in their natural context and in a way that gives room to the particularities of them and the material in which they are studied” (Flick X). In addition, it must be stressed that I have been a pastor and church planter in Kentucky since 2001. In the process, I have planted and developed several churches in this context during the past fourteen years. As the researcher, I acknowledge that this experience causes bias toward my own context, and research literature affirms that the personal experiences of the researcher among other factors affect the choice of one method over another for the design of the research proposal.

Researchers’ own personal training and experiences also influence their choice of approach. An individual trained in technical, scientific writing, statistic, and computer statistical programs and familiar with quantitative journals in the library would most likely choose quantitative design. On the other hand, individuals who enjoy writing in a literary way of conducting personal interviews or making up-close observations may gravitate to the qualitative approach. (Creswell 19)

The first instrument used was the researcher-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted individually by email using questions from Question Set A (see appendix A), then completed and returned by email by each participant two weeks

prior to their one-on-one interview. In order to ensure completion within the established time frame, a reminder email was sent to each participant three days prior to deadline, and additionally as needed until the completed questionnaire was received. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather in-depth and honest reflections from the participants as each person was free to complete the questions at their leisure and were more likely to share personal responses through the computer in the first stages of the research. The questionnaire was conducted prior to the interview to stimulate auto-reflective thinking on the subject at hand. The questions were open-ended, followed a logical order, from general to specific, and maintained cohesive themes in order to encourage participants to articulate their experiences in writing.

The second instrument used was the semi-structured personal interview. The interview was scheduled and conducted on an individual basis, to be sensitive to each participant's needs and context. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were held at the nearest Starbucks location to each participant. The interviewer asked the participant the questions from Question Set B (see appendix B) and notes were taken by the interviewer as the participant responded. The interview was audio-recorded with written consent from the participant for later reference and accuracy. The interview was conducted two weeks following the completion of the questionnaire to allow the participant to arrive at the interview oriented to the subject at hand. The interview helped the participant begin to form and voice their own opinions before having any outside influences in preparation for the focus group format.

The last instrument used was the focus group. The focus group included all participants together. In order to allow adequate time for response and discussion, the

focus group was conducted over a two-hour period in two separate sessions, one month apart, using the same questions from Question Set B (see appendix B) split between the two sessions. Because the Hispanic United Methodist pastors of the Kentucky Annual Conference already meet as a covenant group on the first Monday of every month, permission was obtained to use the same time, date, and location to carry out the two focus group sessions. The questions from the interview were repeated in a focus group setting in order to allow the individual participants to interact with each other and further develop their opinions and expound upon their own experiences with the ultimate goal of identifying trends regarding factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The focus group sessions were video-recorded with written consent from the participants for accuracy and later reference.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the numerous types of approaches vary in regard to the strategies identified by the researcher to complete the procedures selected for the data collection, as well as the methods to analyze the findings. The research strategy I have selected to conduct this research is phenomenological research, explained by Creswell as “[a] strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell 13).

The aforementioned approach is the most fitting for this research project in the sense that the subject at hand, of factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Church within the Kentucky Annual Conference, is a local as well as a nationwide phenomenon. Moreover, as described by Creswell, the lived experiences of the participants play a fundamental role in data collection and posterior analysis. The

research seeks also to study the subjects that impact growth positively or negatively in Hispanic church development within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The ultimate purpose of implementing this qualitative analysis strategy would be to identify patterns of relationship and meaning upon coding the data according to underlying themes based on the findings from the instruments used.

The following steps for data analysis were employed for this qualitative research based on Creswell (Creswell 185-90):

Step 1. “*Organize and prepare* the data for analysis. This involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up field notes, or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information” (Creswell 185). The instruments used for collecting data were questionnaires, personal interviews, and focus group sessions. All questionnaires completed by participants were collected electronically by email, then all names of the participants and the churches they represent were replaced with coded identifiers (Pastor A, B, C... from church A, B, C..., and so on) to ensure confidentiality. The interview and focus group recordings were transcribed for analysis, also all names were replaced with coded identifiers.

Step 2: “Read through all the data. A first step is to obtain a *general sense* of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. What general ideas are participants saying? What is the tone of the ideas? What is the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information? Sometimes qualitative researchers write notes in margins or start recording general thoughts at this stage” (Creswell 185). Therefore, all collected data was reviewed and the responses and experiences shared by the participants in the questionnaires, during the interview and focus group sessions were reflected upon,

with special attention paid to repeated ideas and overall themes in order to begin to draw a general picture of the data, as a starting point for more specific organization and detailed analysis.

Step 3: “Begin detailed analysis with a coding process. ... It involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term” (Creswell 186). After a thorough review of all data, noted ideas and overall themes were used to create a systematic coding process for analysis and interpretation.

Step 4: “Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis” (Creswell 189). The purpose of this step is to use the coding system established in the previous step to generate specific themes and categories to create headings that will later appear in the findings listed in the later chapters. This is the process of narrowing down the general themes into specific buckets of information to discover the roots of the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Furthermore, upon analyzing the different perspectives of the participants, interconnections of themes were sought in order to identify best practices for church growth for sampled churches.

Step 5: “Advance how the description and themes will be *represented* in the qualitative narrative” (Creswell 189). Following this step, tables and graphics were developed to present the findings of the research analysis and the description of the participants in a way that is easy to visualize and understand. Additionally, I included a detailed discussion of specific themes, subthemes, perspectives, and quotations gathered from the questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups.

Step 6: “A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data.” (Creswell 189). Using the results from the questionnaires, the interviews, and focus groups, the data was grouped. The different nuances found after making the interpretation of the pertaining data were classified according to themes and trends of the factors in addition to the best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the study’s geographical context. The findings and results of the analysis are reported in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The research focused on participant questionnaires, interviews, a focus group, and church historical documents as primary data sources. Participants were recruited from among the Hispanic pastors of Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference by formal letter requesting their participation and consent on June 8, 2016. The instruments used were researcher-designed open-ended questionnaires conducted individually from July 21 to August 12, semi-structured personal interviews conducted individually from August 9 until August 25, and finally, a focus group held in two sessions on September 12 and October 12 2016 from approximately 10am to 12pm. Due to the primary language of all participants being Spanish, all materials were provided to participants in Spanish. Additionally, interview and focus group discussions were also conducted in Spanish only with the sole purpose of answering the three research questions.

This chapter reports the findings of this project based on the instruments used to collect the data from participants. In addition, the guidelines and timeline described in Chapter 3 have been followed to ensure reproducible findings. Strictly speaking, a profile of the responses gathered from the three instruments are discussed in detail. The reliability of these instruments is examined. Descriptive and qualitative data includes the

implementation of the following instruments: the questionnaires, interviews, and finally, the focus group conducted at the end of the data collection phase.

Participants

Seven participants were recruited from among the pastors of the 12 Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference representing congregations with an average attendance of above 50 and below 50 members. The participants are Licensed Local Pastors of the United Methodist Church, Hispanic, and all male except for one female. This is due to the fact that of the 12 Hispanic United Methodist churches in the Kentucky Annual Conference, there is only one female Licensed Local Pastor currently serving. The prospective participants are between the ages of 30 and 50, native Spanish speakers, serving in rural and urban contexts. Educational backgrounds vary from a minimum of a high school diploma up to a master's degree; therefore, participants are considered capable of making informed decisions. All participants are in satisfactory mental and physical states of health. The prospective participants were contacted by letter explaining in detail the research project and their rights and responsibilities as participants, as it was explicitly on a voluntary basis. Included in the letter was a statement of consent for each participant to read, sign, and return. Each participant agreed.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

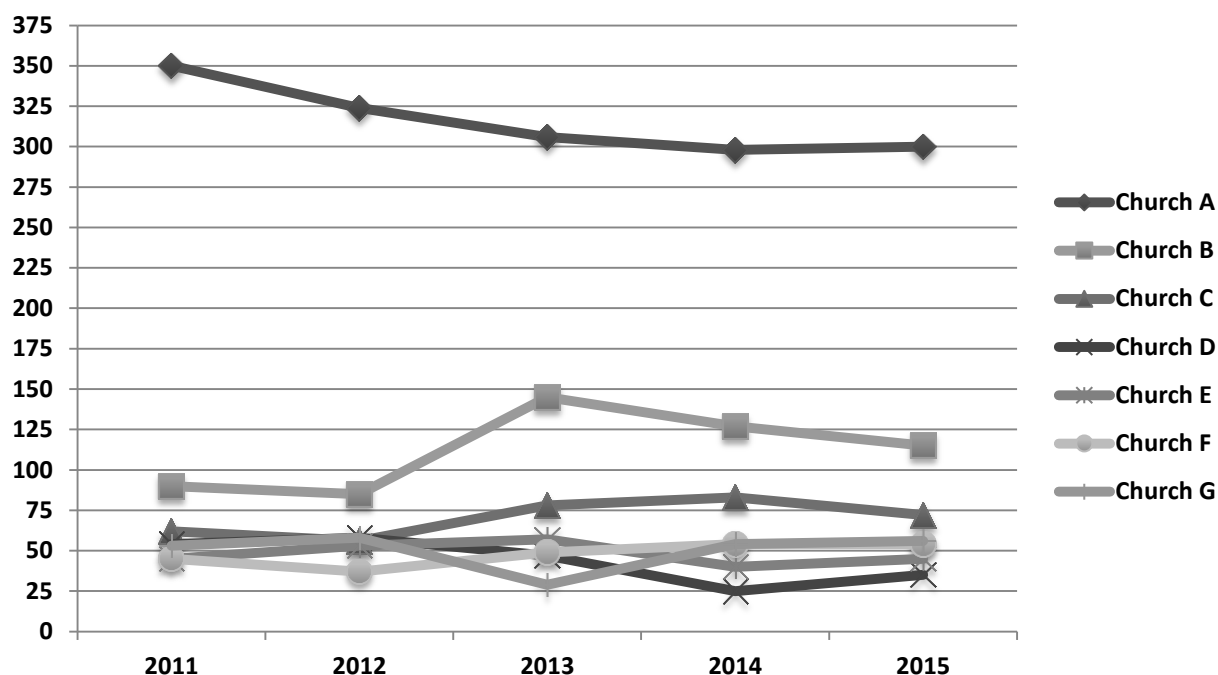
Participants	Gender M/F	Nationality	Church	Language	Context KY	Title	Age
P.A	F	Puerto Rico	UMC	Spanish	Urban	Local Pastor	30's
P.B	M	Cuba	UMC	Spanish	Urban	Local Pastor	40's
P.C	M	Mexico	UMC	Spanish	Rural	Local Pastor	50's
P.D	M	Cuba	UMC	Spanish	Rural	Local Pastor	40's
P.E	M	Cuba	UMC	Spanish	Urban	Local Pastor	40's
P.F	M	Puerto Rico	UMC	Spanish	Rural	Local Pastor	40's
P.G	M	Cuba	UMC	Spanish	Rural	Local Pastor	50's

Description of Evidence

The instruments used were a researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured personal interviews, and a focus group held in two sessions. Due to the primary language of all participants being Spanish, all materials were provided to participants in Spanish. Additionally, interview and focus group discussions were also

conducted in Spanish only. The researcher-designed questionnaire was conducted on an individual basis by email within two weeks of each participant's one-on-one interview. Reminder emails were sent to each participant within a week of their scheduled interview to ensure receipt of completed questionnaire prior to interview.

Research Question #1 was answered by means of questions 1, 3, 4 and 6 of the questionnaire by all the participants' responses with factors that impact growth above fifty. Research Question #2 was answered by asking the participants questions 5 and 7 of the questionnaire who responded highlighting the factors that impact growth on Hispanic churches below fifty. Research Question #3 was answered by questions 2 and 8 of the questionnaire regarding best church growth practices. All participants answered each question regardless of the current average worship attendance of their churches. This was intentional in order to include the perspectives and experience of participants from both ends of the spectrum. Participants from churches with an average worship attendance above fifty have already experienced factors that impact growth in churches under fifty in the process of breaking that barrier to their current worship attendance. Additionally, participants from churches below fifty in average worship attendance each have experienced church growth beyond fifty in the history of their pastoral appointments (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Church Size for the Participating Churches, 2011-2015.

Questionnaire Data

Research Question #1. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is above fifty?

In order to better understand the perceived factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference with an average attendance over fifty, the participants were asked questions 1, 3, 4, and 6 of the questionnaire.

The written responses on the questionnaires were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number one, a total of 84

discussed factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 2). For example, stagnation was the most commonly identified theme, mentioned in 16.7% of these occurrences. In contrast, the Holy Spirit was the least mentioned theme, being addressed only 6% of the time. 3.6% of the responses did not fit into a larger category such as: unity, passivity, resistance, doctrine, systems, plasticity, and others. The most frequently reported factors discussed by the participants fell into the following themes: stagnation, vision, discipleship, adaptability, teamwork, and leadership. Other frequently reported factors fell into the themes of recruitment and the Holy Spirit.

The following are a representation of responses participants shared in relation to questions 1, 3, 4, and 6 of the questionnaire. Pastor A reported that “Once [a] disciple has found their place in the vision of Fuente, he/she is ready to be a captain and guide others. He/she is sent by the principal pastors of the House to serve in their calling and gift.” In similar manner, Pastor B was also able to identify his church’s operational team saying: “Yes, [church B] has a leadership team who are able to articulate the vision of the church and capable of reproducing themselves.” Pastor G also responded, “I have a group of leaders who love the vision and have a function in the area of ministry assigned to them. Also, they have to report their personal struggles and difficulties that they have in training others.” Pastor D explained that one is aware that the church is facing a church growth barrier when the church maintains the same number and same spirituality for years, and “the people don’t worry about it growing or not.” In relation to the theme of adaptability, Pastor C identified additional barriers such as the resistance to change and

the failure of the church to recognize discipline, accountability, and abandoning bad habits as necessary elements of successful church growth.

Figure 2. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 1, 3, 4, and 6 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

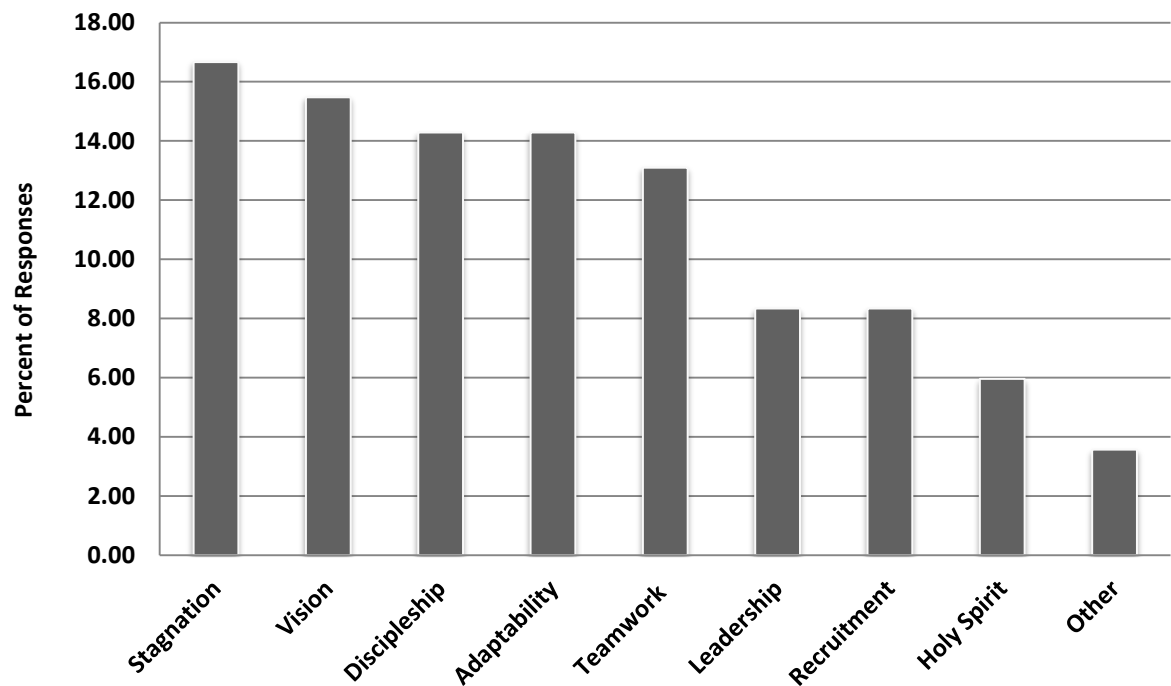


Chart 1. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 1, 3, 4, and 6 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

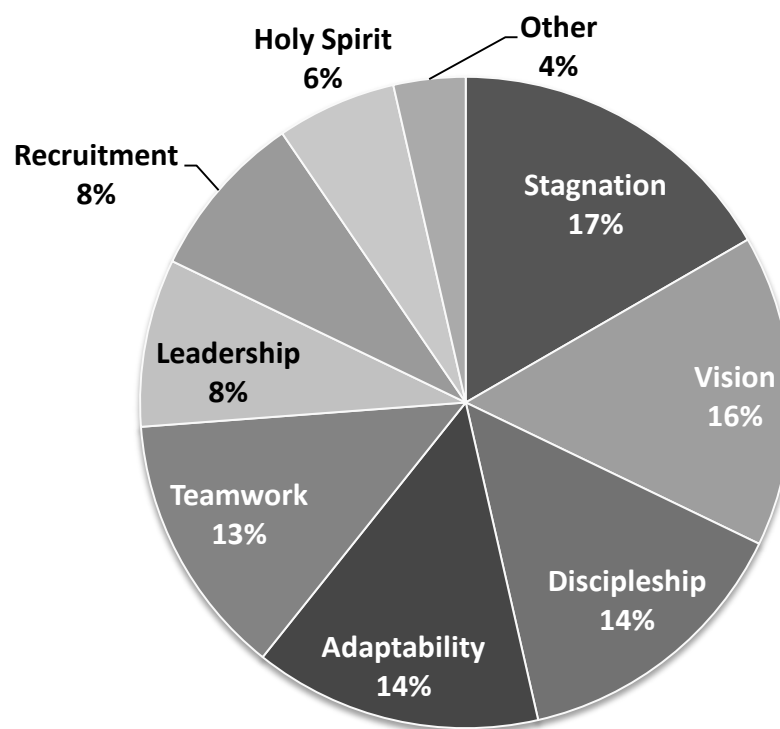


Table 2. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 1, 3, 4, and 6 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Stagnation	16.67
Vision	15.48
Discipleship	14.29
Adaptability	14.29
Teamwork	13.10
Leadership	8.33
Recruitment	8.33
Holy Spirit	5.95
Other	3.57

Research Question #2. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is below fifty?

