ABSTRACT

SALVIFIC RELATIONSHIP:

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND MISSIONAL

SERVICE IN THE WICHITAS DISTRICT OF THE OKLAHOMA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

Matthew B. Scraper

When churches remove the valuable theology of spiritual growth taught by Wesley and passed on by the tradition of the Church, they remove the reason for people to engage in the instituted means of grace through the Church. Therefore, there may be connection between participation in missional involvement and the availability of instruction in Christian spiritual growth. The purpose of this research was to assess whether a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. While other factors may also influence rates of missional involvement, this study sought to assess whether the availability of such instruction correlates in any way to rates of participation in missional involvement within a congregation.

The findings of this study indicate that: 1) congregations with a greater number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth are also likely to have higher rates of participation in missional service opportunities; 2) congregations with higher rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth are likely to have higher rates of participation in missional service opportunities; 3) the clergy who participated in the study do not report even an average level of familiarization with the traditional method of

teaching Christian spiritual growth, known as The Three Ways; 4) congregational and denominational leaders may be incorrect in their assessment that congregations with a lower average age range are more likely to participation in missional service opportunities, and 5) missional service and spiritual growth opportunities are equally viable points of entry for different kinds of people.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled:

SALVIFIC RELATIONSHIP:
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND
MISSIONAL SERVICE IN THE WICHITAS DISTRICT OF THE OKLAHOMA
ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

presented by

Matthew B. Scraper

has been accepted towards fulfillment

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will consist of an overview of the project. It begins with background information illuminating the development of the project and articulates how this particular project can benefit the Church. The chapter continues with a rationale for the project, covers key research questions that should be answered, address delimitations, and offer definitions for key terms and phrases that were used throughout the project. It concludes with an introduction to key thematic areas explored in the literature review that follows the second chapter.

Autobiographical Introduction

I have been a student of an appointed minister for literally my entire life. That is to say, I have not only studied the role of an appointed minister, but have been taught by an appointed minister of my church throughout the entirety of my lifetime. I am the son of a minister. My father is a United Methodist minister ordained in the Kansas East Conference of the United Methodist Church over forty years ago; he has had the opportunity to earn a total of four graduate degrees in his lifetime. His most recent degree, a Doctor of Philosophy in Franklian Psychology and Christian Spiritual Formation, reflects the overall direction of his life's work. He has always had a passion for Christian spiritual growth and meaning discovery, specifically as expressed in the writings of the Christian mystics and Viktor Frankl. From a very early age I participated in classes that my father taught in the local church on the topic of Christian spiritual growth. These classes always focused on understanding Christian spiritual growth using the "road map" offered by the experience of the Christian mystics, often expressed as "The Three Ways."

The result of this influence in my early life was a profound personal feeling of importance for pursuing a real, mature, and meaningful relationship with the Triune God. As I grew older and experienced the world outside of our parish, I began to interact with many Christians who, it seemed to me at least, had little understanding of the importance of their relationship with God and virtually no exposure to spiritual formation. Growing into my current role has found me following in my father's footsteps as I have sought to pursue a ministry that is oriented toward helping others come to know the saving power and abundant life found in relationship with God. Over my lifetime, I have developed a tremendous passion for this undertaking, as well as a strong desire to see the theology of spiritual growth as understood from a Wesleyan perspective return to a place of value in the local church. This influence caused me to develop a question: is there a relationship that exists between the teaching of Christian spiritual growth within the churches of the Wichitas District of the Oklahoma Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (OKUMC) and the overall level of participation in missional involvement?

Statement of the Problem

Although the idea that there are three distinct stages of Christian spiritual development shows up in the writings of the church as early as the 5th century, Fr. Benedict Groeschel's book, Spiritual Passages, offers a meaningful point of entry for anyone seeking to better understand this three-fold process of Christian spiritual maturation. This work builds upon Evelyn Underhill's 1911 publishing of Mysticism but goes beyond Underhill's coalescence of the collective spiritual growth experience of early church saints to further identify the nature of the individual experience within each of "The Three Ways" (Purgation, Illumination, and Union)(Underhill). Although the writings on this topic reach back throughout nearly the entire

history of Christianity, the focus of the topic is undeniably on movement toward meaningful life that is the result of a mature relationship with the Triune God.

Throughout the history of the church, there has been a parallel theological conversation that has taken place regarding the proper *ordo salutis*. This conversation generally finds its expression in a three-fold movement as well (Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification). As a Wesleyan denomination, the United Methodist Church (UMC) is certainly most influenced by John Wesley's *ordo salutis*. Although Wesley spends little time discussing Glorification, his writings on Justification, Regeneration, and Initial and Entire Sanctification have allowed the denomination that he fathered a valuable theological voice within the dialogue of global Christianity. Therefore, it stands to reason that it is possible that when churches remove the valuable theology of spiritual growth as taught by Wesley and passed on by the tradition of the Church, they remove the reason for people to engage in participate in the instituted means of grace through the Church. It is therefore possible that there is a connection between participation in missional involvement and the availability of instruction in Christian spiritual growth (see fig. 1.1). Therefore, it is likely that in churches where instruction is offered in Christian spiritual growth there will also be higher levels of participation among current members in missional involvement.

Figure 1.1:
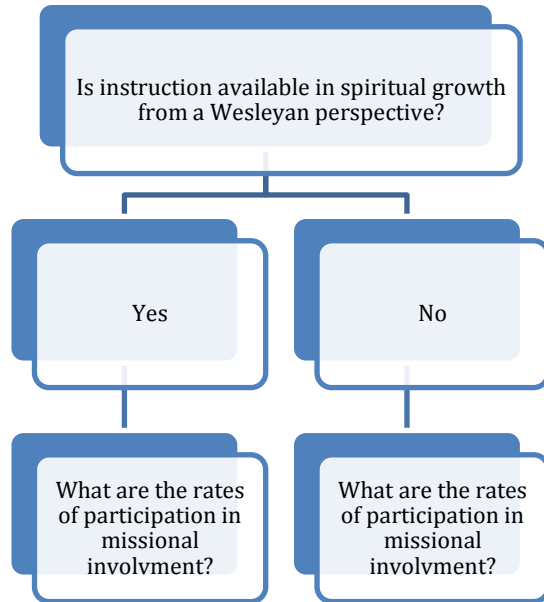
Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to assess whether or not a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. This study did not seek to propose or assume that instruction of this nature is the only factor that influences participation in missional involvement within a congregation. Rather, this study sought to assess whether the availability of such instruction correlates in any way to rates of participation in missional involvement within a congregation.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth are offered by congregations within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC?

It is possible that there are a large number of United Methodist clergy with an understanding of Christian spiritual growth. However, if instruction is not offered to the laity within the churches to which these clergy are appointed, then it is possible and perhaps even

likely that this knowledge is not being passed on to the laity through the church. In order to determine whether or not a relationship exists between opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional involvement, it is first necessary to determine whether or not such opportunities for instruction are available. The results of this question will help to determine an overall pattern of the availability of such instruction within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC.

Research Question 2: What is the level of missional involvement among the congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC?

If the intended result of instruction in Christian spiritual growth is not only salvation, but also spiritual maturity (as will be addressed in the literature survey in chapter 2), then how is this reflected within the life of the local church? The purpose of this study is not to gauge the effect of participation in instruction on Christian Spiritual growth on the life of the individual who participates in such instruction, but rather to assess whether or not a relationship exists on a congregational level between congregations that offer opportunities for such instruction and rates of participation by congregation in missional involvement. The intent is to essentially measure participation in one specific type of act of mercy as identified by Wesley. These terms will be explained further in the definition of key terms.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the availability of Christian Spiritual growth programs and levels of missional involvement among the congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC?

If the intended result of instruction in Christian spiritual growth is not only salvation, but also spiritual maturity (as will be addressed in the literature survey in chapter 2), then how is this growth into spiritual maturity reflected within the life of the local church? This research question

focused on one aspect of the literature review that indicates missional involvement as a work of mercy that is/can be a result of growth toward spiritual maturity. This question seeks to understand if there is a relationship between the availability of spiritual growth programs and missional involvement, and if there is a relationship, what is the nature of that relationship?

Rationale for the Project

This over-arching reason that this study matters is because for quite some time the growth rhetoric coming out of the American Church, (and out of the United Methodist Church) has been strongly centered on the idea of moving the Church toward cultural relevance. The basic summary of this belief, as it has been communicated to clergy in the OKUMC, is that the Church is in decline because it is no longer relevant to the lives of the people that the Church seeks to minister to through Christian community. The communicated message to clergy continues that this failure of the church is commonly attributed, at least in part, to the carryover of older (perhaps European) religious practices that are no longer relevant to the modern American culture. The communicated message has therefore been that should the Church make greater strides in becoming relevant to the culture (in this case: the culture of America) then the Church will likewise experience a resurgence of participation.

While this perspective holds much merit, it may also be true that a focus on personal holiness holds the potential for a resurgence of participation as well. While writing about the influence of German Pietism on the theology of John Wesley, professor Ken Collins of Asbury theological seminary writes the following: "what Wesley likely found most attractive in German Pietism, especially from Halle and precursory movements, was the strong association of the new birth and the reform of the church, in other words, that renewal must begin with the inculcation of holiness"(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 208). If there is to be significant reform in the

American church, and such a reform must begin with the inculcation of personal holiness, it is therefore important that for the purposes of this study an assessment be made as to the availability of opportunities for such instruction in spiritual growth from a Wesleyan perspective.

The second reason that this study matters is because being able to identify concrete reasons for the level of current participation among members of the churches that we serve is not the same thing as being able to identify objectives and steps to correct deficiencies and move congregations toward greater levels participation. Clergy need concrete and objective steps that can be taken in order to help increase levels of participation among current members in key areas such as missional involvement.

The third reason that this study matters is because the church is in decline. Many denominations throughout the United States are currently experiencing significant declines. My own denomination, the United Methodist Church, is experiencing rapid declines, and has experienced those declines consistently for several decades. Any course of action taken to reverse those declines will likely include the greater participation among members of local congregations. Being able to assess what could be a significant factor in determining how to increase rates of participation is of great benefit to the church.

The fourth reason that this study matters is because clergy are often held responsible for the levels of participation among current members of the congregation, even when many of the reasons for the state of the local congregation's current level of participation are often outside of the direct or indirect control of the clergy. Clergy in any denomination do not have unilateral control over the direction of the church. Even, at times, the ability to identify the factors that contribute to lack of participation among current members does not bring with it the authority to make the necessary changes to help the congregation to increase levels of participation. A

number of factors often prevent clergy from being able to make the necessary changes, ranging from denominational oversight to local culture, to the complexity of working with an all-volunteer community. For clergy to be able to identify something that lies within their direct sphere of influence that can likewise contribute to higher levels of participation would allow the clergy to be able to take direct steps toward increasing participation.

Definition of Key Terms

Christian Spiritual Growth:

For the purposes of this study, the term "spiritual growth" will refer to a process that has, as its intent, the purpose of advancing toward deep, personal, and mature relationship with the Triune God (Wesley, *A Plain Account* 114). As outlined in the literature review that follows, this process was within the context of the three-part movement from the Purgative Way, to the Illuminative Way, and finally into the Unitive Way (Volf 78–79). For the purposes of this study, this three-fold movement will parallel the *ordo salutis* preached and taught by John Wesley which is approached through the threefold movement from justification, to sanctification, to glorification (Wesley, *A Plain Account* 90; Burwash 40). In a more expanded form, this would include prevenient grace, repentance, justifying grace, justification, regeneration sanctifying grace, initial sanctification, entire sanctification, and glorification.

Means of Grace:

The "means of grace" defined for the purposes of this study, will refer specifically to John Wesley's interaction with and description of those elements which constitute the means of grace. In his book, Christian Perfection and Wesley's Purposeful List, Anthony Headley writes that Wesley defined the means of grace as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men

preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace" (Headley 133). Headley goes on to note that Wesley

identified a difference between the "prudential" means of grace, and the "instituted" means of

grace. For Wesley, these instituted means of grace referred to those "signs, words, or actions"

that were "clearly established in scripture" (Headley 133). Headley writes that Wesley identifies

five "instituted" means of grace, consisting of: prayer, searching the scriptures, The Lord's

Supper, fasting, and Christian conference (Headley 133). These works are "often referred to as

'works of piety,'" as well, and was referred to within this study in that manner as well (Collins,

The Theology of John Wesley 257). The first three of these (prayer, searching the scriptures, and

The Lord's Supper) along with Wesley's directive to attend the church was the instituted means

of grace that are measured for the purposes of this study., Wesley emphasizes the need for

church attendance in his writings, "Many had forgotten that we were all at our first setting out

determined members of the Established Church. Yea, it as one of our original rules, that every

member of our Society should attend the church and sacrament" (Wesley, "The Wesley Center"

4)).

Missional Involvement:

Collins notes that "Wesley repeatedly affirmed the value of missional involvement as a

genuine means of grace, whereby not only are the poor helped to a better life, but also those who

minister to them benefit in so many ways" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 267). For

Wesley, these works included, "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger,

visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted" (Collins, *The Theology of John

Wesley* 267). Headley notes that Wesley considered missional involvement among the instituted

means of grace, stressing the relational nature of active participation (Headley 135). For the

purposes of this study, the term "missional involvement" includes and is limited to: local,

national, and international mission trips scheduled through an outside missional organization or

planned entirely by the local congregation, as well as local outreach opportunities that have as

their primary intent the goal of providing any kind of service to or building relationships with

individuals and communities that are not currently included in the membership of the church

(Roxburgh 159–160).

Delimitations

Because administrative structures and methods of collecting data relative to the level of

participation among members of the local church vary so greatly between denominations, the

author has made some inclusionary and exclusionary decisions for the purpose of defining the

boundaries of the study. To begin, the author focused specifically on the United Methodist

Church. This allowed the author to include his own local context while also applying the results

of the study to the context in which he serves. Further, it allows the author the opportunity to

define the study according to the administrative parameters common to United Methodist

Churches as a result of the UMC's required adherence to the polity set forth by the Book of

Discipline. In order to make the data both manageable and relevant, the author limited the study

geographically to the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. In addition to the possibility of

collecting very large amounts of data if the study was not geographically limited, cultures vary

according to the subcultures present in different regions of the United States. Therefore, what

may be a motivational factor in one geographic region may not necessarily be so in another. By

limiting this study to the Wichitas District of the OKUMC, the author could later match the

results of the necessary surveys (detailed in a later section) to the statistical data that is reported

to the Annual Conference by each local church and disseminated through the Conference

Journal. The author included United Methodist churches within this district of all sizes and in all

settings (rural, urban, suburban, etc.) and churches that have both male and female clergy appointed representing any age group. This inclusion allowed the author to analyze whether or not there are any trends within the data relative to any of the above criteria.

Review of Relevant Literature

In assessing the relevant literature on this topic, an effort was made to engage the theology of Christian spiritual growth. This review will focus on understanding Wesley's *ordo salutis* within the context of Christian spiritual growth to include Wesley's understanding of both works of piety and missional involvement. In engaging the sub-topic of Christian spiritual growth, the intent was to better understand the theology that undergirds the process of spiritual growth leading to spiritual maturity. This will take the form of engaging and understanding Wesley's *ordo salutis* and its relevant application to the movement of the individual Christian toward spiritual maturity.

In engaging the sub-topic of missional involvement, the intent was to better understand Wesley's definition of the works that comprise it. An attempt will also be made to better understand how the two kinds of works (works of piety and works of mercy) differ from one another in practice. Finally, an attempt was made to better understand why missional involvement (a work of mercy) is beneficial.

Research Methodology

This study was a pre-intervention study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The purpose of the study was to assess whether or not a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. Quantitative data was collected using a survey designed to assess rates of participation

throughout the district. Quantitative data was also collected through an observation of spiritual formation and missional service statistics as reported in the 2016 Annual Conference Journal of the Oklahoma Annual Conference from each of the 22 participating congregations. Qualitative data was collected through the use of a semi-structured interviews with a randomly selected group of five appointed clergy from within the district.

Type of Research

This study was a pre-intervention study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study was a pre-intervention study because the intent of the study is to determine whether or not a relationship already exists between two practices so that further conclusions might be drawn and follow-up suggestions might be made. The study used quantitative methods to identify practices and rates of participation. The study used qualitative methods as a means by which to draw inferences about the relationships from the participants in the study.

Participants

An attempt was made to include every local church in the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. Because forms of polity are different between Christian denominations, it is important to focus on one denomination in order to determine whether or not this relationship exists. Because practices and cultures can vary regionally, it is important to explore the nature or presence of this relationship within one geographic area. United Methodist Churches of all sizes and in all demographic environments within this district will participate, for reasons to be identified in the data analysis section.

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from all local United Methodist Churches within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC in the form of a survey and questionnaire sent to those churches and through semi-structured interviews of five randomly selected appointed clergy from within the district. The survey and questionnaire focused on questions relative to the percentage of churches that offer opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, as well as participation in missional involvement. The semi-structured interviews focused on gathering qualitative data that expressed the opinions of appointed clergy on the relationships that exist between Christian Spiritual growth programs and missional involvement.

An effort was made to make the survey and questionnaire as user-friendly as possible. The survey and questionnaire were administered using an online survey hosting service. Assistance was solicited from the district administrator in disseminating a link to the survey to every local church in the district. The survey and questionnaire were structured to only allow each participant to participate one time, and though confidential it was not anonymous.