In order to better understand the perceived factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference with an average attendance below fifty, the participants were asked questions 5 and 7 of the questionnaire.

The written responses on the questionnaires were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number two, a total of 48 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentages of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 3). For example, vision and training were the themes with the most commonly mentioned factors; each accounted for 16.7% of the factors mentioned. In contrast, tradition was the theme with least number of mentioned factors, being addressed only 8.33% of the time. 4% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: external influence, home groups, inward focus, social focus, relevant worship, and spirituality.

The following are a representation of responses participants shared in relation to questions 5 and 7 of the questionnaire. Pastor E stated that “[a] touch from God in the heart of people is what provokes commitment first with the Vision and then the Mission of the Church.” Pastor F mentioned the following factors as necessary to breaking growth barriers: “[t]raining, teamwork, [and] multiplication of leaders so there are avenues to continue the vision.” He further explained that “competition among the people” must be addressed due to the small number of the Hispanic population in his context. In response to question 7, Pastor A stated, “To break the barrier of fifty a clear ministerial process

must be established for developing leaders who can expand the work [of God].” To the same end, Pastor B stressed the importance of training leadership: “Change begins with the local leadership; all leaders should be retrained each time new church members total 50.”

Figure 3. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 5 and 7 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

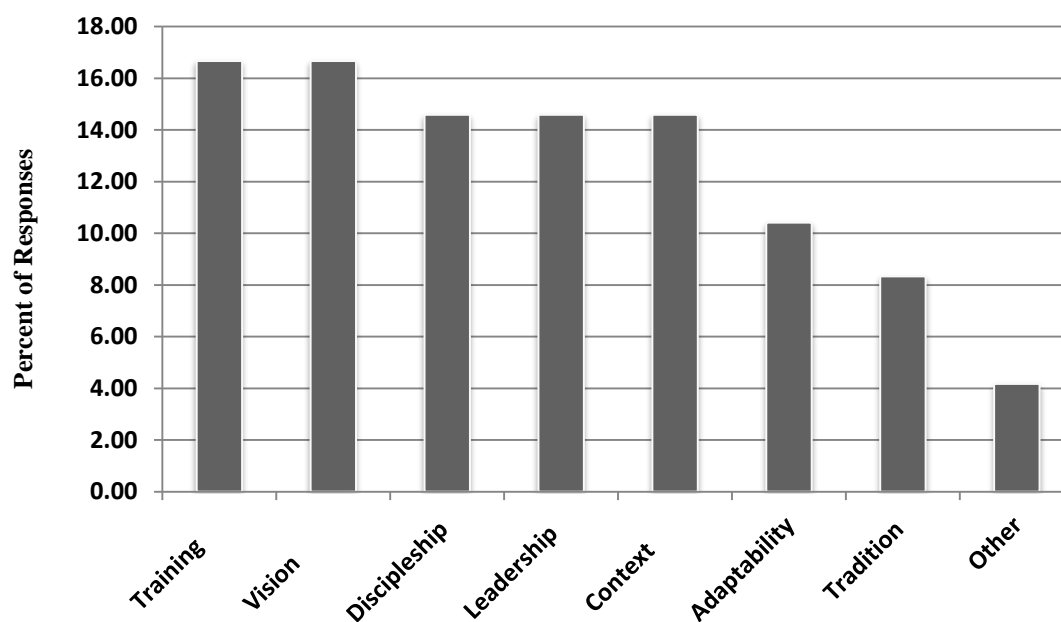


Chart 2. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 5 and 7 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

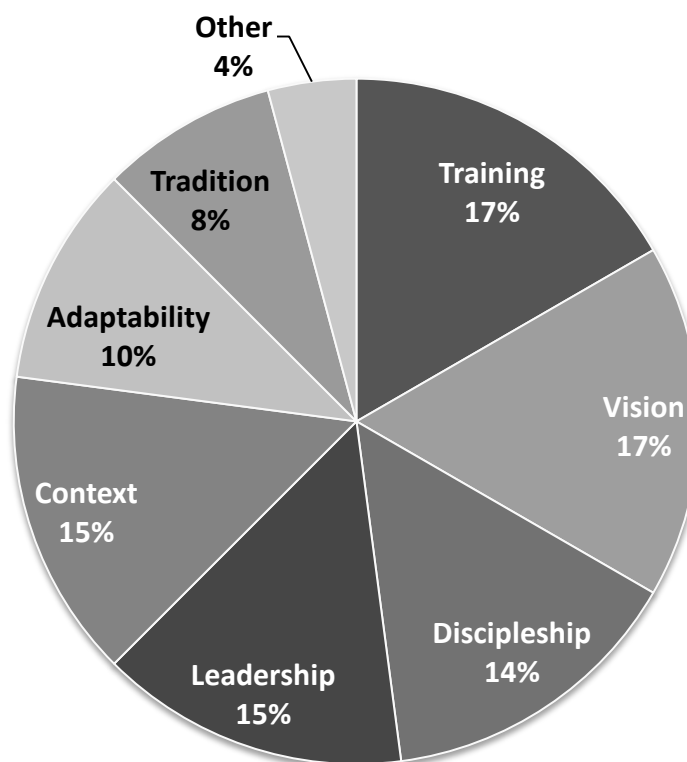


Table 3. Percentages of Responses in Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 5 and 7 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Training	16.67
Vision	16.67
Discipleship	14.58
Leadership	14.58
Context	14.58
Adaptability	10.42
Tradition	8.33
Other	4.17

Research Question #3. What contributing factors, if any, stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference?

In order to better understand the perceived best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, the participants were asked questions 5 and 7 of the questionnaire.

The written responses on the questionnaires were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number three, a total of 58 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 4). For example, modeling was the theme with the most commonly mentioned factors, accounting for 37.9% of the factors mentioned. In contrast, evangelism was the theme with the least number of mentioned factors, being addressed only 6.9% of the time. 3.5% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: kingdom mentality, covenant, administration, discernment, and charisma to name a few.

The following are a representation of responses participants shared in relation to questions 2 and 8 of the questionnaire. In response to question 2, Pastor B stated that “an effective church planter should be a leader full of the Holy Spirit; one must have the ministry of teaching (Teacher) and be a person who prays and knows [the] Bible.” In similar manner, Pastor C stated in relation to modeling, “Consistency and constancy in teaching that which our community suffers, [modeling] good habits and revaluing integrity and Christian principles ...” In addition, pastor A shared a testimony about her church’s best practices, “mentoring the leaders committed to the vision is a fundamental

aspect of church growth best practices, which includes: training, follow up, accountability and personal development.” In turn, pastor G added addressing the importance of vision, prayer, evangelism, and teaching for church growth by saying, “The best practices for church growth for me would be to endlessly teach the vision to each believer to join us, to never neglect biblical teachings, prayer and fasting as part of the life of the church.

Evangelism which is to continue what Jesus did and does in lives and be a good witness.”

In contrast, contrary to the research finding of modeling as the most prominent factor theme, Pastor D emphasizes preaching, fasting, praying, and evangelism as the most important theme factors for church growth best practices, to which he adds: “Preach-Fast and Pray. The Church discusses an infinity of projects, formulas, steps, etc. But in my opinion if the Church would fulfill the Great Commission [to go and preach] it would be enough, it was Jesus’ example and command.”

Figure 4. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 2 and 8 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

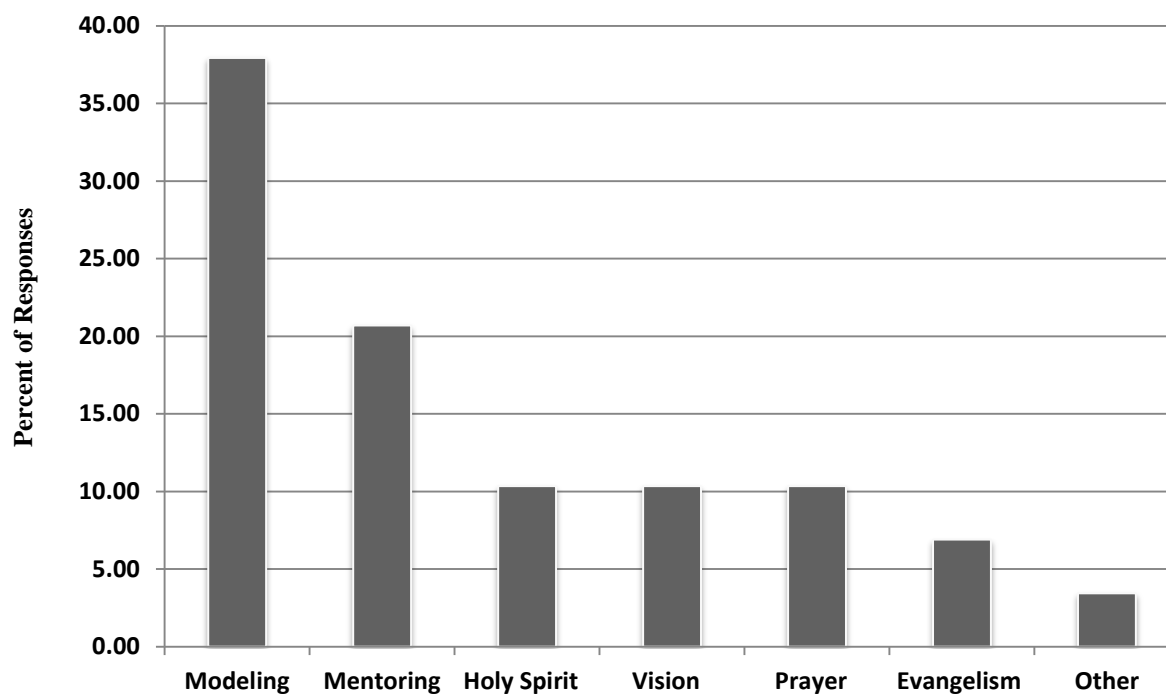


Chart 3. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 2 and 8 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

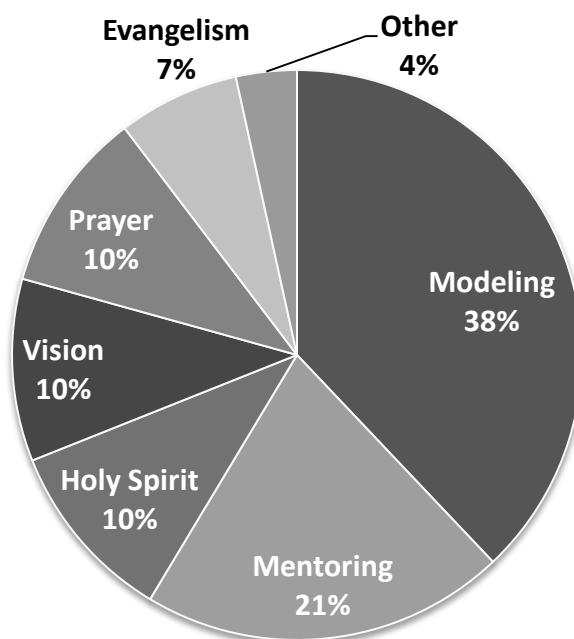


Table 4. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 2 and 8 on the Questionnaires ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Modeling	37.93
Mentoring	20.69
Holy Spirit	10.34
Vision	10.34
Prayer	10.34
Evangelism	6.90
Other	3.45

Interview Data

Research Question #1. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is above fifty?

In order to better understand the perceived factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference with an average attendance over fifty, the participants were asked to answer questions 1 and 2 of the interview.

The oral responses in the individual interviews were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number three a total of 85 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 5). For example, training and leadership were the themes with the most commonly mentioned factors, each accounting for 17.7% of the factors mentioned. In contrast, the Holy Spirit was the theme with the least number of factors mentioned, being addressed only 5.9% of the time. 2.4% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: small groups, home groups, self-differentiation, priorities, and low education.

In supporting the findings, Pastor A shared, “The most difficult challenges about church growth in my experience are: leadership training, keeping the leadership focused and growing spiritually, and commitment to the vision; but also lack of conflict resolution skills in the head pastor” on the one hand, as well as “lack of clarity in vision, instability due to employment, burn out because of lack of communication, and resting” on the other. Above all else, Pastor A identified autocratic leadership as a negative leadership

style. He defined an autocratic leader as a “leader who does not delegate to other leaders, and seek to control everything.” In contrast, Pastor A stated that “the mentality of seeing oneself as a spiritual father and mother of others, [being] legacy oriented, being a mentor, [and] investing in others” are positive leadership styles, further adding that [one must] “see others as an extension of the ministry in Christ teaching [others] to love, forgive, listen, be merciful, learn to resolve conflicts, communication, personal development, open to new things, [and} the practice of spiritual disciplines.”

Pastor B, while discussing difficult factors regarding church growth in Kentucky, mentioned “lack of adaptability, openness, implementation of new growth strategies, lack of restructuring the leadership, failure to evaluate the vision in relation to results, open to new ways of doing ministry.” In addition, Pastor B finds that “one of the big factors affecting growth would be the instability of church membership due to their immigration status, employment ...” He went on to say, “Another key factor I see in my context is our economy—our finances—as a big limitation for church growth, ministry development, and evangelism in Kentucky.” Furthermore, in relation to question 2 about positive styles of leadership Pastor B stressed that “a leadership team philosophy is key for church growth, along with vision and unity. In other words, we must be all working together toward one goal and purpose to accomplish our church vision. Besides, I see a need to delegate to the church leadership in a way that they can lead the church in the absence of the senior pastor, with a self-reproducible DNA.”

Pastor C, on the other hand, established based on his experience that “the inability of the leadership to connect with people, but furthermore the inability of the church leadership as a whole to connect with other people in the congregation and in the

community due to culture barriers prevent church growth from happening in our context. ...I also see it difficult to grow a church without allowing the Holy Spirit to lead the pastor, the leadership and the congregation into a new vision according to God's will for that community." Pastor C further shared: "Another factor is the focus on money. As a result, the Hispanic people work many jobs; many employment shifts to reach the personal agendas they had when they left their countries." In addition to the factors of employment and jobs schedules, Pastor C also mentioned media, cultural sins, and competition among church leaders "which, far from uniting the Body of Christ, divides us." An increasingly common theme in Pastor C's context was that of tradition: "I have been affected by the view of the Methodist Church as Catholic among the Hispanic people because many of the immigrants coming to United States are from a radical evangelical background and resist any Catholic influences."

Figure 5. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 1 and 2 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

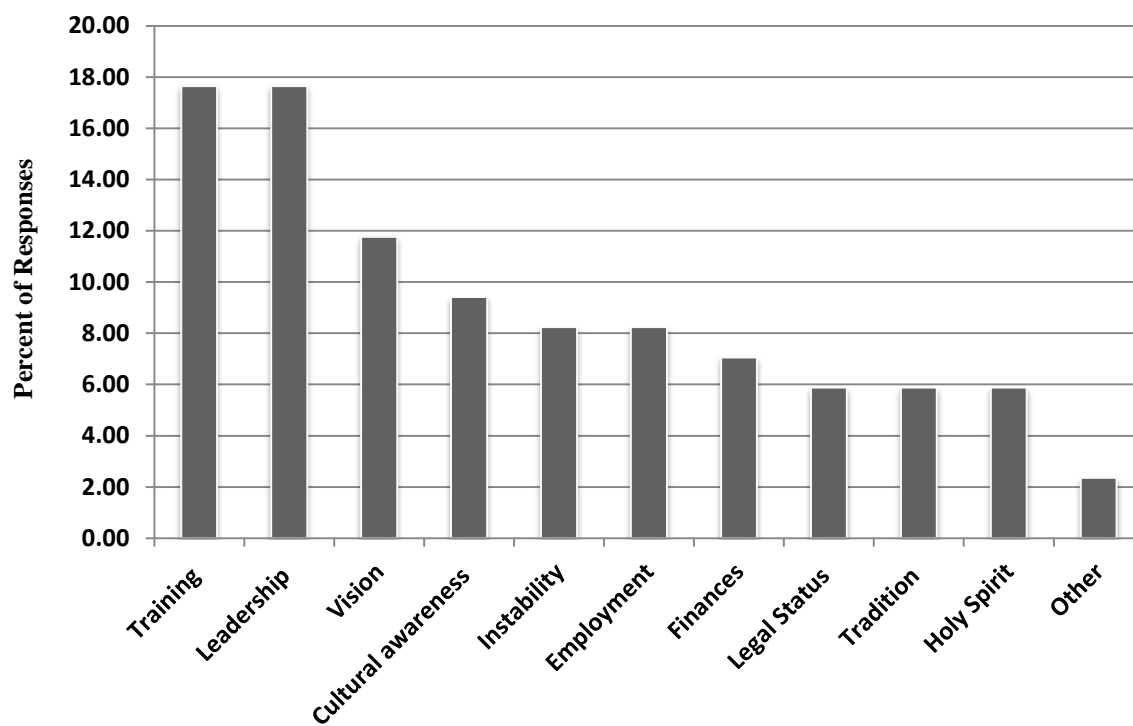


Chart 4. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 1 and 2 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

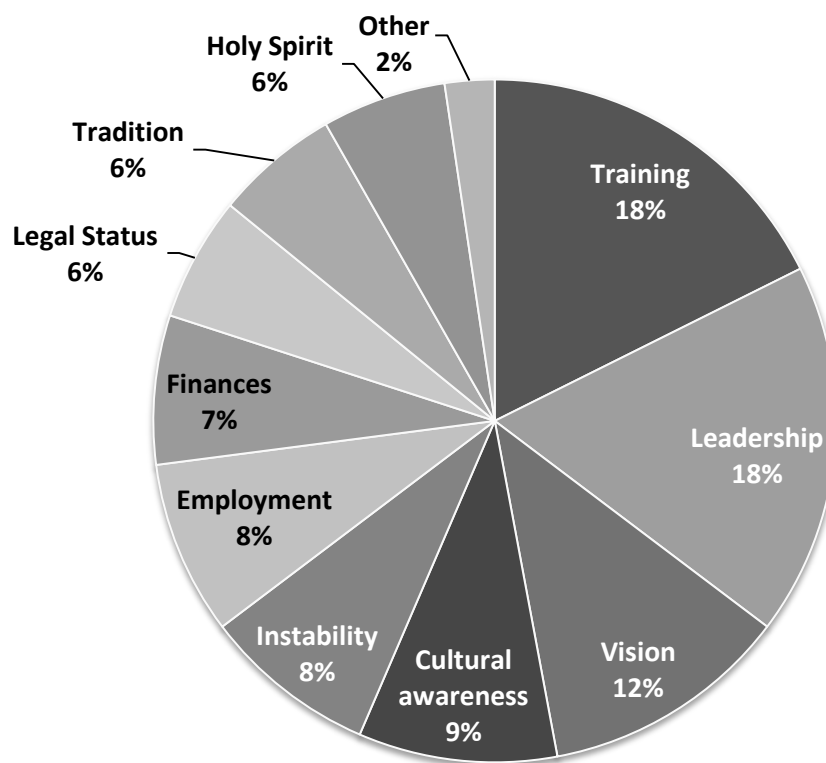


Table 5. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 1 and 2 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Training	17.65
Leadership	17.65
Vision	11.76
Cultural awareness	9.41
Instability	8.24
Employment	8.24
Finances	7.06
Legal Status	5.88
Tradition	5.88
Holy Spirit	5.88
Other	2.35

Research Question #2. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is below fifty?

In order to better understand the perceived factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference with an average attendance under fifty, participants were asked questions 3 and 4 of the interview. The seven participants were asked, “If your church is not growing beyond fifty in worship attendance, can you explain reasons why not?” Participants serving churches with average worship attendance below fifty were directed to answer according to their current context and participants serving churches with average worship attendance above fifty were directed to answer retrospectively according to their experience serving in the same

context before their churches broke the barrier of fifty. Their responses were coded to identify themes, and frequency counts were gathered to show how many of the participants mentioned each theme.

The oral responses in the individual interviews were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number three, a total of 83 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 6). For example, modeling and autocracy were the themes with the most commonly mentioned factors, each accounting for 16.9% of factors mentioned. In contrast, location was the theme with the least number of factors mentioned, being addressed only 3.6% of the time. 2.4% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: pride, lack of systems, irrelevant preaching, and lack of practice of the spiritual disciplines.

In relation to questions 3 and 4, Pastor A shared that factors affecting growth include “autocratic leadership, a solo team leader mentality, self-centered leadership, lack of delegation, avoiding conflict, lack of listening skills, and pride.” He continued, “[O]ne fundamental factor I have experienced is allowing small family group clans within the church, which keeps frequent attenders from embracing new people. But also gossip, lack of follow up, lack of goals, lack of plans, and lack of accountability [affect growth]”. Pastor B identified factors such as “lack of responsibility, lack of commitment, lack of sharing the vision, and imparting to others the vision of the church on a consistent basis.” He added, “Some factors causing us to lose leaders are also: church doctrine and tradition—for example ‘infant baptism’—because our community comes from many church traditions. ...I see resistance to the church’s vision, plans and goals as an

important factor, as well as a church where the pastor does not do everything as the solo heroic leader. [Another factor is] the spiritual life of the leader: their personal testimony in the community, but also in his/her family.”

Regarding negative leadership styles, Pastor E mentioned, “A leader who does not model commitment, a leader who is only interested in his salary, a leader with no passion; a leader who is not able to connect with people nor inspire the congregation to come to them as their spiritual leader; a leader who is a bad administrator of human resources and finances; finally, a leader who recruits leaders based on friendship rather than gifts and graces.” Toward this end, Pastor E also pointed out some obstacles to breaking the barrier of fifty in worship attendance as “the location of the building, the demographics around the church in relation to the target audience. Foremost, the lack of a solid and mature leadership team affects church growth negatively in my context; a leadership team that it is not committed to the pastor’s vision for church growth and size.” Based on his experience, Pastor E added that “there are a lack of effective church growth models for small churches in our context to break the barrier of fifty.” Pastor F also shared on negative styles of leadership, saying, “The instability of our context affects our leadership retention and church growth. Also, [there is] lack of meaningful relationships due to our transient community; but one of the most significant factors for us...is family conflict. Our community comes from Veracruz and are family related, so they bring here the same family context and dynamics they had back in Mexico.”

Regarding the factors preventing breaking the barrier of fifty, Pastor F shared: “Lack of commitment of the congregation—they are affected by a profound lack of responsibility to share the church burden, lack of evangelism, inadequate church location, and

employment, [and the fact that] we only have 150 thousand people in our community with four Hispanic churches actively serving our context.”

Figure 6. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 3 and 4 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

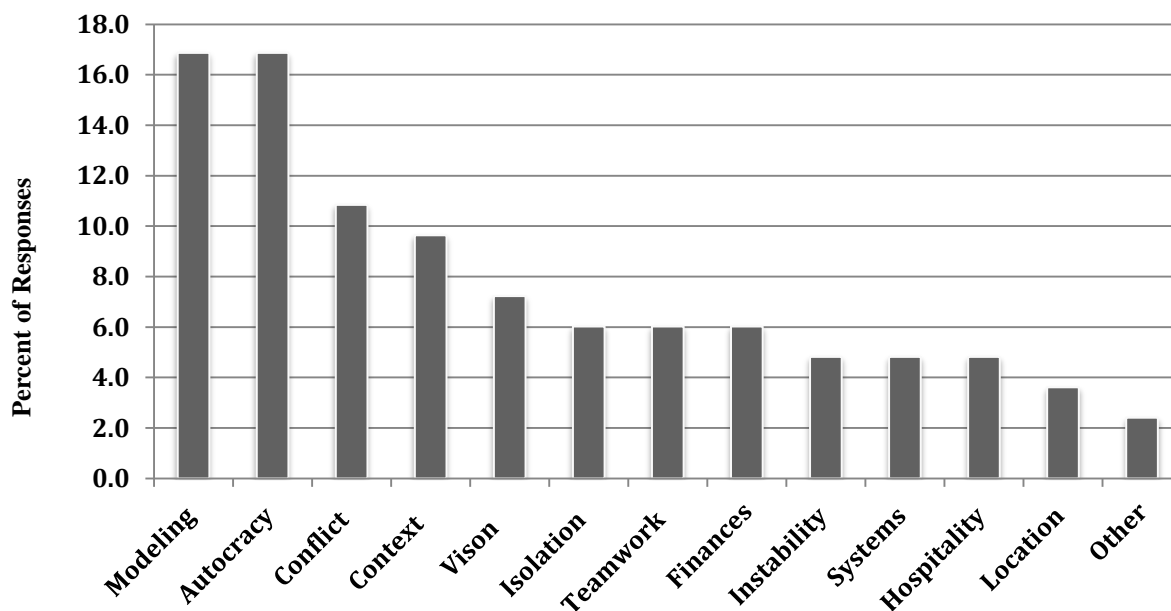


Chart 5. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 3 and 4 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

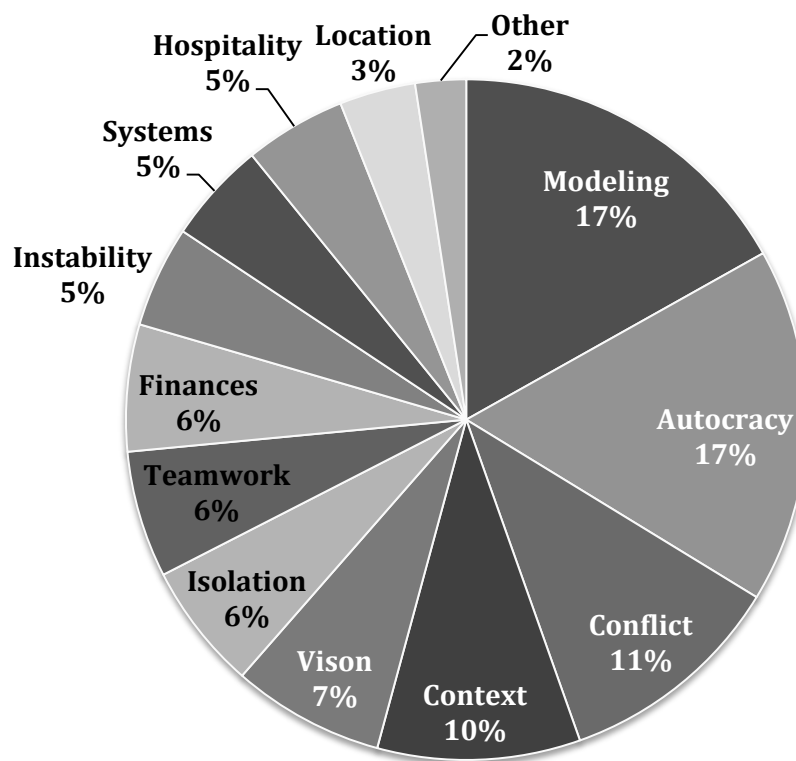


Table 6. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 3 and 4 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Modeling	16.9
Autocracy	16.9
Conflict	10.8
Context	9.6
Vison	7.2
Isolation	6.0
Teamwork	6.0
Finances	6.0
Instability	4.8
Systems	4.8
Hospitality	4.8
Location	3.6
Other	2.4

Research Question #3. What contributing factors, if any, stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference?

In order to better understand the perceived best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, participants were asked questions 5, 6, and 7 of the interview.

The oral responses in the individual interviews were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number three a total of 125 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 7). For example,

discipleship was the theme with the most commonly mentioned factors, accounting for 25.6% of factors mentioned. In contrast, leadership was the theme with the least number of factors mentioned, being addressed only 7.2% of the time. 3.2% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: goals, follow up, critical mass, programs, boundaries, and communication to name a few.

Regarding best practices for church growth in Hispanic churches in Kentucky, Pastor G shared that “a balance [must occur] between church growth based on numbers, discipleship, spiritual disciplines, doctrine, and outreach. ... If I had the opportunity to start again, I would focus on spiritual disciplines, the community, and an outward focus to the city. Also, another good thing would be that I would invest more time with my leadership, rather than other people who are not committed.” Pastor A affirmed, “Cooperation between small and big churches is very helpful in our context to break church growth barriers. Among other best practices, I see outreach efforts in the community and the world through programs targeting different population segments, like single mothers, families, and youth. In addition, modeling love, patience, focusing more on leadership, being more aware of my context [and] my people’s needs, and [knowing] community resources available to serve our congregations.” Pastor B listed several factors as best practices, including “modeling spirituality of the leader along with a multiplication mentality, evangelism, and focusing on reaching the world for Christ; besides a clear vision, leadership development [is also important]—training and retraining the leadership. Lastly, I see modeling self-development, learning from other mentors, [and] good stewardship of finances as very important keys for church growth in our context.” Pastor C clarified best practices in his experience as “focusing on disciples

rather than members; outreach through church planting [that is] focusing on the number of disciples, not on members. Membership does not guarantee discipleship.”

Pastor E shared that a balance between social works and evangelism in outreach is key for outreach to be considered a best practice. He explained, “I spent too much time helping people with their social needs, and most of the time they never commit with our church vision. I learned the hard way that I am a pastor not a social worker. I learned to focus more on spiritual needs rather than social work to make true disciples.” Pastor F emphasized the need to go back to the New Testament to learn best practices, expressing the need for “a new emphasis in the gospel of Christ, a new model of church for the congregation and the community, the true meaning of evangelism and outreach in relation with true discipleship [as] best practices for church growth. But above all, creating a new culture through discipleship, small groups, team development, home groups, [and] prayer and fasting as a way of life.”

Figure 7. Percentages of Responses of Best Practices for the Questions 5, 6 and 7 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

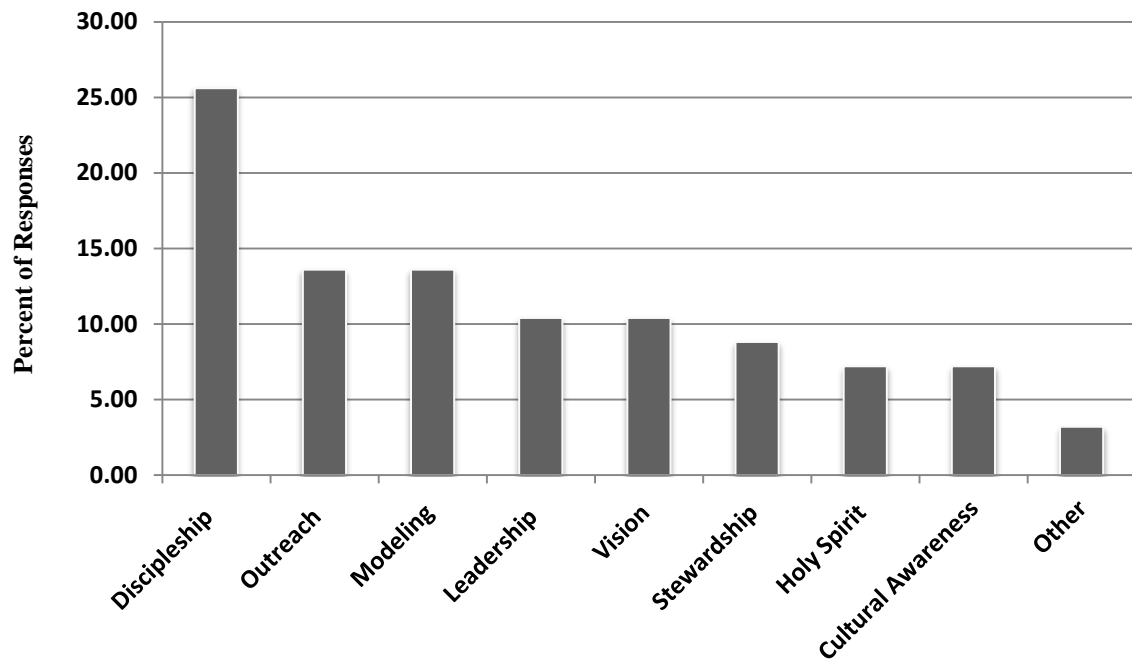


Chart 6. Percentages of Responses of Best Practices for the Questions 5, 6 and 7 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

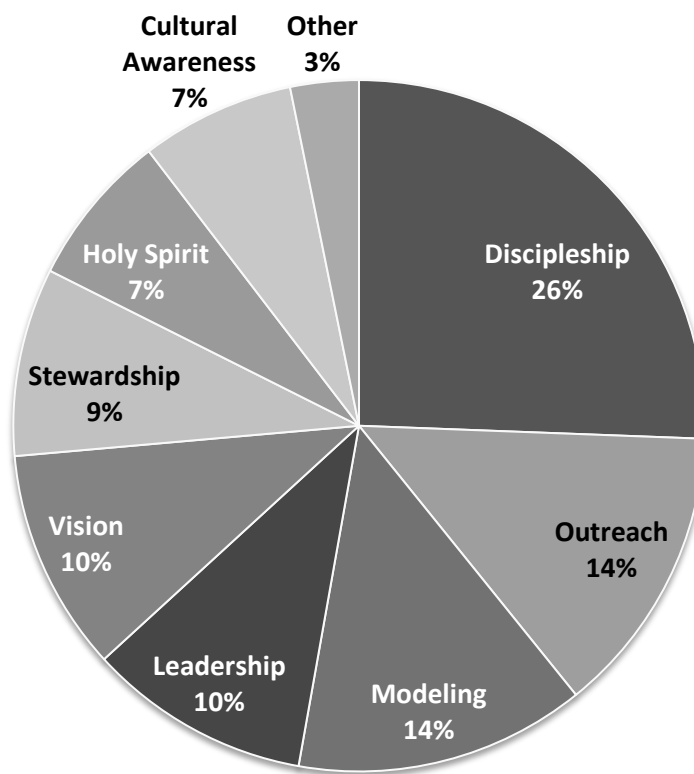


Table 7. Percentages of Responses of Best Practices for the Questions 5, 6 and 7 in the Interviews ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Discipleship	25.60
Outreach	13.60
Modeling	13.60
Leadership	10.40
Vision	10.40
Stewardship	8.80
Holy Spirit	7.20
Cultural Awareness	7.20
Other	3.20

Focus Group Data

Research Question #1. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is above fifty?

In order to better understand the perceived factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference with an average attendance over fifty, participants were asked questions 1 and 2 of the focus group sessions.

The oral responses in the focus groups were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research question number one, a total of 97 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 8). For example, modeling was the theme with the most commonly mentioned factors, accounting for 22.7% of the factors

mentioned, followed by cultural awareness, accounting for 18.56 %. In contrast, the building was the theme with the least number of factors mentioned, being addressed only 3.1% of the time. Notably, 2.1% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: mentality, language, responsibility, testimony, identity, and competition.

Pastor G addressed the factor theme of modeling by stating: “I think in that area something important is the testimony of the Pastor’s family, which can affect people positively or negatively. But we are talking about positive things now. One’s testimony is important to people—of the pastor and of his family, not just the pastor.” Pastor F agreed with Pastor G and added in the context of modeling: “One positive thing in ministry life is multiplication of leaders. When you have an intimate group around you who know your vision and your mission, they take charge of passing it along to others.” Following this trend of thought, Pastor C also added, “Another positive quality of a leader is their personal integrity. It’s a necessary quality lacking in this world. When a pastor has integrity in private and in public, their ministry advances and prospers.” To that end, Pastor B emphasized, “I believe a leader at any level—especially in church, where we have all types of people—a leader is the first at everything, even in arriving early to church. It’s a way to generate credibility, trust of the people, and then that people would follow you.”

On the other hand, in relation to cultural awareness for example, Pastor D stated, “I think another concern when beginning a ministry must do with culture. If someone is going to start a ministry they must immerse themselves in the culture that they will be developing their ministry in, to learn and adapt.” Pastor C went on expanding the thought, sharing, “Sometimes due to cultural prejudices they don’t reach other cultures,

or even talk to them. So, supporting what you are saying, if the Hispanic people would ‘de-culturize’ themselves from their own cultures and take in a new culture—because here we lose 80% of our own culture to take on the culture of this country—it could be beneficial because it is an obstacle, a barrier that is here every day.” In similar manner, Pastor A also added, “It’s a priority that all nationalities have, that ‘my county is better than yours,’ in one way or another.”