Data Analysis

This data was broken down according to two categories. The category relative to demographic region was a self-identified category, assessed through the survey, questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The breakdown of data was as follows:

- Size:
    - Churches under 75 in annual average worship attendance
    - Churches between 76 and 150 in annual average worship attendance
    - Churches between 151 and 300 in annual average worship attendance
    - Churches between 301 and 500 in annual average worship attendance
    - Churches over 501 in annual average worship attendance

- Demographic Region:

  o Churches in rural communities (self-identified)

  o Churches in urban communities (self-identified)

  o Churches in sub-urban communities (self-identified)

This data was compared (by category) to quantitative data reflecting rates of participation by current members in missional involvement for the most recent fiscal year. The point of comparing these two batches of data was to explore whether or not a relationship exists between the percentage of churches that offer opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional involvement.

The two batches of data compared to one another for the purpose of this project were converted to percentages. This was to account for the different variables within the study, specifically the demographic and size variables already indicated. Once analyzed, trends were explored in the same relationships mentioned according to categories of church size and demographic region. Any existing relationships were identified in order to determine whether or not church size or demographic region impacts the relationship being explored.

Generalizability

This study was conducted in as generalized a manner as possible, with the intent that other clergy and researchers could repeat this study in other geographic regions or within other denominations. This study was a pre-intervention study, which means that the intent was to determine whether or not the relationships do or do not exist so that recommendations could be inferred based on the data obtained. If they did not exist, then there is direct benefit to a local congregation if the clergy and lay leadership focus on offering instruction in Christian spiritual growth. If there was not a relationship, then clergy and lay leadership can focus efforts

elsewhere. Therefore, regardless of the outcome, this is a study that can and should be repeated in different regions and different denominations with minimal effot in adapting it to different circumstances.

Project Overview

This project outlines a study of whether or not a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. Chapter Two discusses the most influential writers and practitioners regarding Christian spiritual growth (from a Wesleyan perspective) and missional involvement. Chapter Three outlines the various ways the researcher investigated his research questions. Chapter Four analyzes the findings that emerged from such quantitative methods as surveys and qualitative methods as questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Chapter Five outlines the study's major findings with implications for each discovery now and in the future.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of literature related this project. While there is no evidence for studies that replicate this one, there is a relatively large body of knowledge available as a result of research that has been conducted within each foundational component that comprises this project. This chapter engages this body of literature by summarizing the basic components of this study and analyzing gaps in current research that offer a place for this study to be included in the larger dialogue on church participation as related to Christian spiritual growth.

Biblical and Theological Foundations: Christian Spiritual Growth

A High Level Overview

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." ~Matthew 5:48

Before engaging in the complexity of this dialogue, it is helpful to begin with a high-level overview of the four seasons of Christian spiritual life. The short verse above has plagued Christianity for many generations because of the seemingly obvious command that all Christians are to become perfect. However, it has become less and less acceptable among Christians to assert that perfection is even possible, much less a state of being which God expects the willing Christian to attain. As a result, any scriptural reference to such a lofty endeavor is often ignored or intentionally re-interpreted.

Unfortunately, the flaw in interpretation lies within the translation itself. In this case, the word in this verse that is translated as "perfect" (teleios), is a word that quite literally means "whole" (France 228–229). In fact, the most recent cooperative denominationally supported scholarly attempt (The Common English Bible) translates this word as "complete" as opposed to "perfect." The meaning of the verse can be adequately assessed when the additional meanings are substituted in translation, "Be complete, therefore, as your heavenly Father is complete," or perhaps, "Be mature, therefore, as your heavenly Father is mature." The understood intention of the verse is therefore transformed by the understanding that the world "perfect" is not used here in any sense that indicates that one is expected to be free from flaw, as might be the modern western interpretation of the word. Rather, the verse points to a movement into completion or maturity, conveying the notion that perhaps one is considered "perfected" when one becomes whole, mature, or complete in the same way that God is.

Apart from God, we find ourselves incomplete. The command that we are therefore given, by Christ, is one that implores us to move toward becoming perfected in the Holy Love of God, through Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit (Burwash 15. Briefly we must inquire as to whether or not it is even possible for a human to attain the same kind of completion or maturity that God exhibits. As might be suspected, Christ speaks to this idea very clearly as well, stating that the goal of Christian life is union with God, the one and only place that such completion or maturity is possible (Thornton 20–25). We find this ultimate intention stated again in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, otherwise commonly referred to as "The High Priestly Prayer." In it, Christ states His desire that we live together with God firmly engaged in the same kind of deeply mature relationship that Christ came both to model and to make possible (Michaels 874–876). "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that *all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us* so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21 NIV)

The overarching purpose of Christian spiritual growth is therefore quite simply to grow toward the kind of complete, mature relationship with God that Christ intended and to live fully (as was Christ's intention) in the midst of the abundance that is the result of such deep and meaningful relationship (Gratton 43; Scraper, "Preaching" 13). "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). It is from this perspective that we begin an overview of the process of spiritual growth that leads one to this kind of spiritual maturity, toward completion through relationship with the Triune God.

The Four Seasons of Spiritual Growth

The experience of growing in relationship with God is very much like the experience of growing in any relationship (Thornton 22). Over the centuries, many Saints have traveled this road, and more than a few, such as John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila, and others, have written of their experiences in the hope that doing so will help other Christians to better understand what they are experiencing as they come to know God more intimately (Heath 22; May 9; Fénelon 113). In 1911, Evelyn Underhill published a work titled *Mysticism*, in which she sought to examine the writings of many of the Saints on this topic so that she might come to discern the experiences that were common to each. Others have since built upon her work, including Fr. Benedict Groeschel in his work "Spiritual Passages," and Rev. Dr. Randy Scraper in his work "Franklian Psychology and Christian Spiritual Formation". Work on this subject matter is obviously ongoing. However, the end result of this work as it exists today has been the coalescence of the experiences of many of the Saints into a chart that identifies the experiences common to each of the major seasons (or "Ways" as they are also commonly referred to) of Christian spiritual growth. The table included within this work will include the results of the combined work of Fr. Groeschel and Dr. Scraper as built upon the work of Evelyn Underhill, which reveals the Individual Focus, Experience, and Types of Prayer engaged by those who have grown through each of the three seasons (see table 2.1). It also includes the author's addition to this area of research, referred to as the "salvific overlay." The salvific overlay chronicles the salvific experience of the Christian as experienced through each of the three seasons (again, "Ways") of Christian spiritual growth, from a Wesleyan salvific perspective, as well as an additional season referred to quite simply as the "Natural" phase (see table 2.1).

The Saints and scholars that have written on this topic (Underhill; Gregorius; Scraper, *Franklian Psychology*; Groeschel; Heath), have commonly broken down the experience of Christian spiritual growth into what is now often referred to as "The Three Ways," specifically, the "Purgative Way," the "Illuminative Way," and the "Unitive Way." The high-level overview must therefore begin with a brief explanation of each of the three seasons. These are offered here in the order in which they are commonly experienced. To this growth progression, we will also add fourth "way" to the beginning of the process referred to as the "Natural" season or "way" (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Spiritual Formation Table

	Natural Way	Purgative Way	Illuminative Way	Unitive Way	Union
		Initial Sanctification	Entire Sanctification	Glorification	
Salvific Overlay	Prevenient Grace; Natural Law *(Justification—Justifying Grace / Regeneration)*	*Sanctifying Grace* — Moral Law / Saved from the power, but not the presence of sin	Saved from the presence of sin	*Glorifying Grace* — Perfected (completed) in God, through Christ, by the Power of the Spirit	
Growth Focus	God's Existence; Awakening *(Anxiety-Driven Needs)*	Learning about God; Moral Integration, Mature Faith, Trust	Learning to hear God; Zeal, Presence of God	Learning to rely on God; Quiet Ecstasy — **Dark Night(s) of the Soul** / **Dark Night of the Spirit**	Transforming Union
Growth Experience	*Peace & Freedom*	Struggle Temptation, Trials, Darkness	Light Joy, Peace	Loss of Defenses	
Prayer	Self-Centered Petition	God Focused Petition; Meditation	Meditative Contemplation; Contemplative-Meditation	Simple Contemplation; Prayer of Full Union; Prayer of Passive Union	Infused Contemplation

The Thee Ways—Chart adapted from Groeschel, 1984, p.118, and Scraper, 2009 p. 176

Season 1: The Natural Way

Making the decision to enter into relationship with God is akin to making the decision to believe (Shoemaker 28; Wood 154–155), a necessary step in the salvific process(Dunn 1; Fénelon 116). While there are certainly important philosophical elements to the Natural season (discussed in the next section), this season is likewise marked by significant and measurable salvific experiences. Most notably, those experiences consist of what theologians have commonly called "justification" and "regeneration " (Burwash 438–447). In order to better understand these experiences, we must first examine the types of grace at work during this season and the impact that these types of grace have on the life of the individual Christian. The two types of grace that we will therefore examine are most often spoken of as "prevenient grace" and "justifying grace." Likewise, it is important to understand the manner in which this grace is often "mediated to the soul" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 257). To accomplish this, we return to our discussion of grace by engaging the nature of prevenient grace, repentance, justifying grace, and regeneration. This is followed by an exploration of the means of grace in an attempt to better understand the way in which grace is assessed.

Grace

To begin our examination of grace, we must discuss the nature of grace itself. Simply put, grace is the work of God in the life of the individual. Though there are different kinds of work accomplished by God relative to the spiritual growth and salvific experience of the individual, those different kinds of works all fall under the definition of grace. Some theologians have seen human action and decision relative to grace as an attempt to earn or deserve salvation (Augustine XIV, 35; McGrath 381). In contrast, others have asserted that some level of human decision is necessary within the growth process relative to grace while maintaining that grace itself (or the

offer of real, meaningful relationship) is a free gift of God, first extended to the individual by

God, and totally dependent upon God for its function (McGrath 383–384). This is perhaps best

understood in the context of the Arminian reaction to the "Reformed doctrine of particular

redemption" (McGrath 383). The views of Jakob Arminius were formalized in the *Remonstrance*

of 1610, "in the aftermath of the Synod of Dort" (McGrath 383). Articles 1 and 2 clearly affirm

the role of human liberty in the process of election as it relates to salvation: "God, by an eternal

and unchangeable decree in Christ before the existence of the world, determined to elect from the

fallen and sinful human race to everlasting life all those who, through God's grace, believe in

Jesus Christ and persevere in faith and obedience"(McGrath 384).While there is merit in

ensuring that the work of God is understood to rely on God alone and not on human decision, it

is also important to understand that God does not force the individual to grow spiritually, nor

does God force the individual unwillingly toward salvation, hence the need for the individual to

choose to respond to God's free gift of grace before God will work toward substantial spiritual

growth in the life of the individual. In summary, the work may be God's alone, but God chooses

not to force that work on humanity without the individual's free decision to respond to God's

offer of relationship.

Prevenient Grace

Laying such minimal groundwork is important for our discussion of prevenient grace as it

helps to lay the foundation for understanding the complex relationship between grace and choice

that comprises the spiritual growth process. Both are active components of spiritual growth, and

both are necessary for growth to occur. As Collins writes, Wesley understood this relationship

well:

To be sure, Wesley underscored the free, sovereign action of God in several places throughout his writings. To illustrate, in 1760 in a letter to Dorothy Furly, a woman who was somewhat impatient with her own spiritual progress, Wesley counseled her by pointing out that 'God is Sovereign, in sanctifying as well as justifying. He will act when as well as how He pleases; and none can say to unto him, 'What doest Thou?' In other words, the timetable, so to speak, is ever in God's hands, not in our own. People can be redeemed if they will (Arminian emphasis), but not when they will. Wesley explains in a letter drafted in 1777: 'To say every man can believe to justification or sanctification when he will is contrary to plain matter of fact...That every man may believe if he will I earnestly maintain, and yet that he can believe when he will I totally deny' (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 161).

To understand prevenient grace is to understand the difference between being drawn and being pushed into relationship. According to a Wesleyan view of salvation, individuals are not pushed by God into a relationship that they desire not to have. Rather, individuals are drawn by God, through prevenient grace, into a relationship that slowly begins to complete who they are as an individual, evidenced by an eternal longing that only begins to be fulfilled when the individual chooses relationship over the natural state (Underhill 197–198).

Wesley speaks of the natural state often and then seeks to indicate that while it may be true in theory, it does not actually exist because no person is without (at least) the prevenient grace of God (Collins, *The Sermons of John Wesley* 119). On the natural state of the individual, "Wesley writes, 'unassisted by the grace of God, that 'all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart' are still 'evil, and only evil', and that continually"(Burwash 452) The natural state of an individual is therefore better understood as the state of an individual prior to any decision being

made to enter into relationship with God. Prior to that state, it is not the presence or interaction with God that determines the individual's understanding of morality and thus influences decision making. Rather, as is indicated in the Cambridge Platonist John Norris' explanations about idealism, the individual is operating solely within the realm of his or her own perceptive abilities and is therefore making moral and ethical decisions accordingly (MacKinnon 21).

Wesley is careful to note that this "natural state" does not mean that one is entirely devoid of the presence of God (Logan 71). Rather, it could better be explained that while the individual is in the natural state (prior to making a decision to enter into relationship with God) decision making in the life of that individual is based entirely upon the individual's own perceptive abilities apart from interaction with God (Aristotle 29) . However, the individual is not totally deprived of the presence of God, because God's prevenient grace is actively at work, drawing the individual toward relationship:

> For allowing that all the souls of men are dead in sin by nature, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called 'natural conscience.' But this is not natural; it is more properly termed 'preventing grace.' (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 74)

Prevenient grace could be considered to be either the first work of God in the salvific process or perhaps more appropriately the presence of God in the life of the individual before the individual is even aware of such presence. Again, it is helpful to engage Wesley's comments:

> Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) 'preventing grace'; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some

tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a

blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. (Collins, *The*

Theology of John Wesley 75)

Prevenient grace is therefore properly understood to be the presence of God in the life of the

individual, actively drawing the individual toward relationship with God prior to the individual's

awareness of God's presence. This is accomplished in various ways, not the least of which

includes Wesley's assertion that through prevenient grace, the individual is given an innate sense

of "God's attributes, an understanding of the moral law, as the faculty of conscience" each of

which has the "cumulative effect...of restraining human wickedness, of placing a check on

human perversity" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 80). This internal moral compass,

often described in some way or another as "the law," is however only one limited function of

prevenient grace.

Underhill's 1911 work, *Mysticism,* explores the recorded spiritual growth processes of

many of the Saints, for the purpose of searching out similarities within each journey. When

discussing the movement from life without God to life with God in her section titled "The

Awakening of the Self," Underhill describes the individual experience with prevenient grace in

vivid and experiential language:

In most cases, the onset of this new consciousness seems to the self so sudden, so clearly

imposed from without rather than developed from within, as to have a supernatural

character…We shall see, however, when we come to study the evidence of those mystics

who have left a detailed record of their preconverted state, that the apparently abrupt

conversion is really, as a rule, the sequel and the result of a long period of restlessness,

uncertainty, and mental stress. The deeper mind stirs uneasily in its prison, and its

emergence is but the last of many efforts to escape. The temperament of the subject, his

surroundings, the vague but persistent apprehensions of a supersensual reality which he

could not find yet could not forget; all these have prepared him for it. (Underhill 196–

197)

Therefore, prevenient grace is God's free and unmerited work in the life of an individual that has

not yet chosen to respond to God's offer of relationship, by which God draws the individual

toward relationship through the "restlessness, uncertainty, and mental stress" that inevitably

accompanies existence in an incomplete/unperfected state of existence apart from God

(Underhill 197). Underhill documents the experience of prevenient grace in the life of St. Francis

of Assisi as follows:

Now, the opening of St. Francis's eyes, which took place in A.D. 1206 when he was

twenty-four years old, had been preceded by a long, hard struggle between the life of the

world and the persistent call of the spirit. His mind, in modern language, had not unified

itself. He was a high-spirited boy, full of vitality: a natural artist, with all the

fastidiousness which the artist temperament involves. War and pleasure both attracted

him, and upon them, says legend, he 'miserably squandered and wasted his time.'

Nevertheless, he was vaguely dissatisfied. In the midst of festivities, he would have

sudden fits of abstraction, abortive attempts of the growing transcendental consciousness,

still imprisoned below the threshold but aware of and in touch with the Real, to force

itself to the surface and seize the reins. 'Even in ignorance,' says Thomas of Celano

again, 'he was being led to perfect knowledge.' (Underhill 197–198)

This "persistent call of the spirit" that is constantly drawing the individual toward the "Real,"

(the necessary being solely capable of perceiving absolutely reality (Hasker 14–15)) is the

human experience of God's prevenient grace. Prevenient grace represents God's work through the restlessness that accompanies separation from mature relationship with God. Regardless of the human awareness of God, God is ever present, through prevenient grace, working to reconcile the individual to God's real relational presence.

Justifying Faith and Repentance

Justifying grace represents the work that God does to "pardon" and forgives the sins of the individual (Burwash 45). Contemporary use of the word "justify" does not lend itself to an appropriate definition of the word as it is used in this capacity. While speakers of colloquial American English will regularly use this word in a context that suggests that it would have a meaning that is akin to "validating a given course of action or a particular decision," used in this context, justification more appropriately means, "to be brought into right position or alignment" (McGrath 374). Of additional significance is the important understanding that there are really two separate (but linked) terms being used in any theological conversation about justification, both of which refer to specific acts or experiences. While "justifying grace" represents the free and unmerited action of God within the individual to bring the individual into right position or alignment, "justification" is the result of that work within the life of the individual. We will discuss both terms within this section as they relate to a significant salvific moment. We begin by briefly touching on the related topic of repentance.