Figure 8. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 1 and 2 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

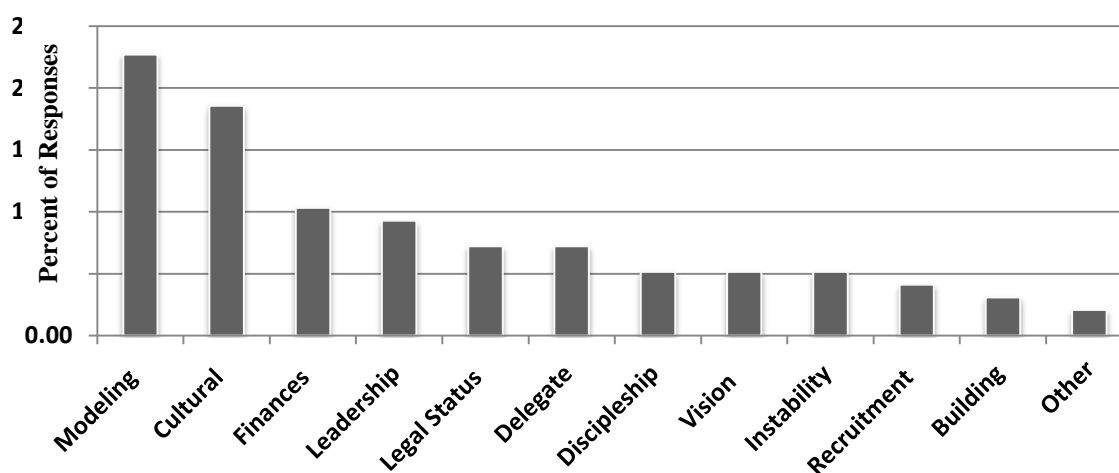


Chart 7. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth
for the Questions 1 and 2 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

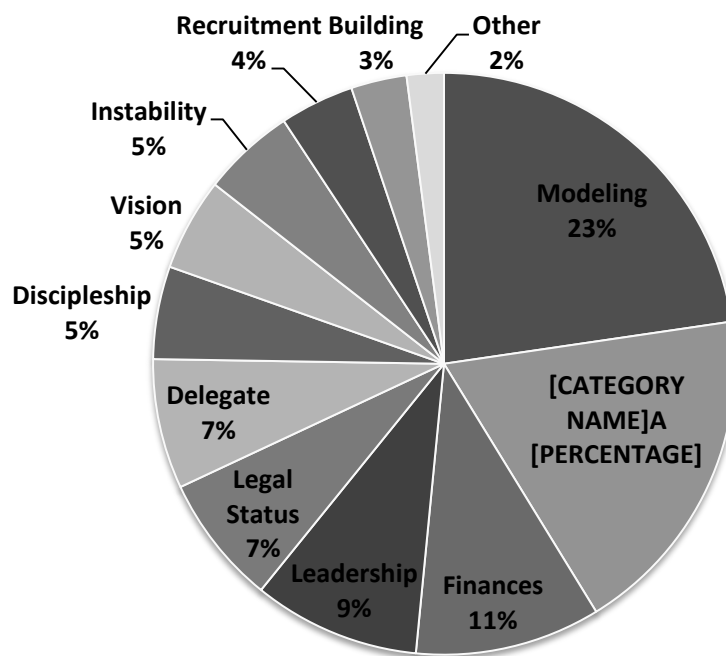


Table 8. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 1 and 2 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Modeling	22.68
Cultural	18.56
Finances	10.31
Leadership	9.28
Legal Status	7.22
Delegate	7.22
Discipleship	5.15
Vision	5.15
Instability	5.15
Recruitment	4.12
Building	3.09
Other	2.06

Research Question #2. What are the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference whose average attendance is below fifty?

In order to better understand the perceived factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference with an average attendance under fifty, participants were asked questions 3 and 4 of the focus group sessions. Our seven participants were asked, “If your church is not growing beyond fifty in worship attendance, can you explain reasons why not?” Participants serving churches with average worship attendance below fifty were directed to answer according to their current context and participants serving churches with average worship attendance above

fifty were directed to answer retrospectively according to their experience serving in the same context before their churches broke the barrier of fifty. Their responses were coded to identify themes, and frequency counts were gathered to show how many of the participants mentioned each theme.

The oral responses in the focus groups were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research questions numbers 3 and 4 a total of 68 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 9). For example, leadership was the theme with the most commonly mentioned factors, accounting for 36.8% of factors mentioned. In contrast, adaptability and spiritual disciplines were the themes with the least number of factors mentioned, each being addressed only 5.9% of the time. 4.4% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: lack of retention, conflict management, lack of commitment, lack of organization, and lack of meaningful relationships.

Regarding leadership, Pastor G said, “I think one thing is when the leader doesn’t have a clear vision, who doesn’t know well what they’re doing. If they don’t have a clear vision they are impaired because they don’t have solidity in what they’re doing and other people can perceive that.” Pastor A added as well that “an irresponsible leader has everything going against him because he doesn’t live up to the very expectations that the church is looking for as a leader.” In turn, Pastor D pointed out in his experience that “I think what is negative for growth and in the life of a pastor is that ideal concept congregations have of a pastor. Sometimes they have an idea about the ideal pastor and think of them as plastic—someone who doesn’t feel, who doesn’t go through difficult

situations, who doesn't have any problems, who doesn't have any needs." Pastor C shared from his heart hard lessons he has learned in ministry regarding leadership: "There is something else about leadership that is especially a concern for male pastors, which is being careful about how we approach women. It is something that could destroy a ministry, among three things that can destroy a ministry: fame, money, and women." In like manner, Pastor A sees this in her own experience: "[One of the] negative leadership styles that I have seen that hurts the church is a controlling style of leader. [This is a] leader who wants to control every little detail, and wants to know everything about everything and if they don't know then they get anxious. It can destroy a church and create an atmosphere of tension within the leadership." Pastor F closed by sharing the consequences of leadership isolation: "Solitary pastors, who feel that they can do it all themselves and don't seek help, think if they share any part of their ministry that another pastor is going to steal it." In addition, Pastor C discussed, "The leadership that doesn't have an agenda but allows others to determine the agenda is a leadership that is 100% focused on failure because you will be running around like firefighters, doing a thousand things but not accomplishing anything."

Pastors of churches under fifty in worship attendance listed several key factors in relation to the data found in Figure 9 and Table 9. Pastor F shared the need to continue developing home groups, but also the use of media to train leaders and keep all of them connected: "In [our location], we have fifty people in worship attendance, however, what has been very helpful to us is home groups, as well as the use of media like the [messenger system] WhatsApp." Pastor G cited instability as one of key factors: "In [our location], the city is very small, therefore it affects job availability causing people to

move frequently seeking better opportunities.” Pastor D continued the subject by adding that “lack of leadership commitment is one of the strongest factors.” Another key element cited was instability in relation to Sunday service attendance, as well as the instability of church shoppers who go around changing churches without having any biblical theological issues for leaving. “We went [as the pastoral staff] to visit a church family at the hospital where their only son went through a major car accident. When we arrived at the hospital we saw many past church members from [our church] gathered there to our surprise.”

Figure 9. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 3 and 4 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

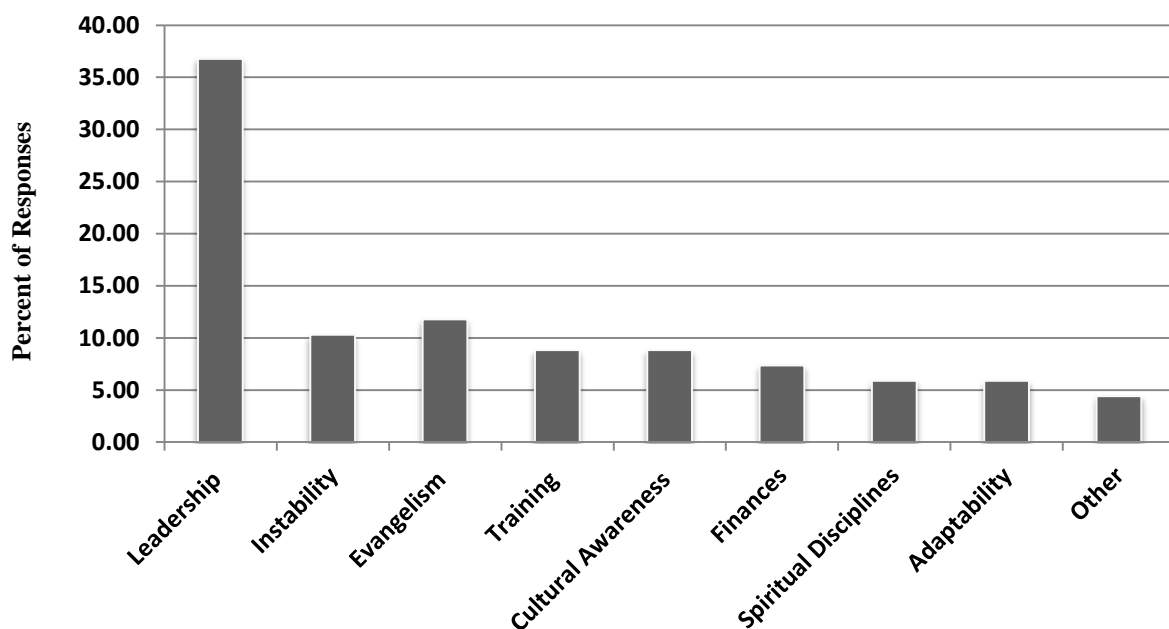


Chart 8. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 3 and 4 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

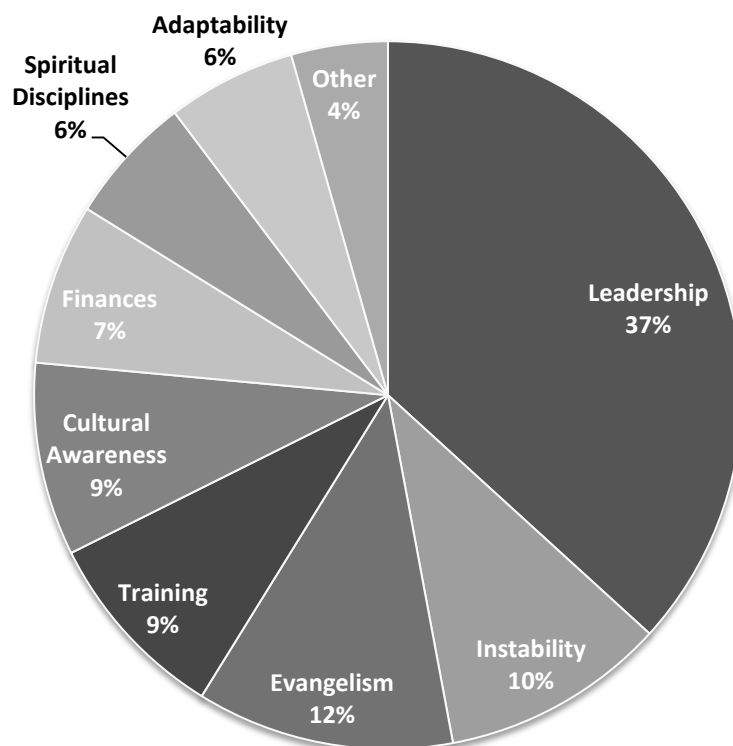


Table 9. Percentages of Responses within Themes of Factors that Impact Growth for the Questions 3 and 4 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Leadership	36.76
Instability	10.29
Evangelism	11.76
Training	8.82
Cultural Awareness	8.82
Finances	7.35
Spiritual Disciplines	5.88
Adaptability	5.88
Other	4.41

Research Question #3. What contributing factors, if any, stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference?

In order to better understand the perceived best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference, participants were asked questions 5, 6, and 7 of the focus group sessions.

The oral responses in the focus groups were coded to identify various themes. Among these responses pertaining to research questions numbers 5, 6, and 7, a total of 110 factors were counted. The following graph shows the percentage of those factors that were coded into each of the identified themes (see Figure 10). For example, modeling was the theme with the most commonly mentioned factors, accounting for 18.2% of factors mentioned. In contrast, social media and stewardship were the themes

with the least number of factors mentioned, each being addressed only 3.6% of the time.

1.8% of the responses did not fit into a larger category, such as: delegate, visitation, home groups, tolerance, humility, focus on families, indigenous leadership, and outward focus.

Megachurches have become one of the most effective models of church growth in our context and the nation. Question 5 of the focus groups addressed this model particularly to study the factors that have impacted growth in megachurches to encourage the participants to think consciously and critically about this church growth model. All participants responded positively to this model. Each viewed megachurches as inspiring and confessed they would all like to have one. In what follows, their voices will be shared to bring light to their comments. For example, pastor D shared, “I would be a hypocrite if I said ‘I don’t want a megachurch’. A megachurch is a dream for all pastors, in my opinion.” Pastor D also clarified that “focusing on numbers is not a fundamental issue; the real issue would be if we don’t pay attention to other factors like relationships, leadership development, maturity, and vision.” Put simply, Pastor F added that “megachurches are good at training people for ministry; however, if we examine [church] history we will not see megachurches leading revivals.” He added, “Revival comes out of small churches, home groups, and the like.” Nevertheless, for Pastor G the most important factors would be evangelism and commitment.

To shine light upon question 3 of this research investigation, participants responded to questions 5, 6, and 7 about best practices for church growth. Pastor G shared vision, commitment, and outreach as key factors in general in relation to modeling and leadership, as well as teamwork and spending time together in order to develop meaningful relationships within the group. With his long ministry as a church planter,

Pastor G encouraged by stating, “If I had to start all over again, I would focus more on leadership only to grow faster.” Looking back, Pastor A shared, “I would be focused on prayer strategies, fasting, home groups, and programs to impact the community for Christ.” Pastor G acknowledged his agreement with Pastor A, adding “I would do my best to focus on the leadership first by doing training, and prayer walks around the city for spiritual warfare” Pastor D added, “Developing good and meaningful relationships in ministry is one of the key factors for church growth.”

Figure 10. Percentages of Responses of Best Practices for the Questions 5, 6 and 7 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

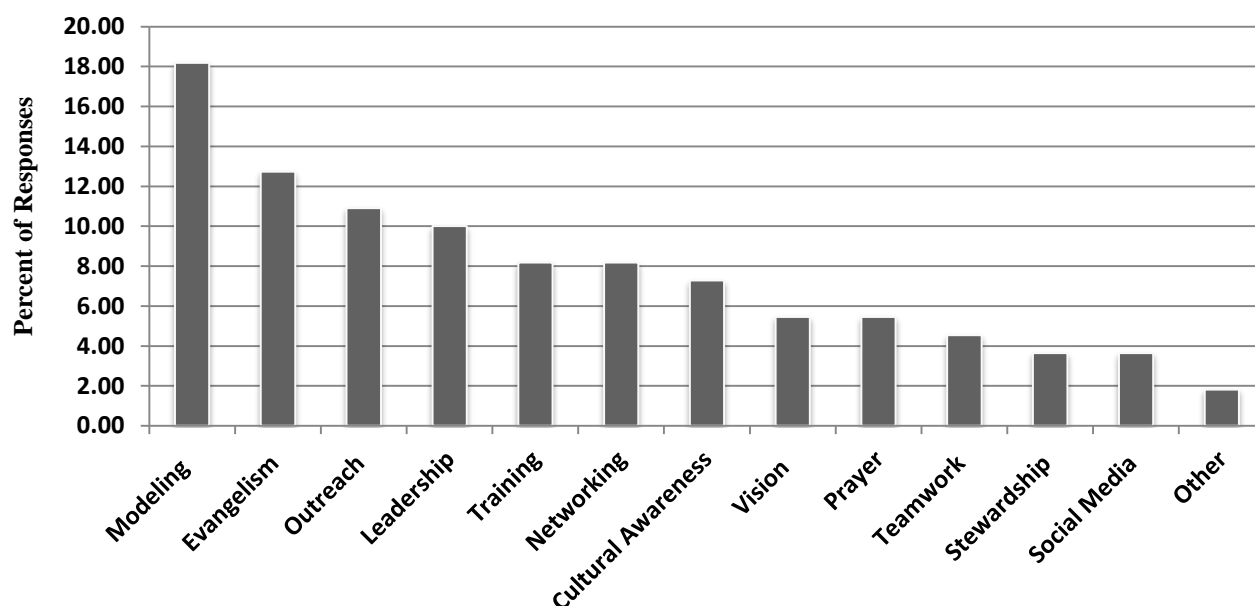


Chart 9. Percentages of Responses of Best Practices for the Questions 5, 6 and 7 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

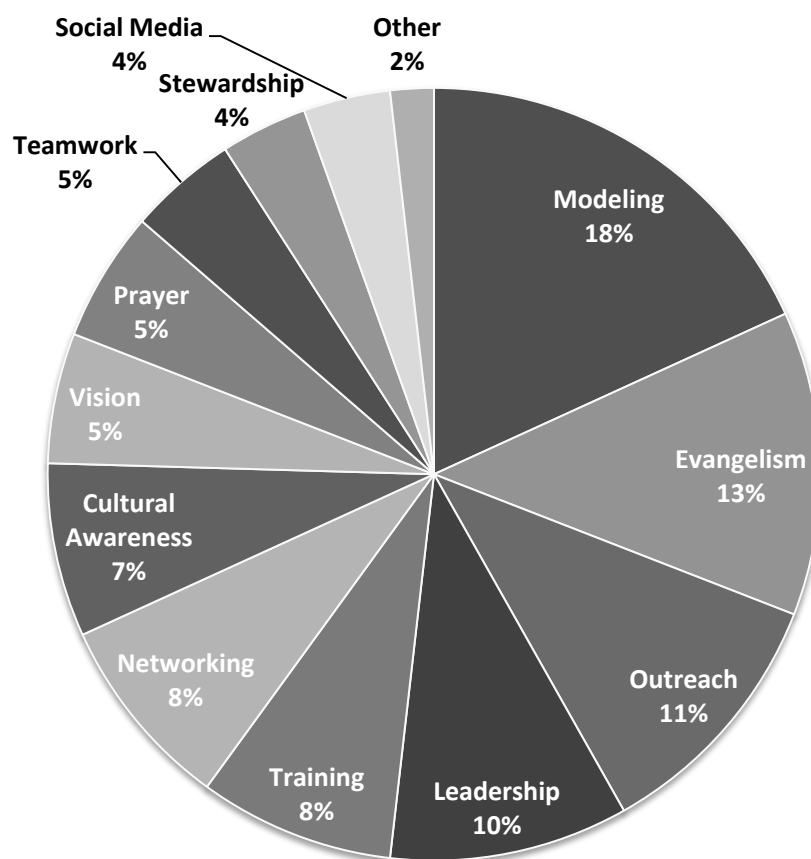


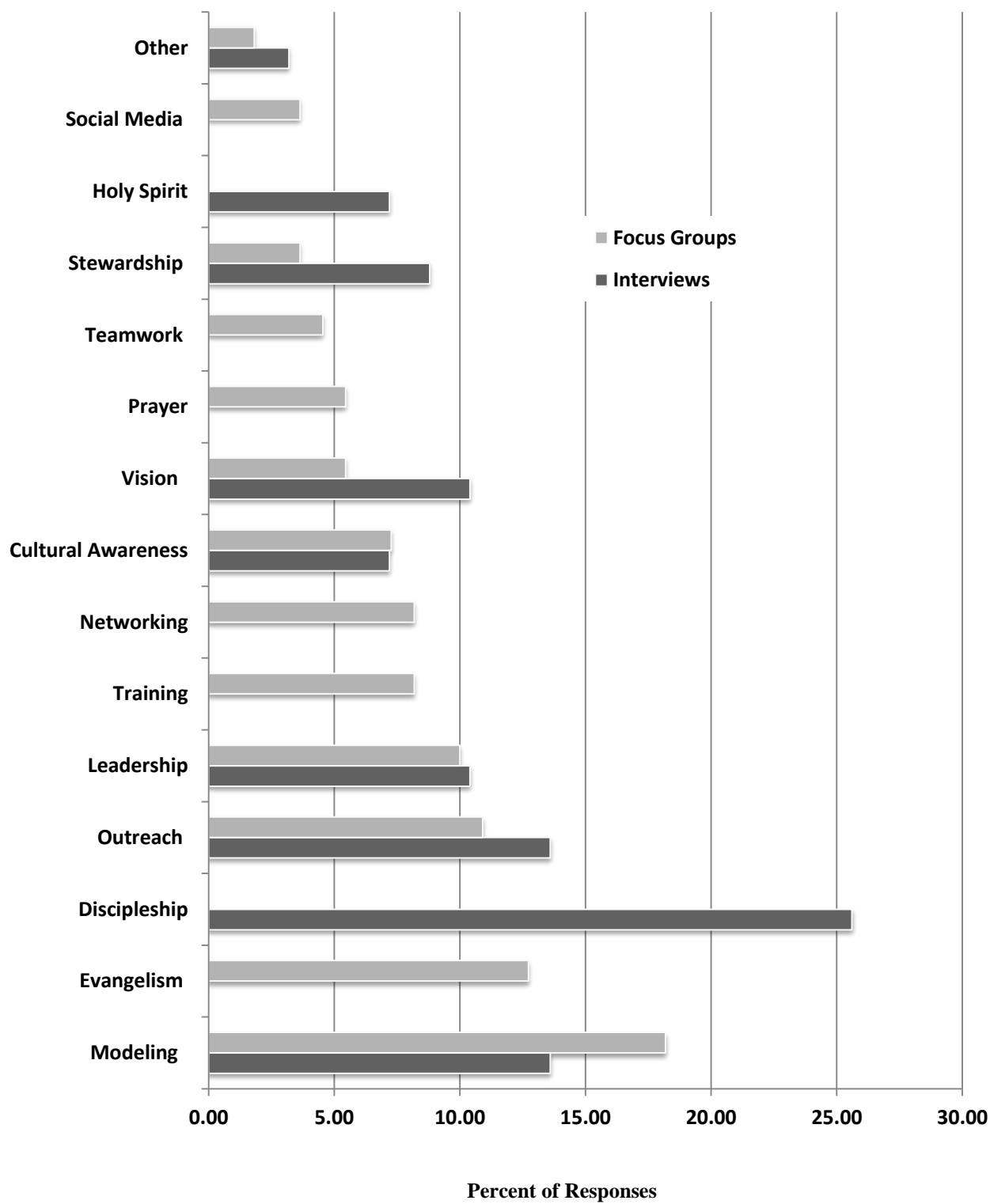
Table 10. Percentages of Responses of Best Practices for the Questions 5, 6 and 7 in the Focus Groups ($n = 7$).

	Percent
Modeling	18.18
Evangelism	12.73
Outreach	10.91
Leadership	10.00
Training	8.18
Networking	8.18
Cultural Awareness	7.27
Vision	5.45
Prayer	5.45
Teamwork	4.55
Stewardship	3.64
Social Media	3.64
Other	1.82

How these focus group responses compare to the interview responses is important to consider (see Figure 11). The largest difference in identifying these themes as important occurs regarding discipleship, which was mentioned in the interviews but not in the focus groups. Similarly, the Holy Spirit was mentioned numerous times during interviews but totally overlooked as a factor during focus groups. Evangelism, on the other hand, was mentioned in the focus groups, but not the interviews. In similar manner, social media was mentioned during focus groups but not at all during individual interviews. Additionally, teamwork, prayer, training, and evangelism were mentioned only during focus groups but never during interviews.

I have emphasized the factor themes that were mentioned or not mentioned in comparison with interviews and focus groups in relation to questions 5, 6, and 7 from the question set used for both the interviews and focus groups, which correspond to research question number three. Furthermore, I have found in collecting the data some additional factors which surfaced in both settings—within the personal interviews as well as within the focus groups. For example, stewardship, vision, cultural awareness, and leadership stood out during both the personal interviews and the focus groups. Garnering special interest was discipleship during interviews and evangelism for the participants as they reflected on questions 5, 6, and 7.

Figure 11. Percentages of Responses of Various Best Practices in the Focus Groups and Interviews ($n = 7$).



Summary of Major Findings

Five specific findings warrant further exploration in Chapter 5 from the three research questions presented in Chapter 3 regarding identifying the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The questionnaire, as well as the interviews and focus groups, revealed the following five main factors which impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference:

- vision
- discipleship
- leadership
- evangelism
- cultural awareness

Accordingly, it is also significantly important to highlight that the comparison between interviews and focus group responses also established the above mentioned major findings as the direct contributing factors that stand out as best practices for church growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Finally, it is important to mention that other less significantly discussed factors such as the ministry of the Holy Spirit, tradition, spiritual disciplines, and the use of social media were discovered as minor findings in the course of this research.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. In Chapter 5 all pieces of the puzzle come together in a powerful integration of the discoveries found through the three research questions and the instruments implemented in answering these: the questionnaire, the interviews, and the focus groups. The literature review, the biblical framework, and personal observations were used to examine the five major findings that emerged from the previous chapter: vision, leadership, discipleship, evangelism, and cultural awareness. These factors that impact church growth have been measured, revealing valuable results worthy of consideration for present and future endeavors in church planting and development of Hispanic United Methodist churches in the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Major Findings

Vision

Biblical and Theological Framework

As I bring the biblical/theological framework in this project to examine vision as a major research finding in Chapter 4, I see many relational aspects worthy of exploring further in bringing this project to closure. In Chapter 2, Guder et al speak into the importance of God's mission and vision for the Western context. He points out that God's mission is radical and inclusive of all humanity; therefore, the purpose of the

Church of Christ is to be God's instrument of gathering the souls for transformation to the image of Christ, for the Church to be the vehicle through which God accomplishes His vision of salvation among us. This principle is consistent with the findings in Chapter 4 where pastors acknowledged God as the initiator and executor of His own mission and vision. We are collaborators and partners in bringing God's dream to fulfillment for our generation. Stetzer, on the other hand, affirms and expands this trend of thought adding that to remain faithful to God's vision we must reclaim our missional heritage—founded and originated in the triune God.

In his writing, Tennent elaborates the triune understandings of the *Missio Dei* demanding that there be no compromise with the status-quo, where the status quo is challenged to provoke deep significant changes in our churches, regardless of the denomination or culture, to the image of Christ. In this regard, I see how the Hispanic United Methodist pastors in the Kentucky Annual Conference have embraced the responsibility of giving birth to what Stetzer and Wright explain as a missiological movement for the transformation of the world. In similar manner, Carder and Warner specify that the vision of God for salvation not only targets individual transformation but also our relationship with one another. This study also confirms Carder and Warner's approach to salvation, as it was found that each of the church vision statements given by the pastors indicate both transformation of individuals through personal discipleship development and transformation of the world through preaching of the gospel and formation of disciples who in turn make more disciples. Following the same trend of thought, Goheen resonates with the previous authors by pointing out that Jesus did not send us to make disciples of individuals but of communities.

The biblical theological truth depicted in Chapter 5 from Chapter 2 transcend cultural differences, including the data for this project based within Hispanic United Methodist churches of the Kentucky Annual Conference. Hirsch encourages us to accept the challenge that regardless of the culture and language of the church, we must bring some aspects of our worldviews, values, and customs under the Lordship of Christ. In other words, we are called to exercise the “kenosis” explained by David Noel Freedman, Allen C Myers, and Astrid B Beck as the act of emptying ourselves as did Jesus, who became human to effectively impact the culture on earth. In similar manner, if we are to be effective in following Jesus’ steps in being countercultural in our vision for salvation of all humankind, we also must empty ourselves from any baggage that would impede the manifestation of God’s vision for the 21st Century in Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Literature Review and Personal Observations

Sullivan addresses vision as a factor that affects churches that remain small in Chapter 2, along with limited leadership, which is the next factor that will be discussed as we unfold the major findings of this project. As the participants pointed out on several occasions, vision is directly related to a desire to do God’s will. God’s vision starts with a commitment to His will and calling on our lives as a church and as leaders. In describing the top ten characteristics of small churches, Crandall highlights “the lack of vision to do God’s will.” In doing so, Crandall uses the life and ministry of Moses as an example of a visionary leader who chooses time after time to do the will of God over common sense and over pleasing people. At times, God requested the impossible from him; however, he never thought of disobeying God’s vision of freedom as an option.

The vision process is nothing more than the act of discovering God's designs for a life, a city, or a nation. God, by His Spirit, reveals designs hidden since before the earth's creation, according to Genesis 1. At the same time, through God's creative power, the human spirit is activated to see in the Spirit what—until that moment—had not yet been revealed, due to sin in the person's life, circumstances, lack of interest in God, or simply being outside of His will and time. The difference between dream and vision based on this study is clear. Visions from God are backed by a clear and defined design that carry them to fulfillment. The vision is accompanied by an intentional process to make things happen. A vision of God recruits brave men and women for its cause like these Hispanic pastors, who are sold out for God's kingdom to make disciples. First, there must be a burden in your heart; the burden becomes a dream; a dream with clear steps to action becomes a vision, the vision of seeing the growth and the progress of our Hispanic Churches in Kentucky in action, supported by faith, while Jesus is glorified. Finally, conviction floods your heart and you are willing to pay the price for what God has given you by grace.

Hispanic churches in Kentucky have been established following the principles and philosophy of SLI (Spiritual Leadership Incorporated), which emphasizes the development of a Ministry Action Plan (MAP) to raise spiritual leaders in a transformational environment and process. I observed prior to the initiation of this project that during my years serving in the Kentucky Annual Conference, all pastors, regardless of church size, had developed their Ministry Action Plan for their context. To create a functional Ministry Action Plan, the factor "vision" is a key element in the equation to guarantee the success of the disciple making process and church growth. I did not recall

this fact until I was conducting the questionnaire and interviews where every pastor could easily articulate the vision and mission for their churches. However, not all participants were able to respond affirmatively to the question about the ability of their leadership to also articulate the vision for their churches. Nevertheless, as I was conducting the focus groups, it soon became clear based on the intense discussion that vision was at the core of the factors that impact growth in our context.

During the project and after the study was finished, peer-to-peer interaction revealed the fact that vision has been in part a decisive factor for church growth in this context which is consistent with Sullivan's findings that were discussed in Chapter 2 about reasons for the tendencies of churches to remain small. Put most simply, this major finding shows that the consistent growth we have experienced in the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference has been highly influenced by having a clear outward vision developed and implemented by the pastors in their own context. The foregoing is a major example of what McIntosh states about the importance of an outward focus for church growth and the assimilation of newcomers. This practice among our Hispanic United Methodist churches results in the Kentucky Annual Conference leading the nation in effectiveness of planting Hispanic United Methodist churches on the one hand, but also, making sure that every Hispanic United Methodist church plant is successfully connected to the Kentucky Annual Conference's life and ministry on the other. In addition to the pastor's vision for their churches, the shared vision of the Hispanic United Methodist ministry is a vital part of the corporate vision of all Hispanic United Methodist pastors in the Kentucky Annual Conference to win the state for Christ. I have witnessed firsthand their passion for the Lord, their outward focus

on the community, and the gifts and graces of the congregations they lead. This fact observed among the pastors is described by Rainer as fundamentals to discover vision in leadership development. In the context of Hispanic church planting in Kentucky, vision as a factor that impacts growth has been exalted above many other factors as one of the most valuable variables to affect church growth in one way or the other.

Discipleship

Biblical and Theological Framework

As explored in Chapter 2, Stetzer states that church planting is the most effective and lasting way to fulfill the Great Commission and practice the Great Commandment; it is also the maximum expression of the Missio Dei movement of sending the church into the world by the Triune God according to Bosch. One of the strongest emphases for the biblical theological framework on this project from Chapter 2 is based on the Trinitarian approach to mission discussed by several authors such as Goheen, Guder, Bosch, Hirsch, and others, each aiming to unfold the involvement of the Triune God in the work of mission among humankind through church planting and development on earth.

Churches that plant other churches with a kingdom and multiplication mentality are Missio Dei churches. Such churches are being planted and led by kingdom pastors who are making a difference in the Kentucky Annual Conference for God's glory. In Kentucky, as in many other places around the globe, the love of many has become cold. Rampant issues regarding immigration, along with the lack of credit given to traditional institutions, has caused an erosion of faith and spirituality for the Hispanic generations who come to this state. Nevertheless, Jesus is still the answer and the most effective response to changing times and needs of the people through radical, genuine, and

transformative discipleship in Him. The mission of God is based in the discipleship of all nations winning one soul at a time. We understand that God is the missionary par excellence, the author and initiator of His own mission. We as human beings and as part of His creation lend our humanity to the Holy Spirit to be His helpers. The Triune God, the God of the Christian faith, is a God who reveals Himself in love by the Father, in grace through the Son, and in power through the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the full expression and manifestation of God's mission on earth is found in Christ Jesus who is both eternal God and man and the ultimate revelation of the truth, known, palpated, and seen by humankind. Consequently, the only way to keep this revelation alive in the hearts of the world, known and unknown, is by making disciples of Jesus Christ—one who is like his Master in his way of thinking, acting, and living. Churches of the kingdom are called to make disciples rather than members of the crowd and to separate from the multitudes those who want to know and do God's will for their lives. These are those who not only come for the loaves and fish but to have a real encounter with God and His presence.

According to the participants in this project, the church members are committed to the congregations and personal agendas of their churches and the United Methodist denomination while, in contrast, the disciples are committed to transforming communities to bring the glorious manifestation of God's presence to the city. Considering this reality, the questions from questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups that every church pastor in the project were asked (e.g. Are we making disciples? Do we have an intentional process for making disciples? How do we know that we have formed one?) emerged from the literature review. The literature review proposed many effective models for church

growth that are all supported by a generative disciple making system that does not close or end.

Literature Review and Personal Observations

Among the greatest challenges of a pastor to discipling a congregation and reaching a community is changing the natural default mindset of the people into a radical kingdom mentality. In Chapter 4, participants mentioned several times the need to form radical disciples with a kingdom mentality and the power of the Holy Spirit. The multiplication mentality has to do with breaking the mindset of limitation, lack of resources, poverty and ruin often found in the context of Hispanic churches in Kentucky.

From the literature review in Chapter 2, Stetzer affirms that the most effective way of making disciples is through church planting. Therefore, to break the barrier of fifty in worship attendance we need to pay special attention to growing the church by extension through churches that plant other churches. According to Schaller, the ultimate goal would be focusing on discipleship-making and intimacy rather than making members to guarantee significant and deep growth. The author goes on to say that without any meaningful connection and intimacy through discipleship, the church will implode rather than explode. Simply put, the goal would be to keep through discipleship the same experience of intimacy people have in a small church setting. Meanwhile, church growth is taken seriously as a value along with the need to bear much fruit. Discipleship formation gives people life and meaning because everything that has life on its own multiplies, grows, and develops naturally to give birth to the vision of God.

Discipleship, mentorship, and training came to the surface in Chapter 4 from a myriad of other factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches within

the Kentucky Annual Conference. In other words, discipleship is at the core of true personal transformation; furthermore, it reveals one's level of maturity toward reaching the total expression and manifestation of the full purpose of God and His Church.

According to the book of Acts, churches that plant other churches, churches that make disciples—disciples that later are sent to start new churches throughout the world to enrich and support any missionary effort—are what are considered disciple making churches.

The pertinent method is that each would become a church that plants another, constantly transmitting the DNA of the mother church as many times as God permits without corrupting the information and substance of the genetic information of what the mother church was called to be from the start. This discipleship mentality of change, multiplication, and scope of the kingdom is the mentality that we desire with all our hearts. The disciple mindset is virally self-multiplied until it forms a missional movement that shakes and impacts the world for Christ. Discipleship is not something you get, rather something you become in Christ. Therefore, the journey of discipleship is never ending. It is eternal as one continuously seeks to grow in wisdom and grace pleasing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Great Commission unfolds the mandate of Jesus of going and making disciples for the transformation of the world. The Lord is raising an army of ordinary people to focus outwardly to the community and the nations so that the Great Commission would not become the “great omission” that Rainer described, as seen in the literature review.

Leadership

Biblical and Theological Framework

Bosch, as explored in Chapter 2, unfolds the maximum expression of leadership exemplified by the Triune God through the classical doctrine of the *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and God the Son sending God the Holy Spirit. This principle of missional leadership will continue throughout the Bible as the backbone of God's missional heart for humankind. We see evidence in Genesis 1 and 2 that as humankind was created after God's own image to reign and govern the earth on His command, the first sign of prevenient grace was unveiled, according to John Wesley as discussed by William Willimon in the literature review. After creation, we are sent forth to fill the earth to extend His image into the four corners of the earth.