Importantly, John Wesley focused strongly on the topic of repentance as a key element of his theology of justification: "there is also a repentance and faith…which are requisite after we have 'believed the gospel'…and this repentance and faith are full as necessary in order to our entering into the kingdom of God" (Burwash 128). As Collins notes, "So important was the proper teaching of repentance for Wesley that he referred to it as one of 'our main doctrines'"

(*The Theology of John Wesley* 156). Wesley would expound upon the theology of repentance, as a "collection" of works associated with the larger doctrine of justification.

> Now repentance is not one work alone, but is, as it were, a collection of many others, for in its compass the following works are comprehended: (1) sorrow on account of sin; (2) humiliation under the hand of God; (3) hatred to sin; (4) confession of sin; (5) ardent supplication of the divine mercy; (6) the love of God; (7) ceasing from sin; (8) firm purpose of new obedience; (9) restitution of ill-gotten goods; (10) forgiving our neighbour his transgressions against us; (11) works of beneficence or almsgiving.
>
> (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 156)

Without finding fault with Wesley's theology of repentance or the logic associated with his explanation of it, it is important to understand the theological context of the reformation era dialogues surrounding the doctrine of justification, namely the argument that justification was something that occurred by faith alone (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 160–164). The point of much of this dialogue seems to give precedence to the almost overdeveloped need to ensure that the sovereignty of God in the act of justification is maintained, over and above any action that could (or more appropriately should not) be attributed to the role or free will of the individual. It would therefore seem that the result of this lengthy and well-expounded debate is an orientation toward repentance that views repentance less as an intentional change of direction and more as the act of seeking forgiveness for past, yet only recently acknowledged wrongs. (McGrath 371–384)

Though there is certainly both an implied and expressed understanding of repentance as a change of direction that is evidenced in Wesley's theology on the subject, the overwhelming feeling that Wesley's writings (and the writings of those that have expounded on Wesley's

theology) produces is a sense that repentance itself is less an act of the realization that a change in direction is necessary if the individual is to move toward abundance, and more a sense that the individual is forced into a directional change as a result of a new awareness that failing to do so will result in eternal punishment. It is at this point that we begin to be able to identify one of the major shortcomings of traditional salvific theology as it has developed in Protestantism. Specifically, the use of conviction associated with fear as a primary human motivation for seeking repentance, justification, and ultimately salvation.

While this difference in motivation may at first seem minimal, this important difference forms the very heart of the reason that salvific theology in the postmodern era has begun to lose its value. These two motivations affect the spiritual growth of the individual in very different, and very dramatic, ways. In spite of the experiences of many of the Saints, this notion of salvation through fear has permeated Protestant Christian theology (Underhill 64). It should be considered then whether or not there is a viable and meaningful alternative to the Protestant era fear-based motivations for repentance. If it is impossible to be pushed into real, meaningful, and mutual relationship based on fear and anxiety as primary motivators, then perhaps it is possible to be drawn into such a relationship by the hope that exists in the promise of peace and freedom (abundance) that is inherent to real relationship with God. If this were to be the case, then it would likely not be the result of a realization that certain actions and behaviors carried with them the threat of eternal punishment but rather the realization that a change in direction (repentance) might lead to abundance through relationship (with God).

In summary, any individual forced into some semblance of relationship because of fear is not in real, mutual, meaningful relationship but rather in a self-centered and survivalist relationship. Such a relationship uses the other party in the relationship to meet the individual's

fear based need to avoid the object of the fear. In contrast, any individual that enters into a relationship out of a desire to be in mutual relationship with the other party based on the hope of abundance (love) enters into true relationship that takes seriously the value of the other party as a full parter as opposed to a means to a survivalist end. The draw toward love expressed in relationship is a far more substantial and meaningful motivation then the push to avoid eternal punishment based on fear. One seeks to know and relate to the other party in relationship, rather than seeking to have his or her own needs met or purposes accomplished.

The Protestant era focus on fear as a primary motivation toward repentance, while well intentioned, has held the potential for extremely negative consequences (Underhill 63–65). Those consequences have been manifested both in the lives of individuals seeking to grow spiritually and in the life of the larger Christian community, which has been in decline for decades as a result of such fear-based theology. Simply put, if an individual is to change course toward meaningful and real relationship that is based on love, such a decision must be a voluntary response to a love already offered. In a theological sense this occurs through the recognition of the presence of prevenient grace. Such a re-directional (repentant) response in the life of the individual certainly involves a level of recognition of God's love and offer of relationship combined with a desire to re-orient toward a relationship that is based on that love. Simply summarized, the individual must be drawn by love (prevenient grace) into meaningful relationship that causes a change in life-direction and orientation relative to relationship with God (repentance). Fear has not proven to be either an appropriate or an effective primary motivation to repent. As a result of the attempt at a fear-based theology within Christianity over many generations it can further be surmised that no individual will ever be scared into anything other a self-serving (and futile) attempt to use God in order to avoid fear.

This simple truth, once realized, forms the foundation for understanding why relationship with God is salvific. As is explained throughout the remainder of this work, it is not the action that God takes to forgive sin that is salvific, but rather God in relationship with the individual that saves the individual, not from eternal punishment and damnation, but from a lifetime of existence apart from God.

Justifying Faith and Justification

Having entered into a dialogue about repentance, we now move on to the result of repentance in the life of the individual, namely that which Wesley described as "justifying faith" (Burwash 40). Wesley spent quite a bit of time on this topic, outlining for his followers exactly what is not considered to be justifying faith (Burwash 44–45). This interesting perspective examines what this type of faith is not.

> If justifying faith, then, is neither simply belief in the existence of God, nor the practice of moral virtue, nor an assent to all that the Scriptures contain, nor the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, nor even the faith of the apostles when Jesus was on earth, then what precisely is it? This litany of what faith is not, offered by Wesley, illuminates many of the false starts and dead ends (some of which dominated his own thinking at one time or other) that he wished to spare his hearers, and it is, therefore, not without its purpose: it prepares the way for consideration of what, in fact, vital faith is. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 166)

For Wesley belief in the existence of God alone is not enough for one to move through justification, neither is an attempt to live virtuously in a manner consistent with scriptural morality, but rather "faith in Christ – Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper object of it" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 166). Perhaps this movement from belief to faith, from

logic to experience represents one of Wesley's most intuitive teachings. Subsequent to his Aldersgate experience, Wesley would begin to teach that logic, while necessary, is not alone sufficient to move one toward a justifying faith. Rather, logic and feeling must be connected to one another in such a way that what is understood with the mind is likewise experienced in the heart; "…it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a 'disposition of the heart'" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 167). This teaching would mirror that of Arminius, who believed that justification "must be according to the law of faith, not of works…not because faith is the righteousness which man opposes to the rigid and severe judgment of God, but 'because it obtains absolution from sins and is graciously imputed for righteousness'" (Bangs 344).

    Collins further explains the essential relationship between the head and the heart:

    Notice here that Wesley does not exclude an intellectual component to faith; he simply points out that this ingredient, by itself, is insufficient; it must be joined to a disposition of the heart. That is, the mind must inform the heart, and the heart must engage the mind; it is 'both/and,' not 'either/or.' Indeed, Wesley realized that sinners receive the justifying grace of God, not merely as intellects, but as persons; they receive it, in other words, with their whole being (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 167).

    Wesley understood the necessity of combining logic with experience so as to engage the whole person in relationship with God, in this instance through justifying faith and the reception of God's justifying grace. The significance of this combination for the student of spiritual growth cannot be understated. The history of salvific theology is inundated with attempts to divorce logic and experience, alternatively emphasizing one over the other when in truth both must coexist hand-in-hand in order for the whole person to experience justifying faith. This assertion

is the very reason that it is so critical for the individual seeking to enter knowingly into

relationship with God to engage the dual questions of God's existence and the necessity of

relationship so early in the spiritual growth process. Questions of belief must be logically

engaged and sufficiently resolved in order for logic to meet experience (Peterson 1). When

experience precedes logic, there is often an inability to reconcile the merits of the experience (in

this case, the experience of the presence of God via prevenient and/or justifying grace) to the

point that the experience and the emotions associated with it are often either misinterpreted or

altogether dismissed. Rather, when questions of logic are sufficiently engaged and adequately

reconciled, the nature of that reconciliation provides a framework with which to interpret

experiences such as justifying grace and regeneration.

Wesley also taught that justifying faith must account for the "necessity and merit of

[Jesus'] death, and the power of his resurrection," indicating an undeniable Christological focus

(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 167). For Wesley, salvific theology can only be centered

on the soteriological act of God in Christ and the redemption available through the work of

Christ, without which salvific relationship itself would not be possible.

> Not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of
>
> Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as
>
> our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us. It is a sure confidence which
>
> a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he
>
> reconciled to the favour of God. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 167)

In order to avoid any confusion in understanding the difference between the terms

"justification," and "justifying faith" and prior to moving from an explanation of justifying faith

to justification itself, it is beneficial to summarize Wesley's understanding of the former. The work of Collins is instructive here:

> In summary, then, justifying faith embraces several vital factors: on a notional level, it entails an assent to the truth revealed in Scripture that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself; on a personal level, it includes a hearty trust (fiducia) in the person and work of Christ; and on a sensate or experiential level, it embraces a trust that is nothing less than a supernatural work, a 'divine evidence and conviction' that Christ 'loved me, and gave himself for me.' Consequently, justifying faith cannot be conceived in any full sense either apart from the redemptive nature of the life, death, and ministry of Jesus Christ, or apart from the experiential trust and conviction graciously received by the believer through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 168–169)

The sum total of justifying faith comes down to the combination of belief, trust, and experience. Belief must be verified and accepted by adequately answering the dual questions of God's existence and the necessity of relationship, resulting in the logical conclusion that there is validity in the scriptural revelation regarding God's salvific and reconciling work through Christ. Likewise, trust can be understood as something that is inherently redemptive, as is the experience of the reception of that redemptive work within the heart of the individual.

With a working description of justifying faith in hand, it is now important to develop a similar understanding of the act of justification itself. Exploring what justification is not is helpful as well.

> Justification, first of all, is not 'the being made actually just and righteous. This is sanctification; which is indeed in some degree the immediate fruit of justification, but

nevertheless is a distinct gift of God.' And Wesley keeps these doctrines separate, conceptually if not in practice, by making a distinction between the work that God does 'for us' (justification) and the work that he does 'in us' (sanctification) demonstrated in his sermon 'The New Birth.' He explains: "if any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental they are doubtless these two the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God does in us, and renewing our fallen nature." (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 170–171)

John Wesley spent quite a bit of time explaining the difference between justification and sanctification, evidenced by the amount of time and number of sermons that Wesley devoted to the topic (Burwash 40, 51, 438 Sermon V - Justification by Faith, Sermon VI The Righteousness of Faith, Sermon XLIII - The Scripture Way of Salvation; Collins, *The Sermons of John Wesley* 111 Sermon - On Working Out Our Own Salvation). Although Wesley understood the substantial difference between the two salvific milestones, there was an inadequate understanding of that difference among the general Christian population. As Wesley would teach, "justification entails a relative change, but sanctification, a real change: 'the former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed so that of sinners we become saints.' The one takes away the guilt of sin; the other removes its power." (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 171).

Wesley also makes an important distinction relative to justification regarding the relationship between justification and accusation. For Wesley, it seems that to be justified is not to have the accusation erased but rather to be forgiven of the punishment that would be the natural result of that accusation (Burwash 45). So while in one sense the accused should quite

naturally be subject to the punishment that is prescribed for the offense indicated, the accusation itself stands while the punishment that should be the result of that accusation is forgiven. As Collins writes, "what Wesley is most probably trying to point out here, and this is a difficult passage, is that justification does not simply deal with the issue of punishment to the exclusion of the consideration of the actual transgression itself" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 171).

This distinction is a rather important one when dealing with the issue of justification because maintaining this distinction is indicative of the understanding that when God chooses to forgive He does so in light of the truth (Burwash 45). That is to say, that when God justifies an individual God does so with full understanding and full recognition of what is, in fact, actually being forgiven and brought into right alignment (Burwash 45). God is not fooled nor does God ignore the nature of the transgressions in question or the fallen state of the individual seeking redemption, but rather offers full forgiveness and pardon (full justification) while at the same time acknowledging the whole truth, and subsequently the actual reality, that comprises the life in the circumstance of the individual seeking salvific relationship or redemption. Wesley further explains:

> For the sinner, being first convinced of his sin and danger by the Spirit of God, stand trembling before the awful tribunal of divine justice; and has nothing to plead, but his own guilt, and the merits of a Mediator. Christ here interposes; justice is satisfied, the sin is remitted, and pardon is applied to the soul, by a divine faith wrought by the Holy Ghost, who then begins the great work of inward sanctification. Thus God justifies the ungodly, and yet remains just, and true to all his attributes! (Wesley, *Explanatory Notes* 480 Romans 4:5)

Simply put, for John Wesley, justification was always something that happened by grace, through faith, as a free gift of God that offers forgiveness and pardon for past sins. Justification for Wesley was not something that removed from the individual the presence of sin, but rather the power of sin, in so much as it freed the individual from guilt and punishment, would be the natural and logical end result of sin (Burwash Sermon V - Justification by Faith; Sermon XLIII - The Scripture Way of Salvation). It is imperative to point out that in so much as justification involves the forgiveness and pardon from sin and subsequently freedom from guilt, justification also, "restores the sinner to a right relationship with God, a relationship no longer marked by alienation and excessive fear" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 173). As Collins points out, Wesley was quick to teach that this kind of salvation is a salvation from the fear of the wrath of God, a wrath that would, under normal circumstances, be the natural result of sin, or more appropriately perhaps, sin's natural consequence. It is at this moment that Collins points out that a "genuine healing of the soul begins to take place," a kind of healing that allows the individual to begin to see God "not as a God of wrath but a God of love" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 173).

John Wesley speaks to the power of this kind of salvation in his sermon, "Salvation By Faith:"

> This then is the salvation which is through faith, even in the present world: a salvation from sin and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word justification; which, taken in the largest sense, implies, a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him, and a deliverance from the whole body of sin, through Christ, formed in his heart. So that he who is thus justified, or saved by faith, is indeed born again. He is born again of the

spirit unto a new life, "which is hid with Christ in God." "He is a new creature: old things are passed away: all things in him are become new" (Burwash 6–7).

According to Wesley's understanding of justification, the pardon that is associated with being justified only applies to the sins of the past. Sins committed subsequent to acts of repentance and justification, according to John Wesley, must likewise be confessed before God and forgiveness for those sins must be sought (Burwash 45). This is important to understand, not as how it relates to the logistics of justification, but as it indicates that being justified, or pardoned, does not in and of itself give the justified individual free license to commit any and every type of sin subsequent to the active justification. The act of justification itself is not a license to commit future sin based on the belief that because justification has been granted and forgiveness received that such forgiveness applies to future sins and subsequently sanctions those actions or sins (Burwash 445).

The theological disagreement that has raged throughout the centuries regarding two key components of Wesley's understanding of justification is also important. The first of those components centers on whether or not justification, and subsequently salvation itself, is a process, or something that happens instantaneously (Burwash 441). While the purpose of this chapter is not to engage those theological arguments in their entirety, it is important to note that there are those who have argued for each position throughout the centuries. The key dialogue within this argument in particular is relative to whether or not salvation, or justification in particular, is something that happens instantaneously, in one moment, or something that is a process for the individual. For Wesley, both the instantaneous nature of justification and the idea that salvation itself can be a process were held in tension (Collins, *John Wesley* 253). Wesley

would never have denied that justification happens instantaneously. In fact, the argument that justification does happen instantaneously was an argument that, for Wesley, spoke volumes to the unmerited and free work of God within the context of the gift of justification in the life of the individual. For Wesley, because it happens instantaneously, justification could be nothing other than a free gift of God (Burwash 45). To make justification itself a process would have meant that there would have been a series of expectations on the part of the individual leading up to justification, which would have made justification itself something that was "works" centered, as opposed to a "free gift" from God (Burwash 45). Wesley would never have likewise denied that salvation itself can be considered a process. Wesley very clearly considered salvation to be comprised of a series of steps that are designed to bring the individual into right relationship with God. Those steps include things like justification, initial and entire sanctification, and glorification. So, for Wesley the idea of the instantaneous nature of justification and the process of salvation could easily be held in tension with one another (Collins, *John Wesley* 254).

The second of these two components centers on the degree to which, if any, the individual cooperates together with God in the process of salvation. For Wesley, much like in the previous argument, these two elements are easily held in tension. Wesley believed that the process of salvation involved a necessary cooperation between the individual and God. However, this is not to say that any of God's action is reliant upon the action of the individual. Rather, it is to say that God will not force any action, such as salvation, within the life of any individual without the individual's willing decision to be a part of the salvific process. Simply put, Wesley believed that God would not force relationship on people, rather God offered relationship to people, as a free and unmerited gift, without requiring or forcing that any individual person take advantage of that offer (Collins, *John Wesley* 254–255). Wesley understood the Scriptures to

indicate that God made it a requirement for the individual to willingly accept God's free gift of grace or, more appropriately, to willingly desire to enter into a relationship with God, before God would bring that free offer of relationship, or the free gift of grace, to fruition in the life of the individual (Collins, *John Wesley* 254). Therefore, for Wesley there is a tension between the cooperation of the individual and the free and unmerited gift of God that is entirely the work of God within the life of the individual (Collins, *John Wesley* 254–257; Burwash 447).

Collins notes that many have not understood Wesley's ability to hold these arguments in tension with one another and be able to reconcile them so easily (Collins, *John Wesley* 245). There are those who have believed that one emphasis or another puts too much responsibility and too much authority in the hands of the individual and fails to ascribe to God the authority that so many believe to be solely God's. Wesley saw no tension there because Wesley understood that all of salvation or any individual action within the salvific process could only be offered by God and could only be brought to fruition by God (Burwash 447). However, Wesley also understood the Scriptures to indicate that this free gift was offered to the individual and not forced upon the individual, such that God willingly gave the individual the free choice to either be in relationship with God or to not be in relationship with God. The draw toward that relationship with God, even before the individual recognizes its presence, summarizes much of Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace, also a free gift of God and also an action taken by God alone within the life of the individual (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 187).

Collins summarizes this tension in the following language:

So then, Wesley held not one but two aspects of his doctrine of salvation in tension: both process and instantaneousness, divine and human cooperation as well as the work of God alone. The former aspect depicts his "Catholic" emphasis and points to human

cooperation with God as men and women are empowered by divine grace and are in

some sense prepared (if there be time and opportunity) for the decisive gifts of salvation,

that is, for justification and for initial and entire sanctification. The latter aspect, however,

depicts his "Protestant" emphasis and points not to human cooperation, but to the free

activity of God and, therefore, to the sheer gratuity (favor) of grace. Again, the former

aspect displays the ongoing growth and development that is a normal part of any vital

spiritual life. The latter aspect displays not process but the crucial element of

actualization of extraordinary grace. The inculcation of virtues along the way of divine

and human cooperation can easily be mistaken for simply being human virtues;

justification and regeneration, however, cannot. In other words, process issues in crucial

realizations that are then followed by further process toward an unrealized soteriological

goal, even entire sanctification. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 187)

Justification is therefore very simply understood as forgiveness (Burwash 45). It is a

forgiveness that is preceded by faith, specifically by justifying faith, and is the result of the work

of God's prevenient grace and God's justifying grace in the life of the individual (Burwash 442–

443). It is the natural result of repentance, or the necessary change in direction that comes as a

result of the realization that the individual is not moving toward a direction that leads to life. It is

likewise a significant moment within the process of spiritual growth that immediately precedes

another very significant moment, a moment that is commonly referred to as regeneration, or the

new birth.

Regeneration

Regeneration comprises the moment when, upon being forgiven or pardoned of sin, the

individual is now brought into right relationship with God, a relationship that is free from the

guilt and the power of sin (Dunn 181). It is a relationship that, because of God, is now free of that which had previously separated the individual from God (sin) (Dunn 182). This moment is often referred to as "The New Birth" or as being "Born Again." Each of these references is largely the result of the feelings associated with the experience of being brought into right relationship with God.

Now free from both the guilt and the power of sin, the individual is justified in the sight of God and subsequently brought into right alignment, or right relationship, with God. The feeling of that experience, as is described by many, is the feeling of being brought into a new life: a life that is free from guilt and is now free from the previous separation from God. There are a number of subtle differences in the working definitions of justification and regeneration. Since the two experiences happen at essentially the same time, the differences between their definitions can be quite confusing.[1] That confusion, and the confusion that surrounds so many of the theological terms that are no longer used by mainstream Christians, is the very reason that our understanding of salvific theology is so limited.

Before we begin working toward a definition of regeneration it is helpful to explore what regeneration is not. There is some element of cooperation in place within the salvific process; there is cooperation between the individual and God in so much as the individual decision, given freely by God to receive the gift of salvation that is offered by God, is a decision that is left up to the individual by God. That free gift from God represents a cooperative relationship, and thus we refer to this process is a cooperative process (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 200).

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[1] There may very well be argument about whether or not these two works are accomplished in the life of the individual at precisely the same time or at essentially the same time. While I would suggest briefly that while these two actions are accomplished within the life of the individual by God at essentially the same time, they are nonetheless not accomplished at precisely the same time simply because regeneration is more or less the natural result of justification in the life of the individual. The temporal separation of these two actions, which are actions that are worked by God in the life of the individual, is really not at issue here and therefore won't be argued in significant detail.

The condition necessary for justification and regeneration is faith. There is nothing that one needs to be nor is there anything that one needs to do in order to prequalify for regeneration. Regeneration, or the new birth, is therefore not dependent upon anything that one does or fails to do; it is solely a work of God that takes place within the life of the individual.

Regeneration is likewise not irresistible. Because it is an offer from God, and because God has chosen to give all of humanity the freedom to make that choice, it is likewise logical that the individual has the freedom not only to accept this offer but to reject it (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 201). While regeneration is both a free gift from God and a work that is accomplished solely by God within the life of the individual, it is also a gift that can be rejected by the individual. Regeneration is something that does not come with prequalification in the sense that such prequalifications are relative to the pious works of the individual. Likewise, regeneration is something that is not irresistible, but can be rejected freely by the individual as it is offered by God as a free gift.

Wesley was quite clear in his belief that justification is something that "implies a relative change," while regeneration is something that "implies a real change"(Burwash 441). "Wesley affirmed that justification on the one hand, is a relative change, one that entails a different relation to God (Burwash 441). Regeneration, on the other hand, is a real change, for "in begetting us again God does the work in us"" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 201). According to Professor Ken Collins, justification "changes our outward relation to God," while regeneration "changes our in most souls so that we become Saints." Justification "restores us to the favor of God" while regeneration "restores us to the image of God." Finally, and perhaps most constructively, justification "takes away the guilt of sin," while regeneration "takes away the power of sin" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 201).

Regeneration then, for Wesley, is something that is really indicative of a new birth. Wesley used this metaphor of birth to help Christians understand the complexity of what this new life entails (Burwash Sermon XVIII: The Marks of the New Birth). Perhaps most notably is Wesley's comparison between the awakening of spiritual senses that occur after the new birth and the awakening of the physical senses that happen when one is born naturally (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202). When a child is born it learns to use its five senses of taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell; when one is reborn spiritually there are spiritual senses that are awakened as a result of this new birth. Wesley would describe this awakening of senses, as "the great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. In quickening the soul God brings its senses to life such that they perceive the spiritual realm in general and the divine love in particular" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202).

The new birth, as Wesley describes it, represents an epistemological change for the individual, as it represents a change in how the individual perceives reality. In light of these dynamics, Collins writes that Runyan aptly notes that the new birth, for Wesley, in addition to everything else, was "an epistemological event that opens up a new way of knowing" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202). The Avenue of such spiritually discerned knowledge was, of course, faith, now seen as a spiritual sense in terms of "the seeing eye and the hearing ear" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202).

This awakening of senses Wesley described is discussed in future sections in greater detail, yet it is important to note that, this assertion is of substantial importance. The natural phase is devoted to deciding whether or not to enter into relationship with God, and as such there are two important questions that are answered in this phase. The purgative way is devoted to

learning about who God is; the illuminative way is devoted to learning to hear God, and the unitive way is devoted to learning to rely on God. As regeneration itself represents a crossover from the natural phase into the purgative way, it is supremely important to realize that the only reason that the purgative way can be devoted to learning more about who God is, is because as a result of having been regenerated, or born again spiritually, the spiritual senses (as Wesley described them) are now awakened to the point that the individual has a capacity to comprehend the communication that takes place within the spirit between the individual and God that was not previously present. These senses are present prior to new birth yet they are dormant. As Wesley describes, as a result of having been regenerated, or born again spiritually, the spiritual senses of the individual are awakened "in terms of the seeing eye and the hearing ear" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202).

Much of the spiritual growth process is devoted to the work that God does to help an individual begin to learn to use these spiritual senses. The awakening of the senses and the ability to use those senses are two very different things. While those senses are awakened as a result of having been regenerated, or born again spiritually, there is much work that is yet to be done within the life of the individual in order for the individual to be able to use the senses that are now awakened. Nonetheless, the connection here between the salvific process and spiritual growth cannot be overlooked. It is as a result of being justified by God and subsequently regenerated, or born again spiritually, by God that the spiritual senses (having eyes to see spiritually, and ears to hear spiritually) have been awakened.

The simple fact that the spiritual senses have been awakened allows for an entirely new kind of relationship between an individual and God as it is very difficult to have a relationship when there is a barrier to communication (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*). As a result of

justification and regeneration that barrier is overcome both theologically, in terms of the fact that the individual is pardoned and brought into right relationship with God, and practically, in that the individual's spiritual senses are awakened so that communication with God is now possible in an entirely different way.

Because regeneration represents the point at which the individual crosses from the natural phase into the purgative way, the examination of the salvific experience as it relates to spiritual growth is concluded here. So much of what has been identified and argued by theologians over the centuries regarding salvific experience happens before the individual ever even enters into the purgative way, which itself has traditionally indicated the beginning of the Christian spiritual growth process.

It is important to understand how much happens within the life of the individual before the individual ever really even begins to grow spiritually. There is first a choice, as the individual must answer questions relative to the existence of God and then answer questions relative to whether or not relationship with God is necessary if, in fact, God does exist. At that point, when the individual decides to repent, a series of grace oriented workings in the life of the individual occurs that bring the individual into relationship with God and truly begins the process of spiritual growth.

It has traditionally been at this point in the spiritual growth process that the question of salvation has arisen. It is not obvious at what point in the process of spiritual growth, which includes the salvific experience, that the individual is actually saved. This depends upon intent. Most people want to know at what point in the process they can be sure that they are going to go to heaven instead of hell. It is relationship with God that should be considered as salvation. If the point of salvation is for the individual to attain heaven and to avoid hell, then the individual

salvific quest is one that is ultimately self-focused as it is focused upon making sure that the individual either attains something that is desired or avoids something that is not desired. More appropriately, people should seek out the next step in their relational growth together with God. It is at this point in the spiritual growth process that the individual has entered into what could be properly termed "right relationship" with God. The term right relationship is used here because one is always in relationship with God and, in fact, cannot be alive without being in relationship with God to some degree and in some way. If God has created you, and you exist, then you exist in relation to the God who created you, in the midst of the creation that God created you to live in. To exist is to be in relationship with God. What is important here is the point at which the individual moves into "right" relationship with God. According to the salvific experience that point can be considered to be now, the moment when the individual having been justified, has now been regenerated, or born again. What the individual has been born again into, is right relationship with God. Having been pardoned, or justified, the individual is born into a new life whereby the individual is now, as a result of having repented, brought by God into a right relationship with God, wherein the focus of the individual's life is on God. Further, as a result of having been born again into this new life, the spiritual senses necessary for communicative relationship with God have been awakened within the individual.

It is worth noting that the first season of spiritual growth, the natural phase, also happens to be the season in which the vast majority of the events commonly associated with the process of salvation occur. It is in the first season of spiritual growth that the individual experiences God's prevenient and justifying grace, and that the individual is justified and regenerated (or born again). It is regrettable that the vast majority of the theological focus of Christian theology and of the Church throughout the ages and into the modern era has focused intently on salvific

events that occur in the very first season spiritual growth, to the virtual exclusion of all that follows. This narrow focus can perhaps be best attributed to the commonly accepted belief that "salvation" is completed for all intents and purposes when one is justified and regenerated. This belief is directly related to the common tendency to view salvation from a selfish and survivalist perspective, believing that the only real goal of the salvific process is to avoid hell and attain heaven. This distortion of salvific theology has ultimately led to a practical theology that focuses primarily on only one season of the spiritual growth process and treats reaching the end of that first season as the goal of the Christian life.

Salvation is a process just as spiritual growth is a process. While the process of salvation includes key events that happen during the first season of the spiritual growth process, the process of salvation extends beyond the events of the first season. Understanding this theology requires a fundamental and foundational re-working of the commonly accepted teachings about the nature of salvation. As the point of salvation is not avoidance and attainment (to avoid hell and/or attain heaven), its true purpose can be better understood by moving into an examination of the second season of spiritual growth, commonly referred to as "The Purgative Way."

Season 2: The Purgative Way

The purgative way will help illustrate that the goal of salvation is perfection, but not according to the modern connotation given to the word. Perfection is best interpreted in its scriptural context as "completion" or "maturation" (France 228–229). The point of salvation is the completion of the individual, through maturation. Such completion is only possible through an increasingly mature relationship with God.

Salvation is a process that also contains key experiences and instantaneous events. This distinction between instantaneous event and process has plagued salvific theological dialogue for

as long as theologians have been dialoguing on the topic (McGrath 221–222). The process of

salvation, like the process of spiritual growth (which are one and the same) both involve key

instantaneous events combined with processes that often lead to, and are the result of those

events. Similarly, both processes involve the gracious and invitational work of God, combined

with the response and participation of the individual. This subject has also caused much

theological disagreement.

Initial Sanctification

Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy note that "the Wesleyan view of sanctification begins with

the insight that in the Bible the concept of holiness centers on relationship with God. It denotes

not what believers are separated from, but to whom they are consecrated" (Boyd 160). It is in the

second season of the spiritual growth process, also called the purgative way, during which the

salvific process of sanctification begins (Underhill 194). Throughout the centuries there has been

a great deal of debate about whether or not sanctification is a process or an instantaneous event

(McGrath 352–353) (Thornton 23). John Wesley would describe sanctification as both process

and instantaneous event, separating initial sanctification from what Wesley called entire

sanctification (Dunn 1). On this subject Collins shares the following:

> In other words, the question of process and instantaneous is not only a reflection of the
>
> larger issue of faith and works but it also helps to display, once again, Wesley's Catholic
>
> and Protestant conceptions of grace. It should, therefore, come as no surprise to learn that
>
> Wesley taught that sanctification (broadly understood) is both gradual and instantaneous.
>
> Thus, in a parallel discussion to what he had already written in terms of the approach to
>
> the justification of the new birth, Wesley remarks: 'a gradual work of grace constantly
>
> precedes the instantaneous work both of justification and sanctification. But the work

itself (of sanctification as well as justification) is undoubtedly instantaneous. As after a gradual conviction of the guilt and power of sin you [were] justified in a moment, so after a gradually increasing conviction of inbred sin you was sanctified in a moment.' Actually even greater clarity is called for in this context in order to discern Wesley's vital teaching. We must, first of all, distinguished sanctification is a process (Catholic element) that leads up to entire sanctification, from entire sanctification itself as an instantaneous actualization (Protestant element) of grace.(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 302)

Whether initial sanctification is itself an instantaneous event with an associated and subsequent process or is itself a process is perhaps less relevant than many theologians have chosen to argue. Initial sanctification is something that occurs subsequent to the moment of regeneration that marks the transition from the natural phase into the purgative way, such that once regenerated (or re-born) the individual Christian is likewise initially sanctified (Bangs 346). However, there is a process of sanctification that follows leading to entire sanctification. This process can be called initial sanctification.

From a salvific perspective, it is during the second season of spiritual growth that the individual is becoming sanctified. This section explores precisely what is happening within the individual during this season. Collins, when speaking of the differences between justification and sanctification, helps to explain what sanctification is:

Justification, first of all, in not 'the being made actually just and righteous. This is sanctification; which is indeed in some degree the immediate fruit of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God.' And Wesley keeps these doctrines separate, conceptually if not in practice, by making a distinction between the work that God does 'for us' (justification) and the work that he does 'in us' (sanctification)…and elsewhere

Wesley teaches that justification entails a relative change but sanctification a real change: 'The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed so that of sinners we become saints.' The one takes away the guilt of sin; the other removes its power. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 170–171)

If justification is forgiveness from sin, removing the guilt of sin and restoring the individual to right-relationship with God, then sanctification entails the process by which God works to actively and actually remove sin from the life of the individual, "so that of sinners, we become saints"(Burwash 183)

Understanding what it means for God to remove sin from the life of the individual presumes some fundamental understanding of sin. In the modern era, "sin" is typically associated with bad actions and thoughts that God would not approve of. As it is taught today, if an individual does, thinks, or believes something that is considered to be bad, the individual has sinned and is in need of forgiveness. The difficulty comes in delineating actions "bad" enough to be labeled sin and knowing when a sin has been "committed." Many Christians seem to have a list of do's and dont's that help define sin, yet the provenance of these lists is unclear. Most Christians would assert that their lists are compiled from a scriptural understanding of right and wrong; however, there seem to regularly be many "sins" which make these individual lists, but either have no biblical foundation whatsoever, or require a very creative interpretation of biblical verses that have nothing to do with the "sin" in question.

To understand sin, one must step outside of the modern misinterpretation of it, and the subsequent poor theology of atonement that has arisen around it. *For so long as our understanding of sin is so shallow, likewise will our understanding of salvation be selfish*. To

begin to reframe the understanding of sin it is important to view it through the lens of what has already identified as the point of salvation, that being completion through mature relationship with God. Within this context, it becomes easier to see and understand sin for what it really is and to comprehend why it is so dangerous. If the point of salvation is to come to completion through mature relationship with God, then sin is anything that gets in the way of that relationship. Because of the nature of the New Covenant and all that God accomplished through Christ, the only barriers to relationship with God that remain are barriers that humans have put in place, either intentionally or unintentionally. Through Christ (and as a foundational element of the New Covenant) God has made it possible for each individual to come into relationship with God given the limitations inherent to linear human existence (which are far fewer than are often assumed). Because God has chosen to act first and has taken the steps necessary to make relationship possible and to offer it to each individual (it is one thing for relationship to be possible and another entirely for God to offer it), then the only barriers to relationship with God that remain are barriers that humans have put in place. Those barriers are called sin (Macquarrie 71–73).