Our beloved United Methodist Church has an itinerant, transitional system of ministry that is always in motion. However, we are ineffective in the way the transition of leaders is handled at each cycle. The system in and of itself is not bad. What we must do is teach the churches and the congregations how to carry out these transitions in an effective and healthy way. Many wounded congregations and resentful pastors, often moved because of salary and benefits, are the result of an ineffective transition system. The itinerant system is biblical, apostolic, and historically proven; however, the motive for transferring leaders should always be the growth of God's work. Great leaders such as Paul moved around for the sake of growing the churches and expanding the kingdom of God. Today in the twenty-first century we are planting Hispanic United Methodist churches where an itinerant system will kill church plants due to the level of relationship between the congregation and the founding pastor of the church. Hispanic people

experience a dramatic level of loss any time a leader is moved—whether because of administrative decisions, because it is time to move, or because “we have always done it this way.” We need to remember that Hispanic people come from a background of great loss. As they come to this country, they experience loss at its deepest expression.

Therefore, the moment they meet a pastor, they get easily attached and such pastors become family, a father figure, advocate, friend, and the go-to person for resolving any issue that may come up with their families. For example, I remember back in 2009 one of my key leaders had a car accident where her youngest son was injured. The first call my church member made was to me not to 911. In addition, I can share many firsthand experiences where the United Methodist Church has lost many Hispanic churches because the senior pastor was moved to a different appointment.

In the account of the transition of leadership between Moses and Joshua, the people responded to Joshua’s leadership once authority was delegated to him: “They answered Joshua: ‘All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go’” (Josh. 1:16). I am impressed by the fact that the people respected Moses’ leadership and his choice of Joshua to be their next leader; they responded in obedience, after Moses had trained him for forty years. The people responded, “We will do as you say and we will go wherever you send us,” which is proof that the decision was God’s, not man’s. The people always confirm gifts, callings, and positions of authority. What God has told us in private is confirmed in public through the church. For it is written, “[A]nd your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt. 6:6). “Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses!” (Josh. 1:17) Then, they honored Moses by saying to Joshua,

“we will be with you, as we were with our last leader.” This is the result that we are looking for when we replace a leader or when we transfer a leader to another position. The people are expecting an anointed leader, full of the Holy Spirit, and backed by God. This account indicates that if such is the case, the people do not put up resistance.

We seek for Hispanic United Methodist congregations to receive new leaders and to respond in obedience and stand behind their new leader when the time comes. Participants in this study mentioned numerous times the importance of the leader, and the leadership teams. Mann, one of the most experienced authors on church growth, affirms that leaders from all denominations have the duty and the task of investing in their personal leadership development to be able to respond to the challenges that small churches present nowadays. I would like to add that Mann’s statement is true for all leaders, regardless of the size of the congregation, denomination, or the context they are called to serve. One of the most powerful pieces of evidence of this need can be found in the graduating classes of seminaries. Most seminary students today are being trained to serve the church of yesterday; in other words, they have been trained how to shepherd, preach, teach, and maintain existing congregations. However, the 21st century is demanding so much more. The 21st century demands leaders who are not only able to keep the Church on track, but beyond that, to lead the Church onto new tracks, new ways of doing church. The Church needs entrepreneurs as much as it does administrators.

The research project also pointed out sub-themes of factors such as modeling, teamwork, and autocracy, making leadership a major theme finding among many other ones. Replacing leaders is a part of our reality, no matter the organization or institution. In fact, one of the reasons I so passionately form leaders is that I believe there is a great

need for authentic leaders nowadays. Likewise, I also believe that inevitably something is going to happen to all leaders at some point of their leadership journey. Leaders age and retire, leaders die, leaders could be murdered due to persecution, as we have seen in the history of persecution of the early church and after, and leaders could fall into sin, get discouraged, and lose sight of the vision. They could also stop producing results due to stress, or personal problems could cause their performance to suffer, resulting in their dismissal. Only by tirelessly modeling and intentionally forming leaders will we be able to fulfill the vision and reach our destiny.

Missional leaders, according to Stetzer, are experts on context and culture like Joshua and Moses were before the people of Israel in times of transition from the desert into the promised land. The people of Israel said to Joshua as he succeeded Moses, “Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses” (Josh. 1:17). In light of this biblical account, I conclude this section by making the observation that the people of Israel had only one request. The leader that could not meet it, could not keep his position; after all, true leadership is through influence moving away from autocracy to teamwork. The people asked, “Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses” (Josh. 1:17). So powerful! Only, only that God be with you! Leadership rests upon modeling servanthood and a life of obedient prayer in deep intimacy with God, then the people will see that God is with us as He was with Moses and Joshua. The power and authority to do ministry, and to lead the people, comes from a close relationship with Jesus in private, not from autocracy and independence from God according to John 15. Autocratic leaders tend to only listen to themselves, to lead by making his/her own thoughts the ultimate rule of thumb and agenda of the day. Every leadership philosophy

is tested before the people, that it may be known to all that God is with you. The test of Joshua's leadership was not long awaited; the day came to prove that God was with him, as God was with Moses. In Joshua 4 we read, "For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over" (v. 23). Joshua did not have to part the Red Sea, but he did the Jordan. History tells us that after that day, the nations of Canaan became fearful, and the Israelites obeyed Joshua until his death. They conquered the land. If the people see that there is no backing of the Holy Spirit in you, they will stop following you.

The project findings remind us that leaders are called to model before others and lead as a team. Therefore, I encourage leaders, in the context of the Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference and beyond that in everything they do, to be sure that people experience the presence of God. The people will follow a leader wherever the leader goes and will go wherever the leader sends them, and they will do whatever is asked of them in Christ if the leader models before them how a true servant lives. Autocratic leaders will never experience the words of the people to Joshua when the people added: "Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous" (Josh. 1:18).

Lastly, we see that the autocratic leaders, those who submit to no one and no thing, those who affirm time and again that they know God and have a personal mission, die spiritually. Autocratic leaders will often lead with hidden agendas. They are leaders whose mission includes no one or includes only those who submit to them by sacrificing

their own mind and values without ever holding their leader accountable. They are those who confuse gifts with character and commission themselves into ministry. Autocratic leaders are those without a mentor, a pastor, a spiritual father or mother, and do not want to be accountable to anyone. They are among those who say, "Only God knows my heart," but only as an excuse to declare independence and immunity against wise correction or direction that anyone tries to offer them in an effort to help them reach their destiny. Put most simply, they are those leaders who defy each and every one of the findings described in Chapters 4 and 5. They will suffer what the people told Joshua: They "shall be put to death;" not by stoning, because we are not under the law, but they will die as Adam and Eve did, who were under grace, in glory, as Christ's church is today. They will die spiritually, slowly burning out, gradually isolating themselves, and leaving the confused sheep who followed them without a shepherd.

We will all give an account for what we have done while in the body, but we have no need to fear, for according to Romans 8, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. However, though our salvation is not at risk, the work we are doing and have done will be tested, and we will suffer loss if it has not been done in Christ Jesus. "The work of each leader will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the leader will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:13-15). The fire will put to the test all that we have done, and what God has not established will not remain. Only disciple-leaders remain, therefore making disciples is not an option.

Christ expects us to form them, that everything we do in ministry would produce disciple-making leaders.

Literature Review and Personal Observations

A church is as strong as the strength of its leaders, being that leaders have been the initiators and catalysts of great movements throughout history. The most taught principles of leadership tell us that everything begins and ends with a leader, and that leadership is influence. We can therefore conclude that God is seeking genuine leaders who invest in others to bring God's kingdom to earth. For many years, leadership formation in the Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference has been accidental, so that the leaders ended up being the oldest of the congregation, or those who arrive early, those who have the most influence—although not necessarily those who have the most character and commitment. Many times, they are those who please the pastor, or those who are present at all scheduled activities, and finally, those who come to the services. God is calling us to form radical disciples and transformers of cities who have a kingdom mentality, a warrior's heart and a friendship with the Holy Spirit. Leadership formation is intentional, meaning that we intentionally walk people through a clear, focused, and simple process in order to help every believer reach his or her destiny.

Apostle Paul said it well: “[N]either the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything; only God gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7). He also said that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. A leader rarely sees his vision completely realized; only leaders with personal—and therefore small—visions will see their vision realized in only one generation. A leader's vision reveals the size of God and the level of the leader's faith. In

this regard, McIntosh warns against setting up the congregation for failure by establishing unreachable goals, as this will affect the fulfillment of the vision of the church as well.

We all know that God-sized visions are great, powerful, and unlimited, but how we present the vision before the church, and how we set the goals to close the gap between the present and the future will determine success.

A vision will not be fulfilled on its own. It is not enough for it to just be revealed and handed down from heaven. Character is needed to support the gifts and talents that will make the vision possible. Focus is needed. One must break away from the world and life's pleasures in order to give one's life for others. Rainer, in his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, affirms that true leaders are intrinsically motivated; therefore, they motivate others to follow God's vision modeling passion and enthusiasm. In contrast, extrinsically motivated leaders fail to accomplish anything because their motivation comes from outside: titles, salary, gifts, and recognition to name a few. More specifically stated, one must be willing to sleep less, eat less, read a lot, listen to everyone, and obey those in authority over you. The multitudes will not satisfy your soul. Only Jesus has the power to soothe the pain of the human heart, to fill our emptiness, and to transform our minds. The vision is the fuel that maintains passion, vigor, the desire to serve God, and the strength to bear the trials. Lose the vision and God's purpose for your life, and you will lose it all.

Israel ceased being a congregation of tribes to become a kingdom. It is impressive how the testimony of God has prevailed until today. It all began with a man, Abraham. The man had a son, Isaac. The son had two sons: Esau and Jacob. Jacob had ten sons who multiplied into ten tribes, and one of them, Joseph, had two sons who then became the

last two tribes to complete the twelve. Then they were ready to begin the multiplication: only seventy-five entered Egypt, but they left as a multitude. Later, God raised up Moses, who formed and trained Joshua, who conquered all the Promised Land. In turn, Joshua established judges who governed, even after his death. These judges were to keep the people in obedience to God, however there were periods of disobedience due to lack of modeling, teamwork, and a high practice of autocratic leadership, until the arrival of the first king, Saul. The understanding of unity in vision, modeling obedience, and teamwork becoming one tribe in heart instead of 12, were what brought them to be organized to the point of becoming a powerful and prosperous nation, beginning with the reign of Saul, then David, and at last, Solomon.

By most standards, leadership is the foundation from which disciples are made in Christ. We are called to plant churches and to evangelize the world for Christ. However, going back to the previous narrative of Israel becoming a kingdom, I would argue that the DNA of disciple-making leaders is present from Abraham to Moses. The promise of God to Abraham was kept until Moses' day. They were experts at passing God's vision from one generation to the next for the transformation of the world. The Church's mission to make disciples is very important; however, even more important is to make leaders who are able to move from core values to core practice in a value-shaped community of believers. The participants in this study referred to this reality on many occasions as the true purpose of the Movement of God because, only then, will generations reach generations to make more disciples.

The task of developing spiritual leaders out of new believers who in turn become disciples has become a priority for many organizations. Leadership as a way of being

rather than doing has become the hallmark of leadership character in 21st Century America. In other words, we have gradually moved from concentrating our leadership development focus from character, back in the 1900's, to personal skills during the second half of the 20th century, then to personal image in the 21st Century. In simpler terms, we do not hold people accountable for who they are at the personal level; as long as they are able to get the job done, if they have the right image, the right face and look smart, they can be recruited without regard for any issues in their private life. Therefore, God is calling us as His children to the fundamentals of character to become spiritual leaders; spiritual leaders who can lead the Church of Christ into the 21st Century. However, spiritual leaders cannot be formed in a vacuum—we need role models who are able to transfer the right DNA from one leader to the next as previously discussed using the example of Abraham and Moses, and others.

Evangelism

Biblical and Theological Framework

In the local church, the responsibility of winning souls is often confused with a ministry such as an evangelism ministry or outreach events for social justice. Being an evangelist is one of the offices of ministry in Ephesians 4:11. An evangelist is one who has matured in his or her calling to the point that the person focuses his or her life on the fulfillment of this worthy task, which is the task of all who love Jesus. Nevertheless, we cannot lose sight of the reality that we are all called to win souls; it is what Christ sent us to do:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

Jesus has transferred to us today the ministry that He received from the Father so that we would go in His place to prepare the way for His second coming in fulfilment of the Missio Dei. Thereby, according to the Missio Dei, by the power of the Holy Spirit vested in us we have the authority to preach the gospel; for only He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22).

Christ promises that the Holy Spirit will be with us, accompanying us always until the end of the world. That is why we have no reason to ever feel lonely; we are always in good company from the time we receive Christ as our Lord and Savior. At that moment, we receive testimony within us that we are children of God: "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you" (John 14:17). Finally, Christ promises that He will be upon us, to be His witnesses and win souls: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The participants' deep biblical theological understanding of the Great Commission enabled them to identify evangelism as one of the major findings. In many instances, they shared the need for abundant sowing of the gospel for church growth, regardless of church size. The pastors repeatedly referred to Christ's work on the cross and the fact that Christ's love for souls is so great that He died for them. The best gift we can bring before the Church are souls won through witnessing, rather than a mere invitation to the church on Sundays. With such an investiture of power, no one has an excuse for not winning souls. Even pastors have this responsibility; they should serve as an example for the church by also being soul winners and showing how it is done in practice. "As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully" (2 Timothy 4:5).

The apostle Paul exhorts the young pastor Timothy to remain firm, to endure the suffering of ministry, and to do the work of an evangelist. We know that he was the pastor of Ephesus, according to historical books. What shall we say of Phillip, who was chosen as a deacon in Acts 6 yet that did not limit him to functions within the church. He also went out and did the work of an evangelist: "But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).

I have been asked many times, "What is it with established churches and their people who don't want to go out and evangelize?" Pastors will say, "I have taught them about evangelism, I have motivated them to go out and bring souls, but they don't do it." First, Christ has told us, "Go and preach the gospel." The attractional church model is less and less effective according to Alan Hirsch, for people have lost trust in institutions

in general. This new generation wants to make a difference, but not through institutions, as very few are effective. Many people are skeptical. Therefore, the best way to motivate them to evangelize is to go with them. To guarantee the growth of the church, we must model before them the practice of this powerful commandment living out the Apostolic DNA represented by the acronym APEST in Hirsch's book *The Forgotten Way*.

Similarly, Goheen also analyzes the missional identity and role of the Church by tracing its roots all the way back to the Old Testament in continuity to the New Testament, which connects both Hirsch and Goheen's trend of thought into one accord regarding our missional responsibility today.

Churches have stayed stuck at "come and follow me;" we have wonderful men and women of God sitting in the pews who have forgotten to go. I am a church planter, I have experienced firsthand the APEST model for twelve years with marvelous results for God's glory. Therefore, based on personal experience in the context of the Kentucky Annual Conference, a missionary to the Hispanic people who continually goes out during the year in fervent prayer reaches at least twenty to thirty-five people, including children and youth. This statistic is surprising, being that precisely twenty to thirty-five people is the membership of many churches, as we see in Table 1 in Chapter 4 regarding the participating churches in this study. If one goes out and models an abundant sowing of the Gospel before the congregation and wins souls for Christ, setting the example, then two things will happen if you are pastoring an existing church: First, people will be affected by the teaching modeled and the activation of God's word before their own eyes. I ask you to pay special attention to how evangelism as a major finding links back to modeling and teamwork previously discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Second, the newly

converted, in their first love, will mingle with the old members and there will be an explosion of new souls, but foremost, new evangelism teams will be born.

Similarly, we can also see a link between modeling, teamwork, and evangelism in their effect on growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Over all, according to Tennent, churches must do a better job renewing and revitalizing their vision to become countercultural and relevant. Churches that are passionate about winning souls for Christ will always be radically relevant. The presence of the first love in a new believer's heart ignites a fire hardly to be content within the four walls of the church. Experience has shown that there is nothing more contagious than a new believer under the power of the Holy Spirit. No more excuses; believers should go out into the streets where the souls are and win them for Christ. Church leaders should mobilize the people as an army to fulfill the Great Commission.

Literature Review and Personal Observations

Schaller emphasizes that evangelism is one of the core doctrines of Christianity, as seen in the literature review. Therefore, we are all called to preach the gospel and bring many to Christ. Evangelism as a mandate from God cannot be reduced to a ministry in the local church, nor to a day of street outreach during the week. True evangelism will lead to the baptism of many in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, baptism becomes the second area of implication of evangelism as a major finding for this study. I find baptism strongly related to outreach in many ways, as I shared before, particularly when it comes to the fulfillment of the Great Commission according to Wright. In other words, while we must continue preaching the Word, we must not stop there—or the work of salvation would be incomplete. For example, once

people have received Christ, the sign of genuine conviction of sin is baptism. Much has been written on this subject in Chapter 2, and I do not want to go into the meaning of the word baptism in Greek and Hebrew, for many know that it means “to submerge,” yet few go and baptize the souls. The other issue in relation to ineffective ways of doing evangelism would be presenting evangelism as a class instead of a lived-out testimony of Christ in one’s heart. According to McIntosh, this is true in most churches but especially true in small churches.

I have had the privilege of baptizing people in the same service during which I have preached about the baptism of repentance, just as the father of baptisms, John the Baptist, did. John preached, then he baptized, as did the apostles, and then the church. We see it in action in the Gospels and in the book of Acts yesterday, and in church planting today. Church planting provides a perfect scenario for new believers, in terms of baptism and conversions. This statement is consistent with the research literature review in the words of Wagner. Church planting—not classes—is the most effective way of making disciples. Scripture does not say that you have to go through a yearlong baptism class before you can be baptized. Baptism is the entryway to the Kingdom, not the exit. Entry is by faith, and not by understanding or by works. If the person believes in Christ and in His work on the cross, and water is near, there is nothing to prevent the person from being baptized according to the Scriptures. Then yes, after their baptism, teach them the whole counsel of God. “As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?’ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:36-38).

There was one occasion in which I put this revelation into practice. I was preaching a powerful message challenging people to believe in Christ, and many received Christ at Asbury United Methodist Church's House of Prayer in Lubbock, Texas, with Pastors Jorge and Gladys Ochoa. Later, after the sermon was finished, I said, "Those who believe are baptized in his name." Then I climbed into the baptism pool, suit and all, and I said, "Whoever believes in Christ, come to the waters!" Two minutes passed that felt like an eternity, and I said to myself, "Lord, I am here in front of everyone. Don't let me be embarrassed!" Then people began coming forward, first an elderly woman, and after her, youth between fifteen and eighteen years old—a challenging age group for every church. By the end, more than forty people were baptized. I am pleased that others, such as Pastor Jorge Ochoa, have continued doing this until this day. Our church leaders do it time and again. I modeled it, I taught it, and now every Saturday many are baptized. In this regard, the words of Rainer remind us of the importance of evangelism to keep the focus of the church outward on the community so that congregations stay off the path of spiritual death and implosion.

I conclude that there is only one baptism. It comes from God, not from man, and is directly related to evangelism through the active sowing of the gospel. This is the importance of linking evangelism efforts with baptism as the ultimate goal. Rather than getting stuck in our conformity with the number of new believers, we must continue toward the path of salvation, toward making disciples of Christ. Other factors that affect church growth are lack of accountability and disconnection between hospitality and outreach as well as between spiritual and numerical growth. These factors are clearly linked to the theme of evangelism. Equally important, church pastors must be alive and in

the center of God's will. If the message we preach does not produce new believers transformed by God's power, who are baptized in the name of Jesus, then the preaching is in vain. Even if we graduated with honors from a renowned theological seminary, the church will not grow effectively.

Cultural Awareness

In Chapter 2, I sought to identify the key factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference based on church growth literature. Cultural awareness is a major category that allows me to correlate the subtheme findings of instability, stagnation, finances, and conflict into one category to facilitate a coherent rationale of thought that integrates my personal observations with the biblical/theological observations and the literature review.

Biblical and Theological Framework

For this next section, I will address cultural awareness because of the implications it holds for the need of being missional in the context of the Kentucky Annual Conference. Almost all church growth literature mentions the missional model as the new kingdom model for church growth in the 21st century. A closer look at the concept of cultural awareness in light of the participants' understanding and the literature review reveals that cultural awareness is just another way of being missional and engaging the context we are called to serve. The participants' understanding and articulation of cultural awareness as a determined factor that impacts church growth during data collection led them to identify stagnation, instability, finances, and conflict as key factors that dramatically affect their culture and context. Put simply, the pastors interviewed felt a radical need to highlight the necessity of cultural awareness before attempting to reach a

community and much more before trying to plant a church. Looking back to the day they started planting their church, they arrived at the conclusion that it is next to impossible to be effective in Hispanic ministry in Kentucky without having cultural awareness as a key principle of life. Furthermore, participants believe that there is a need for pastors, regardless of denomination, to be culturally aware. Cultural awareness involves a need to connect with the particular context in which they are working, and a need to develop meaningful relationships based on respect and understanding of the values, customs, and worldviews of another culture.

Jesus Christ modeled for us the true meaning of cultural awareness when He left heaven to come to earth to save us. Ephesians 2, as explored in Chapter 2 of the literature review, unfolds the principle of kenosis as the DNA for cultural awareness. The Greek word kenosis in relation to Christ is explained as the action of emptying himself of his divine nature to embrace our human nature, according to Achtemeier, Green and Thompson. In other words, cultural awareness is essentially an act of love for other cultures and people. It is the act of emptying ourselves of our own desires, likes and dislikes, customs, values, and worldviews to embrace other than our own. First, we empty ourselves to embrace Christ, to follow Him in close fellowship and discipleship. In the process, we empty ourselves of our own earthly desires to then be filled of the Spirit; we leave behind the many elements of our culture, values and worldviews that are not consistent with the culture of the kingdom. In sum, our emptying is the kenosis that Jesus experienced two thousand years ago, only in reverse. This genuine act becomes our response to the first call from Jesus to fellowship, the same call experienced by Peter in Matthew 4, when Jesus called him to become a fisher of people.

The aforementioned calling from Jesus is just the first call into fellowship, constituting the first invitation to kenosis—to empty ourselves for Him. Then, we are ready to experience a second invitation to kenosis again during the second call of Jesus, as exemplified in John 21 with Peter. At this point, the invitation to kenosis goes deeper; it is now an invitation to empty ourselves, not for our personal benefit, but for the benefit of others as explained by Sims in his article on kenotic leadership discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review. In this stage of kenosis, we feel an insatiable desire to die for others, to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of people from other ethnic groups, not only for our own. A person who experiences this overwhelming love is then unequivocally equipped to be culturally aware, to be fully present among other cultures, but also, according to Schnase, to open themselves up to strangers and offer hospitality to them, that they might find a home. Kenotic leadership empowers us to be culturally aware which then further enables us to identify factors that promote or hinder the expansion of the Gospel for any given context. I have witnessed such dedication in the participants as they were able to connect deeply with their people. For example, some are Cubans and Puerto Ricans pastoring Mexicans; others are Mexicans pastoring Colombians and Guatemalans.

Literature Review and Personal Observations

Chapter 4 reveals that many are the factors loudly calling for the attention of Hispanic United Methodist practitioners within the Kentucky Annual Conference. However, among the most highlighted sub-factors they had identified in the category of being fully cultural aware were instability, stagnation, finances and conflict. I have stressed previously the negative effect of instability and stagnation in connection with the other major findings listed. Therefore, I would only add that instability is a factor that

immediately begins to surface among a myriad of issues related to immigration and legal status of the Hispanics coming to Kentucky. Most of the Hispanic population in Kentucky are migrant workers who move frequently, causing the church to stagnate from season to season, and ultimately contributing to complete membership loss in many instances. For proof of this, in Chapter 4 participants' voices are heard in constant frustration as they share the realities of their unstable church context.

The pastors of churches under 50 in worship attendance are dramatically affected as they serve in rural areas where the issue of instability—and resulting stagnation—are rampant. The pastors of churches above 50 in worship attendance who are in a more urban context are also fighting instability and stagnation to a different but equally frustrating degree. I am therefore suggesting that the location of churches in the context of Kentucky has a significant impact on church growth and ministerial success. While a further study can substantiate such a statement, I am confident to affirm based on this study that the practice of addressing the factors found in this chapter would impact the growth of Hispanic United Methodist churches regardless of the context of location within the Kentucky Annual Conference. I would even imply that the practice of addressing such factors would not guarantee growth, but the lack of implementing measures to address such factors and of practicing the best practices found in this research would definitely hinder or even cancel congregational growth, preventing churches under 50 from breaking the 50 barrier and churches above 50 from continued growth past additional growth barriers.

Closely related to instability and stagnation, the factors of finances and conflict resolution were also listed as intrinsically connected to United Methodist Hispanic

Ministry within the Kentucky Annual Conference. Those factors are difficult to separate from one another because they all revolve around the issue of immigration. The issue of immigration leads to low wages, unemployment, or very unstable employment, especially considering the effect legal status has on employment opportunities and stability. Lack of access to legal immigration status prevents undocumented immigrants from being able to legally work in United States. In addition, there is the issue of financial illiteracy which governs poverty and the low-income classes. Furthermore, the matter of the complexity of the financial system of the United States makes it even harder on Hispanic immigrants to practice good stewardship principles. In sum, one cannot practice what one cannot understand, such as the case regarding health insurance, 401K, Roth IRA, the difference between debit and credit and how they can work to one's benefit or detriment, etc. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that because of the reality described above, financial support from the United Methodist Conference is most important, at least for the first 5 years of the church plant. The previous statement is supported by the literature review in Chapter 2 by Gray and others.

The next and last factor of which we must be culturally aware is conflict resolution. This factor is difficult to identify as a unique factor within this context because many authors list lack of conflict resolution skills as a leadership problem in small churches. In the literature review, Mann describes such a case where matriarch and patriarch congregants control the congregation, impeding the pastor from effectively leading the church into growth. Pastors are either afraid of conflict, or they avoid it until it becomes a congregational issue, or just ignore conflict, hoping it will disappear over time. The truth of the matter is that in many instances pastors are not equipped to resolve

conflicts and lead effectively in situations of high frustration, anger, hostility, and gossip particularly when it involves themselves as pastors, or involves patriarchs or matriarchs of a family-sized church as Gaede points out in the literature review section. Many of the participants confessed that they have learned over the years that ignoring conflicts, or aiming to please people in the process, does not lead to healthy growth, but instead hinders growth to the point of stagnation or even decline if the conflict persists.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

According to this study, the factors that impact growth in the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference are: vision, discipleship, leadership, evangelism, and cultural awareness.

Vision

The mission of God should be at the core of the Church's mission both globally and locally for the Church of Christ to become a true missional incarnational movement. Ecclesia becomes the ultimate expression of the mission of God, not the other way around. Therefore, we need to reactivate the apostolic genius of the Church of Jesus as God's approved paradigm to impact the 21st century. It is written that without vision the people will perish; however, we also need a clear, deep thinking process for the vision to be manifested as an effective disciple-making system. Thereby, the ministry implication of this factor, vision, for our Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference is huge as we continue growing and planting churches. Our vision goes beyond the local expression of each local Hispanic congregation in our conference. As the participants discussed before, they all believe that vision is key for authentic church growth and to inspire congregations to press forward regardless of any limitations.

We call Kentucky the “Upper Room State” in direct connection with Acts 2 where we see the Holy Spirit falling upon the 120 disciples of Christ awaiting the promise of the Father. Kentucky has 120 counties; therefore, we are declaring that the Holy Spirit will impact our 120 counties just as with the disciples in Acts 2. Our vision is to plant 120 Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference so that all Hispanic residents in Kentucky have the opportunity to know Christ in their own language and culture.

Our vision as the Hispanic expression of the Body of Christ in Kentucky is missional because we are focused outwardly to impact the community, but it is also incarnational because we are taking Christ to people where they are. Our vision is that the conversion rate within our churches would be equal or superior to the Hispanic population growth rate of Kentucky in 2017. We are claiming 10 percent of the Hispanic population in our counties to make a disciple of every Hispanic person coming to Kentucky. We are expecting exponential church growth through a very intentional vision for church planting and church revitalization to bring the kingdom of God to our state.

Discipleship

We are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The world of the 21st century demands true disciples of Christ to plant churches and reveal new ways of doing church in this era of uncertainty and chaos. Thereby, the implications of making disciples for our Hispanic ministry in Kentucky transcend culture, context, theology and church denomination. Disciple-making churches are God’s mandate for us, regardless of the times we are living in. Considering this fact, the need for our Hispanic churches to make disciples is decisive to becoming ecclesia, to

becoming the true expression of the people of Christ for our communities around the state and beyond. In like manner, there is also a need for our Hispanic churches to become culturally adaptive to reproduce an organic apostolic movement in a way that it is indigenous to the context of Kentucky. Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference are called to become disciple-making churches with a potent decentralized missional focus on creating a Hispanic church planting network to activate the people of God.

As yesterday, discipleship continues today to be the Church's main language for revealing Christ everywhere we are and go for the transformation of the world. Discipleship is God's "Plan A" to express Jesus's form and ministry as the only begotten Son and Head of the Church. Jesus' Sonship and Lordship reveals for us the authentic DNA model for us to become true sons and daughters of the Living God and inheritors of His kingdom, and ultimately, for us to live out the ancient way of doing church to impact today's world.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the need for discipleship to be more than part of the vision statement of the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. We need to move from a vision statement that mentions discipleship as a theologically sound noun to one that embodies the active implementation of the Gospel through individual and corporate discipleship in the life of the congregation. There is no movement of God without discipleship-making; therefore, to bring credibility and authority to our Hispanic movement in Kentucky, we need to represent our Lord the way we were created to do and embody discipleship as being crucial to our witness and

mission to the world as we continue expanding the kingdom of God through church planting and development.

Discipleship is not a destination—not today, nor was it ever meant to be, according to Christ’s mandate to go and make disciples. Discipleship is not something you get; it is not information. In contrast, discipleship is a journey; it is something we become as we engage in missional work in the world.

Leadership

This study focused on the leadership of the church. The 7 pastors recruited for this project are living examples of the importance of leadership for church growth and revitalization. The leadership of the Church starts with Jesus, the leader of leaders. A sound theology of leadership begins with God the Father leading the way of salvation on earth as the Chief Executor of His own mission, as the Head of Christ, according to Ephesians, and also as God the Son, the Head of the Church. I want to re-emphasize that as leaders of the church who received delegated authority from Christ to serve His Church, we are called to lead in a way that reflects Jesus’ own ministry and love for the Church by modeling servant leadership. Modeling as a best practice for leadership has been highlighted by all participants regardless of church size. After all, leadership is first being and then doing. However, most of the church leadership literature found on the market focuses on “how to do” rather than “how to be,” which would be to focus on character. The kingdom of God is first about being, then doing. The kingdom of God is first about being children of God and persons of worth. All kingdom activity should flow out of our core values as disciples of Christ. I believe that here is where leadership and discipleship interconnect to produce disciple-making leaders—those who lead by

example, not only by decisions, and those who lead by influence, not only by position. My plea would be to recognize that we are called to be spiritual leaders so that we make sure we are building the Church of Christ and not a corporation. Leaders are called to live in consistency with the message they seek to convey; thereby, leadership is directly proportional to discipleship. This statement is fundamental for the implementation of a Christlikeness movement.

Participants in this study often mentioned the necessity of team-building for effective Hispanic ministry in Kentucky. However, only a few pastors had effectively built teams around them and each were from churches with worship attendance over fifty. The net result of the growth of their churches is directly related to the importance of pastoral teams and ministry teams.

Evangelism

Evangelism is God's operating system for bringing Earth into the knowledge of Christ. Nevertheless, evangelism to pagan lands and communities has been reduced to a ministry in many churches, not only during the twentieth century but it has also permeated into the second decade of the twenty-first century. We have failed to embrace the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations because we have not embraced evangelism as a lifestyle and as the first step toward discipleship. All the factors previously discussed interconnect here as well. For example, the vision of God, as earth's Creator and Savior, begins with evangelism; it begins with the Good News that the kingdom of God is here for the salvation of humankind. At its deepest roots, discipleship takes its cue from evangelism to give birth to God's vision of a redemptive world. I cannot stress strongly enough that evangelism keeps the church from a declining state of

maintaining the status-quo for it ignites believers into a lifestyle of preaching the gospel rather than only inviting people to church for the senior pastor to preach the gospel to the unbelievers and the unchurched. In fact, a church cannot be a missional incarnational church without the mark of lived-out evangelism as the missional responsive action to individual sin as well as to the sin of the structures of society in every single arena from politics to art, to sports, to entertainment, to education, to business and so on.

Evangelism activates the whole people of God, transforming passive members of a church congregation into radical believers on fire for the Lord and replacing complacency with urgency for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their society. Evangelism leads the Church to take Jesus seriously and to be willing to bear the risk of rejection for a greater cause: a high calling to raise a movement of disciples of Jesus who worship Christ through a missional incarnational way of living. The source of this revelation comes from three years invested in research, literature review, data collection, and analysis for this project only to re-emphasize the need for evangelism, not as a department within local church ministry, but as a definite purpose for life in continuous action toward the attainment of God's redemptive vision for humankind.

Cultural Awareness

The impact of the cultural awareness factor on church growth varies in complexity at all levels: socially, economically, and politically, particularly in the arena of immigration in the United States. I want to reemphasize the importance of Hispanic immigration s to the U.S. for the Church of today and the future. The Great Commission for the Hispanic community continues to be at the heart of God's mission in terms of making a disciple of every Hispanic person coming to Kentucky. I would like to further

expound upon the issue of dealing with immigration status in America today, which in Kentucky is, in most cases, an issue that leads to serving an undocumented population. I have experienced firsthand how the lack of legal status of Hispanic United Methodist church members prevents pastors from being able to process church membership and enter key leaders into the United Methodist system for ordination and appointments. The net result of this tragedy is a low representation of clergy in the conference leadership teams which also leads to low representation of voices for fairness and equality to be heard at all levels on their behalf. Additionally, immigration status has had a great negative impact on Hispanic congregations in comparison with main culture churches and even with counterpart African American and Korean congregations. One example of the effect of immigration status on local Hispanic congregations is that many Hispanic people immigrating to Kentucky are former farmers with low levels of education who are without official permission for employment. Therefore, when they are able to work, this often implies working more than one job and/or long work hours without vacation time or other benefits in order to support themselves and their families.

The injustice that Hispanic people face daily is not limited to the aforementioned issues, but goes further to other factors such as gender discrimination, low income, and low self-esteem. Human rights violations are common among transient undocumented populations in America. The factor of context for the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference has profound implications like never before due to the immigration phenomenon as a consequence of globalization. Therefore, church planters and pastors in Kentucky must first begin with the exegeses of their context, acknowledging the fact that having an under-educated, manual, migrant-worker

population makes it extremely difficult for these churches to offer discipleship training or involve members in church ministry activities beyond Sundays, not to mention the lack of curriculum written in a simple common language for simple people. The low level of education not only impacts discipleship, but also the method of preaching for congregational growth and development if pastors are not ready to adapt. The issue of gender has also a dramatic impact in the United Methodist Church system. The United Methodist Church holds women in ministry in great esteem and encourages congregations to embrace women clergy. In contrast, the role of women in leadership within the Hispanic culture is often limited or denied. Simply put, many churches within the Hispanic culture find it difficult to allow Hispanic women to serve in prominent leadership positions such as pastor, deacon, house church leader, and so on.

Finally, there are the issues of low income and transient or nomadic populations. I have reserved these two issues for last, due to the magnitude of the impact they have on church growth for the context of the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference. The Hispanic population of Kentucky is a transient population, moving from town to town and from state to state following the “American Dream.” They seek better job opportunities for their families as well as protection from harsh immigration laws and anti-immigrant sentiment. Either motive will prompt a Hispanic family to move suddenly, affecting the stability of a newly formed congregation. As a result, pastors are not able to grow their churches, nor make their ministry sustainable so that the churches can become chartered. Planting charter Hispanic United Methodist churches in Kentucky as a means of increasing the presence of Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference has been

the fundamental church-planting goal for the conference since the beginning in 2001.

However, there has only been one charter Hispanic United Methodist church within the Kentucky Annual Conference in the thirteen years of hard work and endless effort.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study is the small sample of pastors identified to participate in the study. Six out of the twelve existing churches in Kentucky were selected to conduct the study, including a mix of churches above or below fifty in worship attendance. In future years, additional church pastors would possibly be able to participate in the study that were originally unable to due to ministry responsibilities and the bi-vocational call to ministry which prevented them from taking part in the research when the selection of participants was made.

An additional limitation of the study was the focus on senior leadership only and not leadership teams. Although questions were asked regarding discipleship teams, the research questions were not designed for the purpose of unpacking the need, meaning, and determinate role of leadership teams in church growth. The questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups were designed to identify the presence or lack of discipleship teams in the church based on the literature review.