Sometimes those barriers are consciously put in place, and sometimes they are the result of ignorant participation in cultural and familial norms that keep people from relationship. When they are intentional, they are usually the result of a fear of giving up pleasurable behaviors or beliefs. When they are unintentional, they are often the result of a natural tendency to "go with the flow" of culture without intentionally examining that culture and its associated ethics (behaviors) to determine whether such beliefs and behavior lead toward or away from relationship with God (Macquarrie).

In the natural phase, the individual answered some necessary questions and made the decision to enter into relationship with God. As a result, the individual was justified (forgiven) and regenerated (brought into relationship). Those salvific actions mark a transition from the natural phase, into the second season, often called the purgative way. On this subject, Rev. Dr. Randy Scraper, an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, writes the following in his book Franklian Psychology and Christian Spiritual Formation:

> The entrance into the purgative way is marked by the acceptance of the Christian gospel: i.e., the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah of God. The acceptance of this belief is defined as the Christian conversion experience. The conversion is from one who does not believe to one who does believe. For some tis transformation is accompanied by great emotional experiences. For others it is a simple matter of intellectual assent with resulting life changes that rationally follow such a belief. For all Christians this belief begins a process of transformation referred to as 'being molded in the image of Christ.'…it is the phase of getting out of one's life those things that separate one form God and bringing into one's life those things that help to be molded in the image of Christ. (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology [Kindle Edition]* 102–103)

To be sanctified is therefore to experience what happens when, together with the individual, God begins to confront and remove each of the barriers to relationship that remain. To be sanctified is to experience what happens when, together with the individual, God begins to confront and remove sin. The individual Christian has already been forgiven and brought into relationship. Through relationship, God will now begin to remove sin from the life of the Christian, sin being the remaining barriers that prevent the individual from growing into deeper and more mature relationship with God.

Season 3: The Illuminative Way

Entire Sanctification

The end of the purgative way therefore finds the individual Christian immersed in the process of sanctification, of replacing destructive habits with healthy ones, and of replacing sin with love (Schaeffer 74–75). While there are certainly marked seasons throughout the process of spiritual growth, sanctification is a theological, salvific process that crosses over from the second season into the third, from the purgative way into the illuminative way (Schaeffer). For this reason, the part of sanctification that occurs in the purgative way is referred to as "Initial Sanctification," whereas the part that occurs in the illuminative way is referred to as as "Entire Sanctification." Boyd and Eddy write that "Entire sanctification is nothing more or less than having the heart filled with the love of God" (Boyd 161). This may seem like an academic distinction, however the difference between the two is very real. As Collins writes:

> Positively speaking, entire sanctification not only entails actual renewal, transformation, and purification through the ever-potent grace of God, but also marks a genuine healing of the soul (therapeia psuches). 'By perfection,' Wesley notes, 'I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart and the whole life.' Again, 'It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.'" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 302)

Entering into this state of "perfection" or "completion" wherein God has replaced sin (barriers to relationship with God) with holy love certainly requires that old destructive habits be replaced by healthy ones, as is the case with initial sanctification. However, replacing sin with love is not the only transformative process necessary if the individual Christian is to move into unitive wholeness. In order for such a movement to take place, the Christian must also learn to

communicate in real time with God as opposed to simply doing so historically (Scraper,

Franklian Psychology 132). Entire sanctification therefore immerses the individual Christian

heavily in the main focus of the Illuminative Way, that of learning to "hear" God.

This concept has been touched on by theologians who acknowledge Wesley's

understanding of the dynamic of the awakening of "spiritual senses" as a result of the New Birth

(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202). Collins writes:

> In light of these dynamics, Runyon aptly notes that the new birth, for Wesley, in addition
>
> to everything else, was "an epistemological event that opens a new way of knowing." The
>
> avenue of such spiritually discerned knowledge was, of course, faith, now seen as a
>
> spiritual sense in terms of the seeing eye and the hearing ear. And though Wesley's views
>
> on this score have often been understood in a Lockean, utterly empiricist way, it is
>
> perhaps best not to press this comparison too far or in an exclusive manner, for there are
>
> important differences as well. For one thing, though empiricism has often been presented
>
> as an "objective" approach to knowledge, in which the mind is at the center of the
>
> knowing process, Wesley's tack is on some levels subjective and participatory, in that the
>
> truths that emerge out of the awakening of the new birth cannot be known apart from
>
> transformation. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202)

This "subjective and participatory" engagement of new "spiritual senses" is something that aptly

indicates Wesley's own mystical nature. This kind of language locates Wesley firmly within the

tradition of the Christian mystics, in keeping with the best tradition of the Christian saints, and as

one who attempted to identify his experiences through the use of the accepted academic

theological language of the day. Evelyn Underhill's 1911 publication of *Mysticism: A Study of*

the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness helps with understanding this.

Although there has been some discussion as to whether or not Christian spiritual growth via

Christian mysticism is a helpful area of study for individuals seeking to grow toward spiritual

maturity (Eddins), Arthur Holder nonetheless notes that "Until the late 1970's this 500 page

book served as the best single introduction in English to the subject of mysticism, a research tool

for scholars and a survey for the general reader" (Holder 316). As Evelyn Underhill writes:

> The true mystic – the person with a genius for God – hardly needs a map himself. He
>
> steers a compass course across the 'vast and stormy seas of the divine.' It is characteristic
>
> of his intellectual humility, however, that he is commonly willing to use the map of the
>
> community in which he finds himself, when it comes to showing other people the route
>
> which he has pursued. Sometimes these maps have been adequate. More, they have
>
> elucidated the obscure wanderings of the explorer; helped him; given him landmarks.
>
> (Underhill 121)

Though Wesley was himself steering a "compass course across the 'vast and stormy seas of the

divine,'" he attempted to communicate his "subjective and participatory" experience according

to the "map of the community in which he" found himself (Collins, *The Theology of John

Wesley* 202; Underhill 121). It would be a mistake to overlook the foundational importance of

the awakening of the spiritual senses that Wesley describes, and the subsequent impact that the

awakening of these senses has on the spiritual life of the growing Christian as an integral part of

the process of sanctification.

Wesley indicates that these new spiritual senses, "the seeing eye and the hearing ear," are

"dormant prior to regeneration" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202). The awakening of

these senses is therefore something that happens throughout the process of sanctification.

However, this important awakening is something that happens incrementally and the use of these

senses is something that the individual Christian is tutored in by God throughout the purgative and illuminative ways (Underhill). Learning to hear God involves first learning about God, which is the focus of the purgative way. This includes the process of reflecting on thoughts that God has already had (Christian meditation) even while communicating with God through petitional prayer (either self or God-focused) (Merton 34–35). All of this, of course, occurs throughout the purgative way while the Christian is experiencing the moral integration and faith building that is inherent to the processes of initial sanctification. It is through this process that the presence of sin is being removed. However, the transformative nature of sanctification (in its entirety) does not solely rely on the removal of the presence of sin alone, but also on the transformation that takes place in the heart of the individual Christian as he or she learns to use the newly awakened spiritual senses to their fullest capacity. Therefore, while the purgative way focused on the part of sanctification wherein the presence of sin is being removed from the life of the individual and replaced with holy love, the illuminative way focuses on the part of the sanctification process wherein the individual Christian, having experienced the removal of the presence of sin, is now ready to learn to use the newly awakened spiritual senses to their fullest (Underhill). Aptly stated, it is in this season that God continues the transformative process by transforming the manner in which the Christian communicates with God. No longer does the individual Christian communicate with God historically or (only) petitionally. Rather, the individual Christian is now ready to be taught, by God, how to use the newly awakened spiritual senses to hear God, in real time (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology*).

The Christian who is entering a time in which the presence of sin has been removed is now ready to continue the process of being made holy (sanctified) by learning how to communicate with God in real time (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology*). The Christian is ready to

learn to use the newly awakened "seeing eyes and hearing ears" to change the manner in which the Christian relates to God, such that the relationship itself takes on an entirely new level of fulfillment, meaning, and importance for the growing Christian. It is this understanding of the importance of the "spiritual senses" to the salvific process that represents what could perhaps be one of the most significant offerings of Wesleyan theology. John Wesley appears to have attempted to illustrate the experience of growth according to the accepted theological language of the day (Underhill). Had he not done so, the parallels between salvation and spiritual growth may have continued to elude Christianity for generations to come.

Season 4: The Unitive Way

Glorification

John Wesley is often quoted as saying that he believed perfection to be theoretically possible in this lifetime (Jones 213; Outler 71). In spite of this, many have come to the belief that glorification is not possible in this life, but only in the life to come, that the process of salvation itself ends on this earth with entire sanctification, glorification happening either upon the death of the earthly body, when the soul of the individual Christian is brought into eternity, or in the eschatological final judgment (Outler 65–72).

Such a presumption fails in two key areas. First, it fails to understand Wesley's mystical experience. In failing to understand that Wesley was himself a mystic, steering "a compass course across the 'vast and stormy seas of the divine,'" it fails to assess Wesley's salvific theology (and writings) in light of Wesley's mystical experience (Underhill 121). This understanding is crucial because of the simple yet critical distinction that for the mystic, the individual who "knows his task to be the attainment of Being, Eternal Life, union with the One, the 'return to the Father's heart,'" (Underhill 56) eternal life begins not at the moment of the

death of the physical body, but rather in the moment when "Absolute Life is not merely perceived and enjoyed by the Self…but is one with it" (Underhill 188).

Second, it fails with respect to the presumption that the overarching goal of salvation is to escape from punishment for sin, albeit escape in the form of forgiveness born of God's grace, for the individual it is escape nonetheless. Such a presumption is highly self-oriented, its primary goal being the survival or welfare of the individual soul. Much has been said about this topic already with reference to sin and salvation, nonetheless it is highly important to identify the manner in which such a selfish theology of salvation has both permeated salvific understanding and affected interpretation of the writings of those mystics, like Wesley, who have attempted throughout the ages to provide guidance in steering across the vast and stormy seas of the divine (Underhill). Because of the selfish lens through which salvation tends to be viewed, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that the goal is not the survival of an individual soul but rather Union with the Divine (Underhill).

Wesley did believe that the process of salvation, often referred to as Wesley's *ordo salutis*, or "order of salvation," was a process that prepared the individual to enter into the eternal presence of God.

> In a real sense, then, the entire Wesleyan order of salvation, with its two foci, marks a distinct, Spirit-infused path of preparation in order to see God face to face. In the presence of such a radiant and unsurpassed glory, believers so prepared will not look away in shame but will ascend and embrace the very fullness of their salvation…Indeed, the *ordo salutis* does not end abruptly at entire sanctification nor in satisfying the temporal needs of sinners; instead it is the bridge, the way, that will transport the redeemed to eternity (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 323).

It is not, however, as often indicated by those who fail to understand Wesley's mystical experience, that eternal life begins either in the moment when our physical bodies no longer function, or eschatologically in the final judgment (W. Law 21). Rather, the goal of the Christian spiritual life has always been union with God, an eternal life that begins not at some predetermined point in the eternal future, but "when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 314; Wesley, "Sermon 77").

The key to understanding glorification as a part of the salvific process is being able to understand the movement from imperfection to perfection, from incompletion to completion, and from individuality to union with the God of heaven and earth (W. Law 20–23). Yet, because so few have experienced it (as evidenced by the experiences of the saints), even fewer still tend to believe that it is something that is possible to attain in this lifetime (Underhill 103). Yet, as the Christian saints and mystics have always come to know, such growth is not only possible, but it is Christ's hope for all of humanity: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us" (John 17:20-21). The goal of Christian spiritual growth is that every individual would live in relational union with God, in the same manner that Jesus exemplified, even given human limitations; this is the ultimate end to the relational salvific process, and the beginning of a life eternal and that more abundantly so (Underhill 187).

Glorification is therefore about perfection, or rather being perfected, but in the same manner in which it has been discussed throughout this dialogue (W. Law 19–23). Glorification is about being brought to completion by being brought into the fullness of mature relationship with God; not for God to be brought into the individual, but for the individual to be brought by God into the fullness of who God is (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology* 134–135).

Theologically speaking, glorification involves moving the sanctified individual into the real presence of God, both relationally and ontologically. As verified by the experiences of the saints, such a movement is something that is entirely at the discretion of God and entirely the result of the real grace of God at work in the life of the individual Christian, drawing the individual into the relational fullness of unitive life (Underhill). Where through justification God brought the individual into right alignment with God, freeing the individual from the power of sin (separation from God); where through sanctification God transformed the individual into the likeness of God, freeing the individual from the presence of sin (separation from God); through glorification God brings the individual into the eternal presence of God, freeing the individual from the purpose of sin, which is separation from God (Burwash 441–443; Wesley, "Predestination").

Unitive Life

The unitive life is a state of being, for which our human language has not yet developed a vocabulary that is adequate. As James Wilhoit notes, "Orthodox writers have well articulated the radical nature of human transformation through our union with Christ" (Wilhoit 42). The incarnation equally is a doctrine of sharing or participation. Christ shares to the full in what we are, and so he makes it possible for us to share in what he is, in his divine life and glory. He became what we are, so to make us what he is (Kallistos 74) Throughout the centuries, the Saints and the Christian Mystics have tried to explain and describe it, yet any language that is chosen lacks the ability to communicate the fullness of God's glory evident in this abundance of life (Higgins 25). Many have referred to the unitive life as "essentially a state of free and filial participation in Eternal Life," (Underhill 440) while yet others have identified it as "deification,"

By deification they intend no arrogant claim to identification with God, but as it were a

transfusion of their selves by His Self: an entrance upon a new order of life, so high and

so harmonious with Reality that it can only be called divine. Over and over again they

assure us that personality is not lost, but made more real. 'When,' says St. Augustine, 'I

shall cleave to Thee with all my being, then shall I in nothing have pain and labour; and

my life shall be a real life, being wholly full of Thee.' 'My life shall be a real life'

because it is 'full of Thee.' The achievement of reality, and deification, are then one and

the same thing: necessarily so, since we know that only the divine is the real. (Underhill

444)

At the end of the Dark Night of the Spirit, when the necessary lessons have been learned, it

would be easy to say that God restores the feeling of God's presence within the fullness of the

human being, yet the experience of unitive life, into which the individual, mature Christian is

brought, is so much more than that (Underhill).

The dark night of the spirit is the preparation for the infusion of contemplation in the

spiritual dimension of the human being. Moving through this experience is the direct answer to

the prayer of full union (Scrape*r, Franklian Psychology* 134). There are no words to describe the

fullness of this experience, although down through the centuries the saints have tried to help us

understand the reality of this part of the unitive way. Spiritual marriage, ecstasy, and glorious

union are all terms that have been used to describe the result of the movement through the dark

night of the spirit (Underhill; Scraper, *Franklian Psychology*). There is a transforming sense of

union with God that awaits the answer to the next prayer, which is the prayer of passive union.

This prayer is lived in the full recognition that infused contemplation is truly a gift from God

which is given in God's time (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology [Kindle Edition]* 134).

In God's time, the now mature Christian has come to the end of the journey of salvific relationship. Of course, it is not the end of a journey so much as it is the beginning of life, of unitive life that is abundant in its wholeness in a way that God modeled for humanity through the incarnate Christ (Underhill). No longer does the individual Christian engage the complexity of daily life alone, a complexity that has taken on a sense of simplicity because the daily life of the mature Christian is now lived together with God; each and every moment enjoyed in the fullness of union with the divine (Higgins 25).

For so very many years, Christians have approached salvation and spiritual growth as if they are two separate processes, one to save the Christian from eternal torment, the other to help the Christian to grow into becoming a better person. In truth, the two processes illustrate one and the same journey, that being the growth into the fullness of a unitive relationship with God, through which the Christian is saved from a lifetime of separation from the abundance of the Real (Underhill). To journey toward salvific relationship is not to embark on a journey toward an unknown destination that can only be realized at some indeterminable point in the individual's eternal future. The reason for this is quite simply because unitive life has been God's hope for humanity from the very beginning, from the moment that humans were created. This is the lesson that has been taught by the Christian mystics, the lesson that those who have known God have tried to share with the world, that salvation has always and only ever had one purpose, to help us to move into the fullness and abundance of unitive relationship with God.

When we come to look at the lives of the mystics, we find it literally true that such 'songs of lovely loving commonly burst up' whenever we can catch them unawares; see behind the formidable and heroic activities of reformer, teacher, or leader of men the *vie intime* which is lived at the hearth of Love. 'What are the servants of the Lord but His

minstrels?' said St. Francis, who saw nothing inconsistent between the Celestial Melodies

and the Stigmata of Christ. Moreover, the songs of such troubadours, as the hermit of

Hampole learned in his wilderness, are not only sweet but playful. Dwelling always in a

light of which we hardly dare to think, save in the extreme terms of reverence and awe,

they are not afraid with any amazement: they are at home. (Underhill 465)

Wesley describes those that have grown into this unitive life as "men…not only of great

understanding…but who likewise appeared to be men of love, experimentally acquainted with

true, inward religion. Some of these were burning and shining lights, persons famous in their

generations, and such as had well deserved of the church of Christ, for standing in the gap

against the overflowings of ungodliness" (Burwash 151). The clear progression outlined here

allows one to enter into this unitive life; participation in the "means of grace," as identified by

Wesley, also may aid the individual in this growth process (Burwash). Wesley writes that "the

outward ordinances of God then profit much, when they advance inward holiness," these

"outward ordinances chiefly consisting of the "means of grace" (Burwash 151). Wesley

identifies these means of grace as "prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation;

searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving

the Lord's supper" (Burwash 152). A further examination of the means of grace is undertaken in

the following section.

The Means of Grace (Works of Piety and Works of Mercy)

In order to understand the progression toward the unitive life, it is necessary to to engage

a thoroughly Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace. John Wesley would define the

means of grace as "outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end

– to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing [prevenient],

justifying, or sanctifying grace"(Burwash 152) . These means of grace, according to James

Wilhoit, are "available to us…as the ordinary way of growing up into the fullness of his

[Christ's] love and grace" (Wilhoit 42). Wesley would make a distinction between two different

kinds of the "means of grace," referring to the "instituted" means of grace, and the "prudential"

means of grace (Headley 133). For Wesley, the "instituted" means of grace consisted of what

Wesley believed to be the means of grace clearly identified by Scripture (Headley 133). These

consist of: 1) Prayer, 2) Searching the Scriptures, 3) The Lord's Supper, 4) Fasting, and 5)

Christian Conference (Headley 133).

It is the instituted means of grace that are "often also referred to as 'works of piety'"

(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 257). Wesley would indicate that the importance of

participation in these "works of piety," largely "depends on their actual subservience to the end

of religion; that consequently all these means when separate from the end, are less than nothing,

and vanity" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 258). For Wesley, the "end of religion"

consisted of the development of a "holy love" of "God and neighbor," or said differently: growth

into a holy love that is shared in relationship with God, and all of God's creation (Collins, *The

Theology of John Wesley : Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* 258). Therefore, works of piety

have. as their ultimate end, the goal of growth toward spiritual maturity for the individual

Christian.

Albert Outler locates the importance of the instituted means of grace firmly within

Wesley's formative Christian experience as a young man in the Anglican Church. Outler

indicates that Wesley "had grown up with the gospel of moral rectitude" (Outler 30). "The

premise of such a gospel," according to Outler, "was the human moral ability to sin only by

choice. It's prescription for the Christian life, therefore, was moral effort, encouraged,

sanctioned, and rewarded by the church (through her 'means of grace')" (Outler 30). Outler

writes that Wesley's own early life and writings reflect a supreme commitment to this notion of

holy living that was meant to have been the result of the means of grace lived out in his own life.

The problem with this doctrine of "a moral ability not to sin except at will," according to Outler,

is "the tragic discrepancy between its promises and performance" (Outler 31). Outler notes that

even as much effort as Wesley put into this developing notion of holy living in "Oxford and

Epworth and Georgia," he was never able to live up to the standard of holiness that this "gospel

of moral rectitude" had promised (Outler). This is why Wesley's Aldersgate experience that the

resulting spiritual growth was of such profound importance to what would become Wesley's later

understanding of the means of grace. Wesley's experience at Aldersgate helped him to transition

from the "gospel of moral rectitude" to "justification by faith alone" (*sola fide*), i.e. to a doctrine

of a radical, universal human flaw, from all talk about human merit to radical trust in God's

pardon as a *gift,* in and through the merits of Christ's mediatorial sacrifice (Outler 32). Wesley

would eventually replace the "doctrine of election with the notion of prevenient grace," whereby

setting the foundation for Wesley's relational, salvific theology which would locate his

understanding of the means of grace firmly in a relational context more so that a moral rectitude

context (Outler 34). This theological, contextual transition therefore identifies what is so

distinctive about Wesley's means of grace: the means of grace for the post Aldersgate Wesley are

no longer a prerequisite to a relationship with God, but rather the result of that relationship

(Outler).

By the "prudential" means of grace, Wesley referred to those means that were not clearly

identified by the scriptures, but which still "served the life of faith" (Headley 135). For Wesley,

these consisted of both "circumstantial" and "contextual" opportunities to participate in the

means of grace (Headley 135–136). Additionally, the prudential means of grace might show themselves through in missional involvement, although they might also include things done for the self. These works are ultimately geared toward acts that help the poor "to a better life, but also the minister to them" whom Wesley believed to "benefit in so many ways" (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 267). In his understanding of what "works of mercy" actually consisted of, Wesley would include "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously affected; such as the endeavoring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner"(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 267). Wesley is therefore connecting his understanding of "works of mercy" to what might commonly be called "works of mercy" or mission and service by modern-day Christians (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 267). These are opportunities to live out the holy love of God with the neighbor in a way that helps the neighbor to better understand, experience, and embrace God's love directly.

Though there were many practices adopted by Wesley and his followers that reflect the importance of the means of grace, two in particular highlight the importance of works of piety and works of mercy in unique ways. As noted by Anthony Headley, this is an important order of precedence to consider: "It appears obvious to me that rightly practiced, works of piety can foster right relationship with God. In turn, right relationship with God can enhance relationship with others" (Headley 145).

It was the class meeting structure, favored by the Wesleys that served as a primary method by which works of piety were promoted, and participants were held accountable by one another in adhering to them. "Wesley expressed the purpose of these society meetings, which were in some sense similar to the pietistic *collegia* of Spener as well as to the religious societies of the Church of England as 'a company of men having the form, and seeking the power of

godliness'" (Collins, *John Wesley* 121). Though accountability in these meetings was certainly important, the "principal task of these meetings…was one of instruction, of communicating the vital truths of the Christian faith" (Collins, *John Wesley* 121). The larger society meetings eventually gave way to the smaller class meetings. These meetings would normally consist of "five to twelve members" and gathered for the purpose of helping one another to discern "whether they were indeed working out their own salvation" (Collins, *John Wesley* 121–122).

As Headley indicates above, personal holiness was not the only pursuit of those seeking mature relationship with God. Works of mercy, in addition to works of piety, were also considered to be very important. One of the chief practices adopted by the Wesleys that communicated this importance was the visiting of the sick (Headley 145–146). Headley notes that "Wesley suggested that visiting the sick served to increase one's thankfulness to God as well as one's sympathy with the afflicted" (Headley 146). These practices, among others, served to communicate the importance of the means of grace to Wesley and his early followers because they illustrate the manner in which Wesley and his followers took participation in the means of grace seriously.

Missional Involvement

In his book, *Shift: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry,* Church Consultant Phil Maynard writes, "over the years, particularly coming out of the modern scientific era, discipleship ministries have been based on the core definition of a disciple as a 'learner.' This was easy and convenient. We could 'teach' about what it means to be a disciple. So the Church developed a very academic approach to equipping disciples" (Maynard 72). Maynard goes on to discuss the changes that the Church has endured in the post-modern era, and compares those changes to the results of studies that have been conducted regarding the

effectiveness of this educational approach. His conclusion is that the educational model of discipleship has failed, largely because "we missed the part of the definition of disciple as learner that focused on actually becoming like Jesus, not just learning about Jesus" (Maynard 73). Consequently, Maynard proposes that to become like Jesus requires that followers allow the Holy Spirit to transform their behaviors, such that they begin to participate in the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in the world; that they become mission-minded and missionally involved (Maynard 72–74).

Key to understanding missional involvement is understanding that "God enables a people, any people, to reach salvation through their culture and tribal, racial customs and traditions" (Donovan 23). This is as true within the varying customs of North America as it is among the Masai of Tanzania, whom Vincent Donovan set out to bring the gospel message to in the late 1960's. In fact, Philip Meadows has noted that "the dominant understanding of mission as sending people overseas to pre-Christian cultures has been overshadowed by the need for missionary activity in our emerging post-Christian context" (Meadows 1). In his book, *Missional Map-Making*, Alan Roxburgh identifies two distinct cultural changes that have affected the North American Church in unique ways as a result of "globalization and postmodernism" (Roxburgh 128). Roxburgh notes that most of the people that he was bringing into membership within his congregation were already baptized Christians, transferring from other congregations (Roxburgh 128). Roxburgh further assess that much of the church culture that had developed in North America, which represented many of the churches that these new members were transferring from, was a culture that centered around what he refers to as an "attractional model" of church leadership (Roxburgh 128). About the attractional model, he notes that:

I was…aware of the ways in which the forms of church life we were practicing required a number of full-time staff and volunteers to attend to a set of factors shaping the inner workings of the church (worship, small groups, children and youth programs, discipleship, and so on). Those of us in leadership bought into the implicit expectation that focusing on these internal factors was what brought success and growth. As I walked around the neighborhoods in Toronto in the 1980's…several other things became clear to me…the people in these neighborhoods – representing a huge array of nationalities, ethnicities, professionals and blue-collar workers of all ages – were never going to turn up at church on Sunday morning no matter how good or healthy our worship was, and they were never going to sign on to our great ministries and programs. (Roxburgh 128)

Roxburgh goes on to chronicle his understanding of this cultural shift, eventually determining that it would now "be possible to be a faithful community of God's people only by reengaging the neighborhoods and communities where we live and learning to ask what was happening among the people of the neighborhood, attending to their stories, and cultivating receptiveness to being surprised by what God might already be up to among all these people who aren't thinking about church or even God" (Roxburgh 132).

To engage in missional involvement is therefore to engage in the "stories" of those who do not already identify with the body of Christ (Roxburgh 132). Daniel Carroll connects this identity with that of ancient Israel's theology of hospitality when he states that, "Care for the sojourner was important for Israel because they, too, had experienced life as sojourners – and that in most unpleasant ways. The rehearsing at the feasts of their history as immigrants in Egypt and the reminder to be gracious to outsiders and the downcast were exercises in collective memory. All of this, ideally, was crucial for their formation as a people of virtue, especially the

virtue of generous hospitality" (Carroll R 109). To be involved in mission is therefore to extend

hospitality in a way that finds the person or group extending the hospitality to be incarnationally

present with the "sojourner," the person who does not identify with the community that is

extending hospitality (Carroll R 109). Doing so includes participating in the redemptive work of

Christ by following Christ into the communities, families, and lives of people who do not

identify with the body of Christ and both being attentive to and participating in their "stories"

(Hauerwas 121).

As Roxburgh and others have so aptly identified, being able to do so involves not only

understanding, but accepting that what motivates secular individuals and communities can be

both similar to, as well as differentiated from, that which motivates Christian individuals and

communities (Roxburgh 132–133; Hunter, *How to Reach* 44–53). Sherwood Lingenfelter asserts

that those motivational differences are a key component that accounts for the difficulty that

Christians often have in making missional connections. According to Lingenfelter, "much of the

secular development work by people in the market or bureaucracy is based upon…materialistic

assumptions; many believe that the solution to basic human misery is material. Jesus draws a

different conclusion…that all work should be done within the framework of our expectation and

preparedness for his coming again" (Lingenfelter 263–265).

If the basic motivations and assumptions of those involved in mission are divorced from

those whom they seek to be in mission with, then there is a dichotomy present that stifles the

effectiveness of the mission. In his work with the Sawi people of New Guinea in the 1960's, Don

Richardson adopted the basic belief that someone who was sympathetic to the differences in

motivation and assumption that were themselves the result of vastly differing cultures should be

among the first to attempt to be missionally involved with this group of aboriginal people

(Richardson 102). After attempting to make his home together with the Sawi people (along with his wife), Richardson began to embrace the Sawi culture, so that he could gain a better understanding of the "stories" of the Sawi people (Richardson 103–137). Once he had embraced their stories, Richardson was able to understand what he shared in common with the Sawi people, specifically "a belief in the supernatural world and in the importance of interaction between that supernatural world and men" (Richardson 148). Richardson would not only embrace these similarities, but would use them as a bridge to increase his missional involvement with the Sawi people, ultimately sharing the Gospel message in a way that the Sawi could both embrace and understand which resulted in the conversion of nearly the entire tribe (Richardson 231–239).

Cultural engagement is therefore a critical component of missional involvement, so much so that it is likely to be through such engagement that the Gospel message is enculturated. This means that while the social structures of the "sojourner" should not be deified (Storti 93) they must nonetheless be a crucial factor through which (not in spite of which) "social justice through social change" are achieved with the ultimate goal of the proclamation and acceptance of the "hope of the coming of the kingdom of God, in which social transformation will reach its perfect fulfillment" (Samuel 62–69).

Christian Spiritual Growth Programs

In 2001, Daniel Slagle conducted a study within a congregation in the North Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church that focused on the impact of a Wesleyan model of spiritual formation on the lay leadership within that congregation (Slagle). To accomplish this goal, Slagle prepared a model of instruction based on Christian spiritual growth which focused specifically on the instituted and prudential means of grace (Slagle). It was

Slagle's hypothesis that those who participated in the study would be better equipped to serve as leaders within the United Methodist congregation in question (Slagle). Slagle divided his study into two groups (a control group and a test group). The control group did not participate in the study as the test group did. Both groups participated in the Spiritual Leadership Qualities Inventory prior to the study and after it was completed (Slagle). According to Slagle, the Inventory "measures one's level of spiritual maturity according to nineteen characteristics found in the books of 1 Timothy and Titus" (Slagle 2). Slagle found improvement in seven of the nineteen characteristics throughout the course of the study, with at least three of those improvements able to be directly linked to the study (Slagle). While it was not immediately clear which components of the study had a direct impact on spiritual growth, Slagle did report that eighty percent of those who participated in the test group self-identified that their own capacity for leadership had increased as a result of participating in the study (Slagle). The participants reported that regular prayer, participation in Holy Communion, and the study itself had the most substantial effect (Slagle).

In 2011, Steven Pulliam conducted a twelve-week study comprised of twenty-three people that focused on "Wesleyan discipleship and spiritual disciplines" at Central United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas (Pulliam 1). The study sought to determine whether or not there was a connection between exposure to "Wesleyan discipleship and devotional practices," and how well equipped the members of the study group were for "servant ministry and servant leadership" (Pulliam 1). Participants completed a survey before and after participating in the study that sought to assess the participants' level of knowledge with regard to Wesleyan spiritual disciplines and their level of participation in servant leadership and servant ministry (Pulliam). Pulliam defined the "spiritual disciplines" by associating them with Wesley's

means of grace. The results of the study showed that as a result of participation in the study, participants increased their knowledge about the Wesleyan means of grace, as well as their willingness to participate in servant leadership and servant ministry (Pulliam).

In 2002, Brian Law conducted a study of the relationship between church health and church growth in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The study itself consisted of a health based survey distributed to a "random sampling" of 270 out of 1,250 churches in the West Ohio Annual Conference (B. Law 21). Although the purpose of the study was to ascertain what, if any, relationship existed between church health and church growth, what Law found as a result of conducting the study was that there is a relationship that is more important to church growth than church health, that being relationship between "perceived church health," and the "individual congregant's practices of certain spiritual disciplines"(B. Law 2). Specifically, Law found that those participants who self-reported that they participated in spiritual disciplines "tended to view church health higher than those who did not participate in spiritual disciplines" (B. Law 93).

The Inspire Movement is a modern, Wesleyan-modeled discipleship movement that claims to seek to develop the spiritual lives of individual people according to a Wesleyan model of spirituality (Meadows). According to Phil Meadows, Director of the Inspire Movement, Wesley struggled with why the Good News of the Gospel message was spreading so slowly around the world (Meadows 2). According to Meadows, Wesley believed that the answer to this question had something to do with the spiritual lives (holiness) of individual Christians (Meadows 2). Accordingly, the Inspire Movement professes to develop "mission spirituality as a way of life," by adhering to four Wesleyan tenets: 1) "Seeking Holiness," 2) "Spiritual

Discipline" (the means of grace), 3) "Sharing Fellowship," and 4) "Everyday Mission"

(Meadows 3–4).

Each of these studies shows that there is commonly improvement in various categories of

personal spiritual growth and readiness for ministry when individuals choose to participate in

some type of program that emphasizes Wesleyan spiritual disciplines or the means of grace

(Callen 207). What is still in question is whether or not participation in Christian spiritual growth

programs has any effect at all on participation in mission and service.

Research Design Literature

Sensing notes that a survey is described as a "lengthy questionnaire that employs fixed

choice responses" (Sensing 115). Surveys are used when there is a need present to "describe

characteristics or understandings" from a "large group of people" (Sensing 115). Sensing further

notes that surveys should be employed when the sample size engaged is too large to be

reasonably serviced through a questionnaire or an interview (Sensing). Bell notes that when a

survey is employed, "respondents will be asked the same questions in, as far as possible, the

same circumstances" (Bell 14). This method allows the researcher to obtain information and data

from a large pool of participants, and, as in the case of this study, participants who are distributed

over a wide geographic area (Bell 14). For a study such as this, it will be helpful to use such a

method that allows for comparison and correlation.

Surveys are helpful in determining the answers to "the questions What? Where? When?

And How?, but it is not so easy to find out Why? Causal relationship can rarely if ever be proved

by survey method" (Bell 14). Surveys do allow for the researcher to be able to "compare, to

relate one characteristic to another and to demonstrate that certain features exist in certain

categories" (Bell 14). For the purposes of a study such as this that seeks to ascertain whether or

not there is a relationship that exists between opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation rates in missional service, the use of surveys can be a helpful tool. Likewise, this study will require data from many congregations over a distributed geographic area.

However, because surveys cannot answer the "Why?" question (Bell), it will be necessary to employ additional means of qualitative data collection. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for a degree of freedom in the midst of following a "preset protocol that correlates with the project's problem and purpose statements" (Sensing 107). While there is an interview guide that "keeps the interviewer focused on the purpose of the interview," (Patton 344–345) the use of semi-structured interviews also allows the interviewer the freedom to "probe and explore for more depth" (Sensing 107). Therefore, for the purposes of a study such as this, making use of the semi-structured interviews in addition to surveys will allow for the opportunity to better understand why correlations may or may not be present if the surveys appear to indicate that they are or are not.