The last limitation that emerged is the contextually related limitation of the study. In other words, it was a limitation that the study was conducted among only Hispanic United Methodist Churches and moreover within the Kentucky United Methodist Conference, which is a geographical limitation. Therefore, the author encourages that any attempt to repeat this study would be done strictly following the research methodology

found in Chapter 3, using the data collection procedure and coding found in Chapter 4 in order to obtain the same results.

Unexpected Observations

Significantly, none of the participants specifically named the immigration status of the people as a major factor that impacts growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference in the questionnaire, the interviews, or the focus group sessions. However, they did mention factors like instability, employment, and finances that are a direct result of not having legal status to work and live in United States. The fact that they did not identify “immigration” or “legal status” as the root cause of many issues we frequently find in our context really surprised me. As I have stressed before, the fact that in most cases we are serving an undocumented migrant population in Kentucky makes it extremely difficult to fight instability, low income, employment, and many other issues that come along with this painful reality lived by millions of Hispanics today in America.

Lastly, the participants placed significant weight on the importance of the leader and the life of the leader for church growth and development. This finding was consistent with common knowledge found in most leadership literature written within the twentieth century. Nevertheless, participants also gave almost an equal value to the role of leadership teams in connection to the senior leader of a church in the breaking of the barrier of fifty in worship attendance. In many instances, participants referred to their core team as the major factor for ever accomplishing church growth and moving the congregation forward to a new day. This finding would be worthy of further exploration to study the role of leadership teams in fulfilling God’s vision for a church versus the role

of the senior leader as a catalyst agent of change in moving congregations toward their destiny in Christ.

Recommendations

Because the scope of this project was limited to the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist churches with the Kentucky Annual Conference, there is a need to make some recommendations for further study into the factors that impact growth and the best practices for church growth from those factors:

- 1- A larger study group to include all the Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference needs to be formed to further validate the data from this study. At present, there are 12 Hispanic United Methodist churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference that continue striving every year, but also new churches are being planted with the goal of 4 churches per year, according to our Kentucky New Church Development Office.
- 2- I recommend paying special attention to the factors that impact growth below and above fifty along with the best practices for church growth that emerged from the research questions. The general factors in Chapter 4 along with the factors in the major findings in Chapter 5 will serve as a guide to present and future practitioners. Pastors seeking to do Hispanic ministry within the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church would be able to identify which practices to avoid or to embrace in order to grow churches over fifty.
- 3- Research should be conducted both on the role of the senior pastors but also on the role of leadership teams, as I mentioned before. The ministry of breaking the barrier

of fifty in Hispanic churches has some distinct advantages and disadvantages that are not characteristics of senior pastors only.

4- Further study should be conducted limited to only churches that have moved beyond the barrier of fifty in the future years. A pre-and post-intervention study could be made, targeting the same churches after the barrier of fifty has been broken in order to explore how the major findings informed the churches in their successful continued growth. I wonder if the factors that propel the church beyond fifty in worship attendance have the same capacity to hinder church growth when the congregation faces a new growth barrier. According to McIntosh's Typology of Church Sizes (McIntosh 38) in Chapter 2, the next growth barrier would be between 201-400 in average worship attendance.

5- A study should be conducted limited to only churches that are below the barrier of fifty in future years. A pre-and post-intervention study could be made, targeting the same churches before and after the barrier of fifty was broken, to explore how the major findings informed the churches in successfully breaking the barrier of fifty, if at all.

Postscript

I remember when I was a child, maybe eight or nine years old, suddenly and unexpectedly having a vision one night. The scene was a remote area with ancient architecture, everyone was dressed in Roman clothing and sandals. There was a great multitude, and everyone was crowded around a man, who was judging with few words, not allowing any excuses from anyone. In the center of the sky, there was a dark, black hole surrounded by fire. This man would mention the first and last name of those being judged, with the date of their birth and death. After this, he would judge; then pointing at

them with his finger, he would send them into this horrible place in one swift motion. He did this repeatedly until the end. When he finished, he turned toward me, who had been a spectator watching it all in astonishment, and he told me in a firm voice: “Go and share with people what you have seen and heard.” Then I awoke.

Today we see that the dream came true; that I am preaching Christ, the resurrection of the dead, repentance, and the coming judgment of the nations—and no one is laughing now. I tell you who are reading this now, with conviction: God’s vision is always fulfilled. Have faith and be brave. I have written this project with a heart and spirit completely given over to ministry. The motive is to help men and women to become balanced leaders and to train them to transform their communities. As I was studying for my doctorate degree, I was able to see firsthand how Asbury Theological Seminary trains pastors to be theologians and teachers of the scriptures, but they also train them to be leaders. In addition, I know that within congregations there are many trained and natural leaders who can be a blessing or a problem if the pastor is not equipped as a leader to guide them. Therefore, when I finished my doctorate program I set myself more fervently than ever on the arduous task of forming leaders and writing about leadership. I desire to place all my practical and academic experience in the hands of those who seek to be effective and finish the work the Father has entrusted to them.

Here I am, doing the will of my Lord. This study is a practical, useful tool for all those who find themselves worn down from working without results, with small churches that do not grow, with difficult people who do not follow Christ. It is a study for those who do not give up and who want to transform their city. I encourage the reader of this study to dive deep into the findings of this project, where each one of the findings offered in

Chapter 4 and expanded upon in this chapter have been tested and proven in the fire of practical ministry but also through research questions, research instruments, data collection, and the literature review, all embedded in a qualitative research methodology to give birth to a solid ministry mission field study to help many practitioners. They are the fruit of years of church planting together with three long years of academic training through the Beeson International Program at Asbury Theological Seminary. I pray that the God of heaven would bring fruit to your ministry and bless you in using these findings, as richly as He has blessed me and my people in Kentucky.

APPENDIX A

Question Sets for Questionnaire, Interview, and Focus Groups

Question Set A: Questions for the Pastor Questionnaire

1. Does your church have a defined vision and process for making disciples? If so, please state your vision and describe the process of making a disciple from point A to point B.
2. In your opinion, what are the gifts and graces that are present in effective church planters?
3. Do you have a designated team of leaders? If so, are your leaders able to articulate your church vision and mission (if you have one)?
4. In what ways would your church growth be impacted in the case of itinerancy or unexpected absence of the lead pastor (e.g. death, illness, accident, retirement, etc.)
5. If other church groups and denominations are growing, what factors are preventing Hispanic United Methodist churches from doing the same?
6. How do you know you are facing a church growth barrier?
7. What changes do you feel are necessary to implement in your church in order to break the “barrier of fifty”?
8. What are the best church practices that you would suggest for church growth?

Question Set B: Questions for the Pastor Interviews/Focus Groups

1. Drawing from your experience, please articulate what pastors find difficult about church growth?

2. What positive styles of leadership or philosophies of ministry have you observed make a significant impact on the growth of your church?
3. What negative styles of leadership or philosophies of ministry have you observed make a significant impact on the growth of your church?
4. If your church is not growing beyond fifty in worship attendance, can you explain reasons why not?
5. What are your perceptions about Mega-churches and the emphasis on numbers?
6. What new practices would you consider implementing to impact the growth of your church?
7. If you were given the opportunity to start your church all over again from the beginning, what would you do differently, if anything?

APPENDIX B

Question Sets for Questionnaire, Interviews, and Focus Groups

(Spanish Translations)

Question Set A: Spanish translation of questions for the Pastor Questionnaire

1. ¿Tiene su iglesia una visión y proceso definidos para hacer discípulos? Si es así, por favor declare su visión y describa el proceso de hacer un discípulo desde el punto A al punto B.
2. En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los dones y la gracia que están presentes en plantadores de iglesia efectivos?
3. ¿Tiene un grupo designado de líderes? Si es así, ¿son sus líderes capaces de articular la visión y misión de su iglesia? (si tiene una)
4. ¿De qué manera se vería afectado el crecimiento de su iglesia en el caso de itinerancia o ausencia inesperada del pastor líder? (por ejemplo muerte, enfermedad, accidente, retiro, etc.).
5. Si otros grupos de Iglesias y denominaciones están creciendo, ¿qué factores están impidiendo que las Iglesias Metodistas Hispanas hagan lo mismo?
6. ¿Cómo sabe que está enfrentando una barrera de crecimiento de la iglesia?
7. ¿Qué cambios cree que son necesarios poner en práctica en su Iglesia para romper la “barrera de los cincuenta”?
8. ¿Cuáles son las mejores prácticas de la iglesia que usted sugeriría para el crecimiento de la misma?

Question Set B: Spanish translation of questions for the Pastor Interviews/Focus Groups

1. Basado en su propia experiencia, por favor exprese lo que los pastores encuentran difícil acerca del crecimiento de la iglesia.
2. ¿Qué estilos positivos de liderazgo o filosofías de ministerio ha observado que tienen un impacto significativo en el crecimiento de la iglesia?
3. ¿Qué estilos negativos de liderazgo o filosofías de ministerio ha observado que tienen un impacto significativo en el crecimiento de la iglesia?
4. Si su Iglesia no está creciendo más allá de cincuenta en asistencia al servicio, ¿puede explicar las razones por las cuáles no está creciendo?
5. ¿Cuáles son sus percepciones sobre las Mega Iglesias y el énfasis en números?
6. ¿Qué prácticas nuevas consideraría implementar para impactar el crecimiento de su iglesia?
7. Si se le diera la oportunidad de comenzar su iglesia nuevamente desde el principio, ¿haría algo diferente?

APPENDIX C

Letter to Participants

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

HISPANIC UNITED METHODIST CHURCH GROWTH:

THE FACTORS THAT IMPACT GROWTH IN HISPANIC UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES WITHIN THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a research study being done by Rev. Iosmar Alvarez Alfonso, a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a Hispanic pastor within the United Methodist Kentucky Annual Conference leading a Hispanic United Methodist church with an average worship attendance of either 50 and below, or 50 and above.

This project attempts to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference in order to help pastors and leaders identify best church planting practices for Hispanic United Methodist churches in response to the rapidly changing, multicultural 21st Century American landscape

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, attend a one-on-one interview, and participate in two focus group sessions with other research participants. Interviews and focus group sessions may be audio and/or video recorded for further reference and accuracy. This research will be conducted over a six-month period. You will be given more specific instructions prior to each step of the research process including how and when to complete an online questionnaire, as well as the date, time, and location of the interview and focus group sessions. Participation in this research will be on a voluntary basis only.

If you choose to participate, all identifying information collected from you will be confidential, with access limited to the researcher, the research assistant, and the Investigation Review Board of Asbury Theological Seminary. Any further use of this information will not be permitted without proper consent.

Please know that you can refuse this proposal. Your participation is entirely voluntary and your willingness to consider being part of the research process is greatly appreciated. If at any time you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact Rev. Alvarez Alfonso by phone: 859-333-0997, or by email: iosmaralvarez@me.com.

If you are willing to assist with this study, please read the following consent statement, and sign and date below. If you do not wish to participate, please do not sign this document.

Informed Consent Statement

By signing, I acknowledge that I have read this consent form and I give my consent to participate in the study described above. I affirm that I have been informed about the research project, why it is being done, and what is required of me as a participant.

Signature of Person Agreeing to Participate in the Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX D

Letter to Participants (Spanish Translation)

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

CRECIMIENTO DE LA IGLESIA METODISTA UNIDA HISPANA:

LOS FACTORES QUE IMPACTAN EL CRECIMIENTO DE LA IGLESIA METODISTA UNIDA HISPANA EN LA CONFERENCIA ANUAL DE KENTUCKY

Querido _____,

Usted está invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación realizado por el Rev. Iosmar Álvarez Alfonso, un participante del Doctorado en Ministerio en el Seminario Teológico Asbury. Usted está invitado porque es un pastor Hispano en la Conferencia Metodista Unida Anual de Kentucky a cargo de una Iglesia Metodista Unida Hispana con un promedio de culto de 50 o menos personas, o de 50 o más personas.

Este proyecto intenta identificar los factores que impactan el crecimiento en las Iglesias Metodistas Unidas Hispanas en la Conferencia Anual de Kentucky con el fin de ayudar a los pastores y líderes a identificar mejores prácticas de plantación de iglesias para las Iglesias Metodistas Hispanas Unidas en respuesta al rápido crecimiento multicultural en Estados Unidos.

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar de esta investigación, se le va a pedir que complete un cuestionario en línea, asistir a una entrevista individual, y participar en dos grupos de discusión con otros participantes de la investigación. Las entrevistas y las sesiones de los grupos de discusión podrían ser grabadas en audio y/o video para su posterior referencia y precisión. Esta investigación se llevará a cabo durante un período de seis meses. Se le darán instrucciones más específicas antes de cada paso del proceso de investigación incluyendo cómo y cuándo completar un cuestionario en línea, así como también la fecha, la hora y la ubicación de la entrevista y de los grupos de discusión. La participación en esta investigación será en una base voluntaria solamente.

Si usted elige participar, toda la información obtenida de usted será confidencial, con acceso limitado al investigador, a la asistente del investigador, y la Junta de Investigación y Revisión del Seminario Teológico de Asbury. Cualquier otro uso de esta información no será permitido sin el consentimiento adecuado.

Por favor sepa que usted puede rechazar esta propuesta. Su participación es enteramente voluntaria y su disposición a considerar ser parte del proceso de investigación es muy apreciada. Si en algún momento usted tiene alguna pregunta o comentario, no dude en ponerse en contacto con el Rev. Iosmar Álvarez Alfonso, por teléfono al número 859-333-0997, o por correo electrónico: iosmaralvarez@me.com.

Si usted está dispuesto a ayudar con esta investigación, por favor lea la siguiente declaración de consentimiento, y firme con la fecha correspondiente debajo. Si no desea participar, por favor no firme este documento.

Declaración de Consentimiento Informado

Al firmar, reconozco que he leído este formulario. Afirmando que he sido informado acerca del proyecto de investigación, el motivo por el cual se está realizando y que es lo que se requiere de mí como participante.

Firma de la Persona que Acepta Participar en el Estudio

Fecha

APPENDIX E

Letter to Pastor of Church Hosting the Focus Group Sessions

Re: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear _____:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study during the regular meetings for the covenant group of Kentucky Hispanic United Methodist pastors held at _____ UMC church campus. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled Hispanic United Methodist Church Growth: Factors that Impact Growth In Hispanic United Methodist Churches Within The Kentucky Annual Conference.

If approval is granted, the Kentucky Hispanic United Methodist pastors participating in the study will meet twice for a focus group session, each time in the classroom building on the first Monday of the month from 10:00am to 12:00pm as per regular scheduled time and location of the covenant group meeting. The focus group portion of the research process should take no longer than 2 months. No costs will be incurred by either your church or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study at your church campus during the regularly scheduled covenant group meeting will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address: iosmar.alvarez@asburyseminary.edu or iosmaralvarez@me.com with any questions or concerns that you may have.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

Sincerely,

Iosmar Alvarez Alfonso, Doctorate of Ministry Student
Asbury Theological Seminary

Approved by:

Printed Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX F

Letter to UMC Kentucky Annual Conference Director of Hispanic Ministries

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Rev. _____,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study involving pastors of Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Conference. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled Hispanic United Methodist Church Growth: Factors that Impact Growth In Hispanic United Methodist Churches Within The Kentucky Annual Conference.

The project attempts to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference in order to help pastors and leaders to identify best church planting practices for Hispanic United Methodist churches in response to the rapidly changing, multicultural 21st Century American landscape.

I hope that the Office of Hispanic Ministries of the United Methodist Church Kentucky Conference will allow me to recruit pastors from the specified churches below to complete an online questionnaire, a personal interview, and participate in two focus group sessions:

Participant A
Participant B
Participant C
Participant D
Participant E
Participant F

The research process should take no longer than a total of six months. Participation in this research will be on a volunteer basis only. All identifying information collected from the participants will be confidential, with access limited to the researcher, the research assistant, and the Investigation Review Board of Asbury Theological Seminary. Any further use of this information will not be permitted without proper consent. No costs will be incurred by your office or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address: iosmar.alvarez@asburyseminary.edu or iosmaralvarez@me.com with any questions or concerns that you may have.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed

envelope.

Sincerely,

Iosmar Alvarez Alfonso, Doctor of Ministry Student
Asbury Theological Seminary

Approved by:

Printed Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX G

Letter to UMC Kentucky Annual Conference District Superintendents

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Rev _____:

I am writing to request permission to allow the church, _____ UMC to be involved in a research study that I will be conducting. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled Hispanic United Methodist Church Growth: Factors that Impact Growth In Hispanic United Methodist Churches Within The Kentucky Annual Conference.

I will be recruiting pastors of Hispanic United Methodist churches from within the Kentucky Annual Conference to participate in an online questionnaire, a personal interview, and two focus group sessions. The project attempts to identify the factors that impact growth in Hispanic United Methodist Churches within the Kentucky Annual Conference in order to help pastors and leaders identify best church planting practices for Hispanic United Methodist churches in response to the rapidly changing, multicultural 21st Century American landscape.

The research process should take no longer than a total of six months. Participation in this research will be on a voluntary basis only. All identifying information collected from the participants will be confidential, with access limited to the researcher, the research assistant, and the Investigation Review Board of Asbury Theological Seminary. Any further use of this information will not be permitted without proper consent. No costs will be incurred by your office or the individual participants.

Your approval to allow _____ UMC to be included in this study will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address: iosmar.alvarez@asburyseminary.edu or iosmaralvarez@me.com with any questions or concerns that you may have.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

Sincerely,

Iosmar Alvarez Alfonso, Doctor of Ministry Student
Asbury Theological Seminary

Approved by:

Printed Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX H

Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

RESEARCH ASSISTANT CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Hispanic United Methodist Church Growth:

The Factors That Impact Growth In Hispanic United Methodist Churches

Within The Kentucky Annual Conference

I, _____, agree to assist the primary investigator with this study. I agree to maintain full confidentiality when performing these tasks.

Specifically, I agree to:

1. keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the primary investigator;
2. hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be revealed during the course of performing the research tasks;
3. not make copies of any raw data in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts), unless specifically requested to do so by the primary investigator;
4. keep all raw data that contains identifying information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
 - keeping all digitized raw data in computer password-protected files and other raw data in a locked file;
 - closing any computer programs and documents of the raw data when temporarily away from the computer;
 - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data; and
 - using closed headphones if transcribing recordings;
5. give, all raw data in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;

6. destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

Provide the following contact information for research assistant:

Printed name of research assistant_____

Address:_____

Telephone number:_____

Signature of research assistant_____ Date _____

Printed name of primary investigator_____

Signature of primary investigator_____ Date _____

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