Summary of Literature

For the past thirty years, the growth rhetoric coming out of the American Church (and The United Methodist Church) has been strongly centered on the idea of moving the Church toward cultural relevance. The basic summary of this belief, as it has been frequently communicated, is that the Church is in decline because it is no longer relevant to the lives of the people that the Church seeks to minister to through Christian community.

The communicated message has therefore been that should the Church make greater strides in becoming relevant to the culture (in this case: the culture of America) then the Church will experience a resurgence of attendance and membership as a direct result of a theology that

seeks to do a better job of meeting people where they are. The church has set out to accomplish this goal with a fervor that should have been matched by a desire to research and understand the culture that the Church has overwhelmingly sought to become relevant to.

Moving toward becoming relevant to a culture that is growing exponentially in its sense of entitlement has produced a new consumer driven Church "experience" in America that treats Christians more like bargain shoppers than disciples. In order to be relevant, the American Church has been forced to identify which practices and theologies are attractive or unattractive to consumer Christians. As a result, practices and theologies that are unattractive are being purged, at the same time that American Churches are ever reaching for the next big activity or theology, many of which are becoming increasingly shallow and humanist.

Humanism as a moral philosophy has provided an attractive alternative for the American Church as it moves toward cultural relevance, specifically because humanism is predicated on the belief that the individual contains within all that is necessary for moral decision making. For humanism as a moral philosophy, relationship with God is not necessary for moral decision making; rather, the individual is quite simply called to use his or her own faculties to make the decision that is least likely to infringe upon the rights of another. Of course, the eternal problem with humanism as a moral philosophy has always been its reliance upon the individual's perception of reality as complete reality without acknowledging that judgment (even moral judgment), without both complete knowledge and perfect love, is always unjust.

The unfortunate consequence of this Christian cultural and theological shift has therefore been the rise of a Church in American with little to no depth, and subsequently little to no real value. Western Christians may feel entitled to a fault, but they are not unintelligent. It is an eventuality that consumerist intelligent Christians eventually realize that the Church is not a

necessary conduit for humanistic philosophy, and as a result there is little to no real value in

Church participation beyond periodic encouragement, the cultivation of social relationships, and

the use of the Church as a springboard for the promotion of secular social agendas. None of these

motivations has yet proven sufficient to ensure continued active participation in the American

Church for most post-modern Christians.

In summary, the quest for cultural relevance in the midst of cultural shift toward

increasing entitlement has resulted in a version of the American Church with little to no value for

post-modern Christians. This emerging culturally relevant version of American Christianity has

become a "form of Christianity with some of the heart removed, more of the mind, and most of

the vertebrae. It is not a version of the Christian faith that has a fair chance of changing the world

or its devotees. No ancient martyrs would have been fed to the lions if their faith had been

reduced to that" (Hunter, *The Celtic Way* 94). George Hunter's words, though describing the

Prosperity Gospel that constituted a previous attempt at cultural relevance, are nonetheless

applicable here. American Christianity is losing its value.

If American Christianity is to survive this uniquely unprecedented cultural shift toward

entitlement, it will not do so by becoming more relevant to an already entitled culture. That much

is readily apparent. Perhaps the direction forward is not to be focused so much on relevance as

on value. A theology with more substance (and subsequently more value) than humanism

combined with practices, however indigenous they might become, that reflect this substantive

theological shift might prove to be more effective in turning this tide than previous attempts at

cultural change have proven. What such a theology should consist of would certainly (and very

likely should be) open for much debate. A starting point for such a debate should focus on

returning to an older and more substantive theology of spiritual growth, one that places

importance on growing toward spiritual maturity through meaningful relationship with God as offered by St. Gregory of Nyssa in his work, The Life of Moses:

> Since the goal of the virtuous way of life was the very thing we have been seeking, and this goal has been found in what we have said, it is time for you, noble friend, to look to that example and, by transferring to your own life what is contemplated through spiritual interpretation of the things spoken literally, to be known by God and to become his friend. This is true perfection: not to avoid a wicked life because, like slaves, we servilely fear punishment, nor to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life by some businesslike and contractual arrangement. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God's friendship as the only thing dreadful, and we consider becoming God's friend the only thing worthy of honor and desire. This, as I have said, is the perfection of life. (Gregorius 132)

While writing about the influence of German Pietism on the theology of John Wesley, Professor Ken Collins of Asbury theological seminary writes the following: "what Wesley likely found most attractive in German Pietism, especially from Halle and precursory movements, was the strong association of the new birth and the reform of the church, in other words, that renewal must begin with the inculcation of holiness "(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 208). If there is to be significant reform in the American church and in global Christianity as a whole, such a reform must begin with the inculcation of personal holiness, or to use a more modern phrase, with a focus on relationship with God.

This represents the most significant opportunity that emerges when analyzing the available literature. In a postmodern culture that combines humanist moral philosophy with

survivalist practical salvific theology, such a shift toward relational theology could prove

substantially re-formative if one of its ultimate outcomes is to lead the individual toward

participation in acts of mercy, specifically missional involvement. Therefore, it is important to

study if, and where this is taking place, and whether or not there are any discernable relationships

between the offering of instruction in substantive Wesleyan salvific theology and participation in

missional involvement.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will address the research methodology for this particular project. The nature

and purpose of the project will be addressed, including an examination of the research methods

used to address each research question. The ministry context of the research will also be

identified, including the criteria for selection of participants, a description of the participants, and

ethical considerations for this research project. This section will conclude with a discussion of

the procedure used in collecting evidence from participants as well as the procedure used in

analyzing the evidence once it was collected. Finally, the reliability and validity of the project

design will be addressed.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research is to assess whether or not a relationship exists between the

availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation

in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. The

nature of this study as a relationship study necessitated the gathering of data across a wide range

of churches within given limitations as addressed below. Data was primarily gathered via the

combination of a survey and questionnaire sent out to senior appointed clergy within the churches included in the study and semi-structured interviews of twenty randomly selected appointed clergy from within this district. The survey and questionnaire included two main components designed to assess what opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth are available within the selected congregations and what the rates of participation in missional involvement are within the same congregations. The semi-structured interview included questions that that sought to determine the participants' impression of relationships that do or do not exist between the availability of Christian spiritual growth programs and missional involvement.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth are offered by congregations within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC?

This question was answered using questions 8-15 of the survey and questionnaire in Appendix B. This survey was sent electronically to all of the senior appointed clergy throughout the Wichitas district of the OKUMC. These questions sought to obtain data relative to determining what opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth are available within the identified congregations. These opportunities for instruction (according to the survey) include and are limited to: Sunday school classes, bible studies, retreats, and sermon series. This survey and questionnaire asked for varied responses including yes/no and multiple choice questions along with open-ended questions that allow for individual interpretation.

Research Question 2: What is the level of missional involvement among the congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC?

This question was answered using questions 16-22 of the survey and questionnaire in Appendix B. This survey and questionnaire was sent electronically to all of the senior appointed clergy throughout the Wichitas district of the OKUMC. These questions sought to obtain data relative to determining what the level of missional involvement is within the identified congregations. Missional involvement (according to the survey) includes and is limited to: local, national, and international mission trips scheduled through an outside missional organization or planned entirely by the local congregation as well as local outreach opportunities that have as their primary intent the goal of providing any kind of service to or building relationships with individuals and communities that are not currently included in the membership of the church (Roxburgh 159–160). This survey and questionnaire asked for varied responses including yes/no and multiple choice questions along with open-ended questions that allow for individual interpretation.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the availability of Christian Spiritual growth programs and levels of missional involvement among the congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC?

This question was answered using the semi-structured interview questions 2-6 from Appendix B as well as by comparing the results from questions 9 and 10 with question 18 from the survey and questionnaire. These questions were used in semi-structured interviews of twenty randomly selected senior appointed clergy within the Wichitas district of the OKUMC. Interviews were conducted over the phone in a one-on-one environment that included only the author and the interviewee. The purpose of the questions used in the semi-structured interviews were to provide qualitative data that could be used to assess the participants' impressions relative

to the relationships that do or do not exist between the availability of opportunities of instruction in Christian spiritual growth (RQ 1) and participation in missional involvement (RQ 2).

Ministry Context(s) for Observing the Phenomenon

The ministry context for engaging in this relationship study consisted of all of the congregations in the Wichitas District of the OKUMC that were willing to participate in the survey. Because forms of polity are different between Christian denominations, it was important to focus on one denomination as practices and cultures can vary among differing denominations. This variance would have been problematic in trying to determine whether or not relationships existed. Likewise, it was important to explore the nature or presence of this relationship within one geographic area so that regional socio-cultural differences were not a factor that affected the data obtained within the study. While any number of denominations or regions could therefore have been selected, the author has chosen to narrow the context of the study to the denomination and geographic region identified for two primary reasons: 1) this region comprises the author's own ministerial context which allows for greater contextualization of the study and more authentic interaction from the author; 2) this denomination represents one of the major denominations that is the modern descendent of Wesley's original Methodist movement.

Within this particular culture, there is a mixture of small, medium, large, and mega-church environments. Likewise, there is a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural ministry contexts. Clergy within this denomination are often highly educated, however the level of power-distance in this context tends to be very low. This means that while the clergy person may be respected and well credentialed, he or she is not always revered and/or deferred to unconditionally, at least this has been the authors own observation from having served within this context.

Participants to Be Sampled About the Phenomenon

Criteria for Selection

These participants were chosen because they represent the author's own context of ministry, and because they likewise represent the modern descendants of the Methodist movement founded by Wesley. If there is a relationship that exists between the availability of opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional involvement, then it stands to reason that one key context to assess the potential of the existence of that relationship would be within a denomination that is descended from Wesley's original movement because Wesley's original movement focused so intently on Wesley's *ordo salutis*, as identified in Chapter 2.

Naturally, any of the many Wesleyan denominations could have been chosen, and any segment of those denominations could likewise have been assessed. Therefore, the Wichitas District of the OKUMC was selected because, as mentioned, it is the author's own ministry context which allows for the potential applications of findings to the author's own context of ministry.

Likewise, selection of one district within an annual conference provides for a large study population, while maintaining a degree of homogeneity and a more simplified method of dispersing the survey. The churches of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC share in common a hierarchical structure that makes the administration of the survey both manageable and available to a large population of churches that share a common geography, while maintaining an element of diversity.

Description of Participants

This study focused on the responses of senior appointed clergy within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. The use of churches throughout the Wichitas District of the OKUMC provided for a great deal of diversity within the study, while maintaining a degree of homogeneity which allows for greater applicability of the findings within the context studied. While diversity according to geographic region is limited in such a context, as are some additional elements of diversity inherent to such a geographic limitation, there is likewise the opportunity for diversity in a number of categories. Participants include males and females, churches of varying size and demographic location (urban, suburban, and rural), as well as churches with varying types of appointed clergy (local pastors, commissioned elders, and ordained elders). Although the findings of the research were broken down by demographic region, the purpose of the included diversity was to assess whether or not there were relationships in these areas that differed according to the diversity of regions identified.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to consider that this study, and this author, represents not only the United Methodist Church (the author's own denomination) but also Asbury Theological Seminary and the Church Universal. The rights of participants were safeguarded throughout the study in multiple ways. While the survey, questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews were not anonymous, they were confidential, and the data obtained and any material relating to that data was safeguarded. Digital information was safeguarded via storage on the author's own personal computer that is password protected. At the culmination of the study, the help of an outside professional was obtained to wipe the data completely from the memory of the computer. Hard copy data including taped recordings and documents obtained and used throughout the study was stored in a locked file

cabinet at the home of the author. Hard copy documents were shredded using a shredder upon completion of the study.

All of the participants' own reports were available to the individual participants. No information obtained from one participant was shared in any way with another participant, with the exception of the final findings of the report as reported in the dissertation itself. Participants were not paid or compensated in any way as an incentive for participating in this study. No travel was required of any of the participants that chose to participate in the study. The online tool Survey Monkey was used as a dissemination tool to distribute the survey and questionnaire to participants throughout the district. Because this survey is not confidential by nature, the author purchased a membership from Survey Monkey that is confidential. A letter confirming this was sent to the Institutional Review Board of Asbury Theological Seminary. There is no power differential between the author and the participants. All participants are colleagues of the author with no official or unofficial employment hierarchies involved. Participants in the semi-structured survey were assigned a two-digit number by name in order to maintain confidentiality within the study, after they reported their names and the churches that they were appointed to within the survey and questionnaire. Those numbers are used to refer to the participants' responses in the appropriate sections of this dissertation. Participants in the survey and questionnaire were assigned a three-digit number to refer to their participation throughout the study and in the appropriate sections of this dissertation. Participants in every aspect of research were assured that no one other than the author would know who actually participated in the study. Participants were also assured that no one would know who made individual comments in semi-structured interviews. Participants were made aware that only the author, dissertation coach, and readers would have access to identifying data.

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

This research intentionally combines the use of qualitative and quantitative methods in accordance with the guidance of Tim Sensing who writes that "…a variety of methodological approaches are needed and credible…mixed methods are especially valuable" (Sensing 52). This opinion is echoed by Catherine Riessman who notes that a "multi-methods approach" that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods is the most effective means by which to engage in research (Riessman 56). Because the intent of this study is to assess whether or not a relationship exists between two areas of ministry, research methods used consisted of a survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey made possible the collection of data from large numbers of respondents in similar circumstances so that the data could be compared for the purpose of "demonstrating" whether or not "certain features exist in certain categories" (Bell 14). Likewise, semi-structured interviews were used in order to allow for the opportunity to "pursue matters as situations dictate," in an environment where "specified themes, issues and questions with predetermined sequence are described in the protocol" (Sensing 107).

Surveys and interview questions were developed with the assistance of Dr. Janet Dean of Asbury University and with permission from Rev. Dr. Randy Scraper to make modifications to the spiritual growth survey included in his dissertation on *Franklian Psychology and Christian Spiritual Growth*. Permission to distribute surveys and conduct interviews was obtained from Rev. Christ Tiger, District Superintendent of the Wichitas District of the Oklahoma Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Once the permissions were obtained and the survey and interview questions were written and approved, an online delivery method for disseminating the survey questions was constructed through a purchased membership from the online survey tool, www.surveymonkey.com. A link to these survey questions, along with an online informed

consent letter was emailed to each of the clergy appointed as senior pastors through the Wichitas

District. This link was emailed with the assistance of the District Administrative Assistant, and

with the permission of the District Superintendent.

After the online survey links were emailed, interviews were scheduled with 20 randomly

selected clergy appointed to senior pastor positions throughout the Wichitas District (Sensing

82). In order to facilitate random selection, each church in the district was assigned a three-digit

number. Each of those numbers were written on separate pieces of paper and placed in a

container. The author then randomly drew twenty numbers without looking at the numbers

selected. Once drawn, the senior appointed clergy of each church were contacted and asked

whether or not they would be willing to participate in an interview. If one of the selected clergy

declined, the number was discarded, and another number was randomly drawn from the

container to take the place of the number discarded.

Interview times were scheduled according to the availability of each participant and the

author. The author set up a time to call each participant. One week prior to each interview, the

author mailed an informed consent letter and a copy of the interview questions to each

participant so that the participant would have a copy of the questions and the informed consent

letter prior to the interview. Each mailing included a self-addressed, stamped return envelope for

the participant to mail the signed informed consent letter back to the author prior the scheduled

interview. At the time of each interview, the author called each participant from the author's

office and recorded each interview using a secure recording application after obtaining informed

consent from the participant to do so. The author introduced himself, read aloud the necessary

informed consent paperwork, obtained consent from the participant, and then began to read aloud

the interview questions as written. The author probed individual responses as necessary, and

thanked the participant for participating prior the end of the phone call. All data obtained was stored digitally on the author's secure, password-protected computer. All hard copies were stored in a locked file cabinet in the author's office.

<p style="text-align:center">Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected</p>

Sensing notes that Swinton and Mowat define data analysis as "the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data that the researcher generates during the research process" (Swinton 57). The use of quantitative data interpretation can and likely should be added to this description. To bring "order, structure, and meaning" to the raw data that was the result of this research in a manner that allows for the opportunity to assess possible relationships was the intent of the methodology used for analyzing data.

Methodologically, the decision was made to pursue a "thick" description as opposed to a "thin" description (Geertz). This decision was made so as to more efficiently seek out the "often hidden meanings behind the words, gestures, actions, and practices observed" throughout the research project (Sensing 195). For the purpose of this research, documentary analysis consisted of the analysis of surveys collected from the senior appointed clergy of the Wichitas District, as well as the transcripts obtained from the randomly selected interviews.

The surveys and interview transcripts were analyzed using a multi-methods approach that included the intentional development of "themes, categories, and patterns" assessed through multiple readings of the data that included "literal, interpretive, and reflexive" readings of the data (Sensing 198; Moschella 172–73), as well as triangulation that involved the hiring of a statistician to fully analyze the relationships identified by the survey in particular. In this instance, an expert statistical analysis of the data was conducted by Dr. Janet Dean of Asbury University (Sensing 85). Care was taken to develop categories reflective of the analysis of the

surveys and interview transcripts that were "exhaustive," "mutually exclusive," "sensitizing," and "conceptually congruent," as Sensing identifies that Merriam recommends (Sensing 198; Merriam 183–84). This means that the author took care to make sure that there was a category available for all of the data assessed, that the categories were not such that data could fit into multiple categories, that the category names reflected the data that they contained, and that the categories were conceptually related to one another (Merriam 183–84).

The process of identifying themes present in the research followed Van Manen's practice of "1) Find the phrase that communicates the fundamental meaning of the text as a whole. 2) Select the statements that are particularly essential and revealing about the phenomenon being described. 3) Examine every sentence's contribution to the phenomenon being described" (Sensing 198; Van Manen 92–93). Though this methodology was primarily used to analyze interview transcripts, step 2 was also applied to analyzing surveys. Van Manen also indicates that individuals engage the world via some combination of four aspects, which are: "spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality" (Sensing 199; Van Manen 101). Sensing notes that meaning assessment is often "multi-layered and multi-dimensional" (Sensing 199). Consequently, these aspects by which individuals come to experience reality were critical multi-dimensional lenses through which to analyze the data.

An integral component of the process of analysis included the use of triangulation to test for "consistency" so as to determine degree to which there is slippage within the research (Sensing 200; Patton 248). The purpose of seeking to identify slippage within the study is defined by Sensing as "the search for rival explanations" which "help clarify the limits and meaning of the primary patterns" (Sensing 200).

Finally, the interpretive and reflexive readings of the interview transcripts in particular sought to identify the presence of "silence" within the data (Sensing 200). Sensing writes that Van Manen notes that "unspeakable silences" may be present for various reasons, but that such "omissions…may prove to be the most significant part of the narrative" (Sensing 200; Van Manen 112–14).

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

Sensing writes that Merriam notes that "Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static" (Sensing 219; Merriam 205). Consequently, "dependability and confirmability are provided through an audit trail that clearly describes the processes of collecting and analyzing data and provides the means by which readers may refer to the raw data" (Sensing 219; Merriam 177). For the purposes of this study, the research methodology and procedures have been clearly outlined, such that they can be audited and even replicated as necessary. There has been substantial step-by-step description of the process involved and methodologies used to gather data through research, analyze that data, and report the findings of the data. Additionally, the means to "refer to the raw data" is also clearly identified and included.

It is important to note that, as Merriam suggests, "the researcher in qualitative studies is the primary instrument" (Sensing 219; Merriam). This understanding is critical to determining the validity of a qualitative study, in so much as Patton suggests, "validity in quantitative research depends on careful instrument construction to ensure that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. The instrument must then be administered in an appropriate, standardized manner according to prescribed procedures…In qualitative inquiry, *the researcher*

is the instrument. The credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork" (Sensing 220; Patton 49–54).

Validity was therefore achieved primarily through the use of triangulation and "multi-methods" research and analysis, "relative confirmation" obtained through "member checking" of the interview transcripts, the presentation of "alternative themes" discovered during analysis, "peer debriefing," seeking the perspective of one who is not immediately involved in the study, and finally the clarification of the researcher's own bias as indicated in chapter 1 (Sensing 221–223).

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will present the evidence that was collected as a result of the research that was conducted for this project. It will begin with an examination of those who participated in the research project broken down according to varying demographic categories. The evidence pertaining to each of the three research questions will then be presented. This chapter will focus only on a presentation and description of the evidence that was collected. It will conclude with a summary of the major findings of the evidence collected throughout the research project.

Participants

This study received 22 responses to the semi-structured survey from senior appointed clergy within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. There were 5 senior appointed clergy within the Wichitas District of the OKUMC who additionally agreed to participate in semi-structured telephone interviews, all of which were recorded with the consent of those who participated.

Two-thirds of participating senior appointed clergy were male (14), one-third were female (7), and one person did not respond to the question on gender.

The following charts and tables offer a demographic breakdown of the respondents to the survey as well as a demographic breakdown of the congregations represented by the participants. The data reporting clergy participation by gender is shown in Figure 4.1. The data for congregational average age is represented in Figure 4.2. The data for congregational average income levels is reported in Figure 4.3. The data for congregational geographic distinction is reported in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.1: Participation by Gender
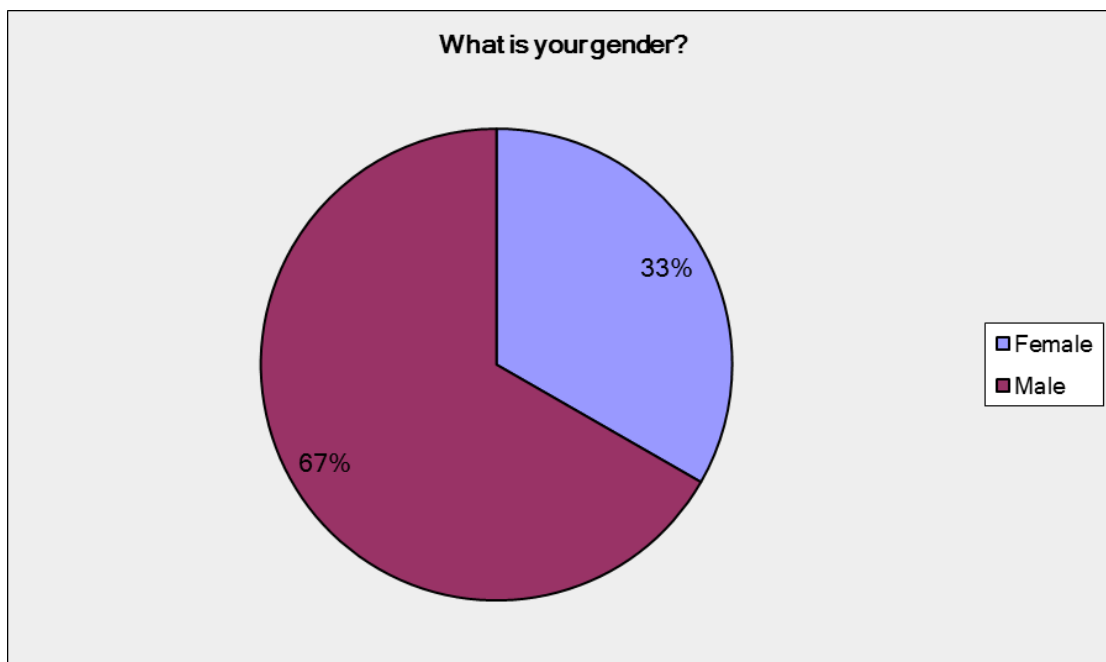
Figure 4.2: Congregational Average Age Range

What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 or older

0% 0%
9%
27%
18%
32%
14%
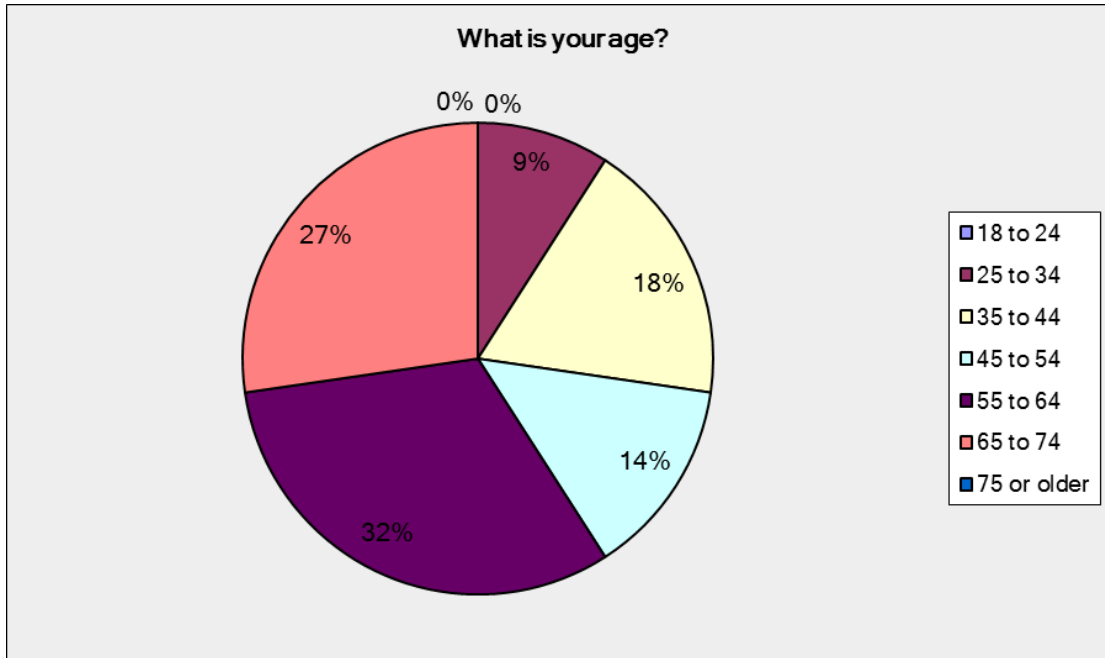
Figure 4.3: Congregational Average Income Levels

What is the approximate average annual household income within your congregation?

- $0-$24,999
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000-$124,999
- $125,000-$149,999
- $150,000-$174,999
- $175,000-$199,999
- $200,000 and up

0% 0%
5%
5%
5%
6%
0%
37%
42%
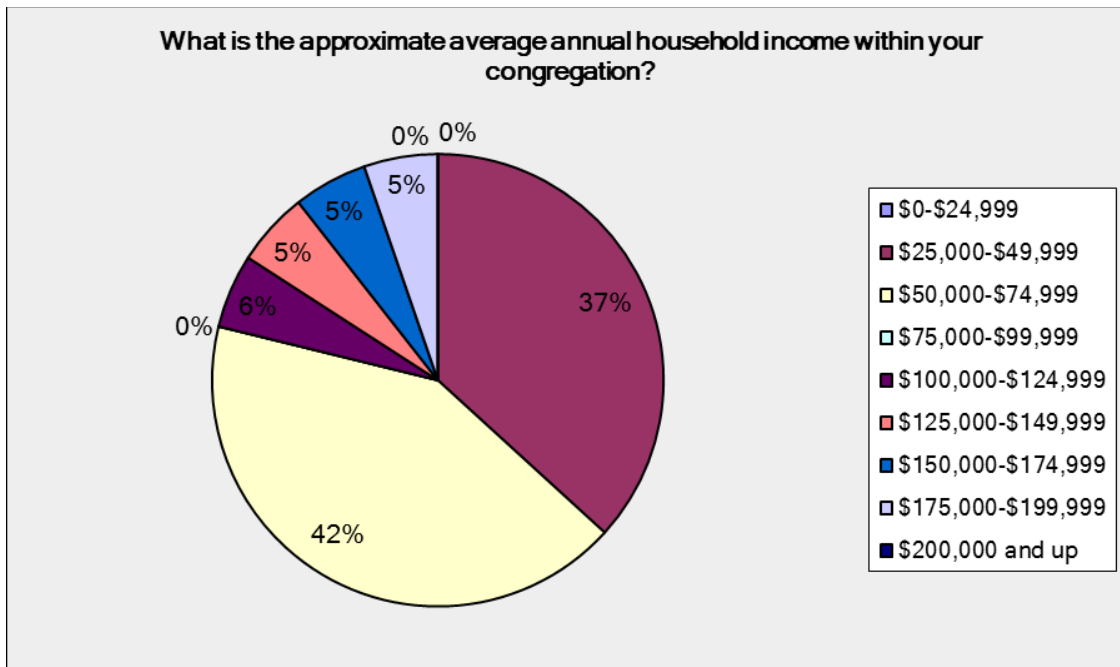
Figure 4.4: Congregational Geographic Distinction

What is the geographic distinction of your congregation?
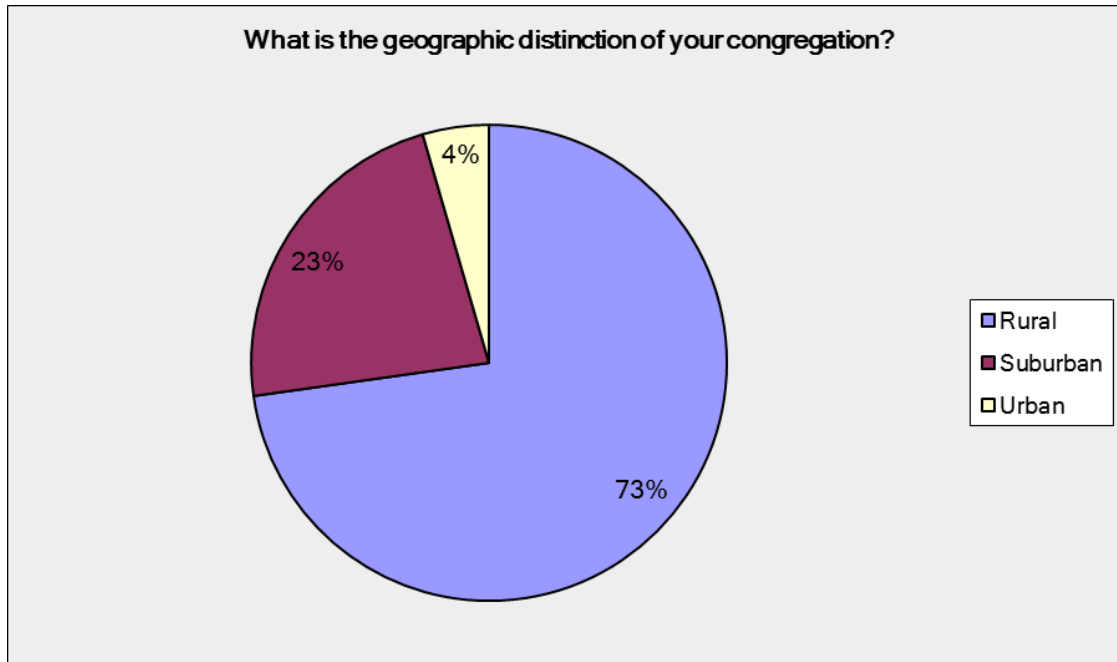
Research Question 1: Description of Evidence

This question sought to obtain data relative to determining what opportunities for

instruction in Christian spiritual growth are available within the identified congregations. These

opportunities for instruction (per the survey) include and are limited to: Sunday school classes,

bible studies, retreats, and sermon series. This question was answered using questions 8-15 of the

survey and questionnaire in Appendix B. This survey was sent electronically to all of the senior

appointed clergy throughout the Wichitas district of the OKUMC, 22 of whom chose to

participate. The data for opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth offered in a

24-month period is presented in Figure 4.5 below.

Figure 4.5: Opportunities for Instruction in Christian Spiritual Growth in Past 24 Months

Have opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth been offered within your congregation in the past 24 months?

5%

□ Yes
■ No

95%
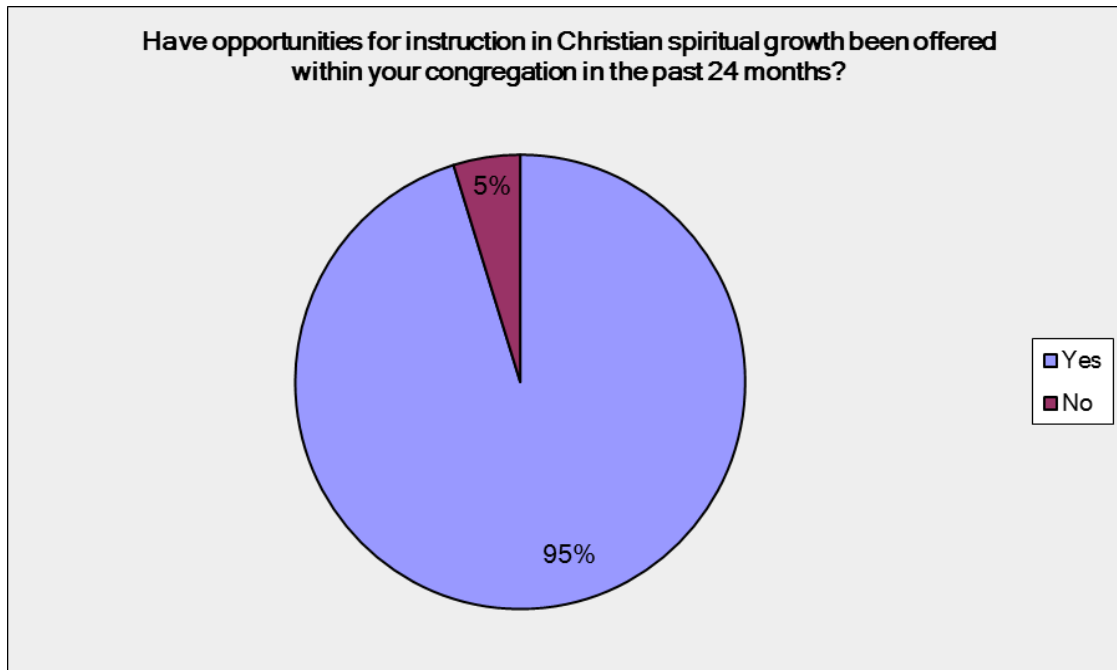
The data for number of opportunities in Christian spiritual growth offered in a 24-month period is presented in Figure 4.6. The data for the number of people who participated in opportunities for spiritual growth offered over a 24-month period is presented in Figure 4.7. The data for overall familiarity with Christian spiritual growth is presented in Figure 4.8. The data for congregational familiarity with The Three Ways is presented in Figure 4.9. The data reporting congregational familiarity with the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* is presented in Figure 4.10. The data for congregational enthusiasm for instruction in spiritual growth is reported in Figure 4.11. The data identifying the spiritual disciplines practiced within the congregation is presented in Table 4.1.

Figure 4.6: Number of Opportunities for Instruction in Christian Spiritual Growth in Past 24 Months

If you answered "yes" to question (10), how many opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth have been offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

50%
30%
20%

Legend:
1-3
4-6
7 or more
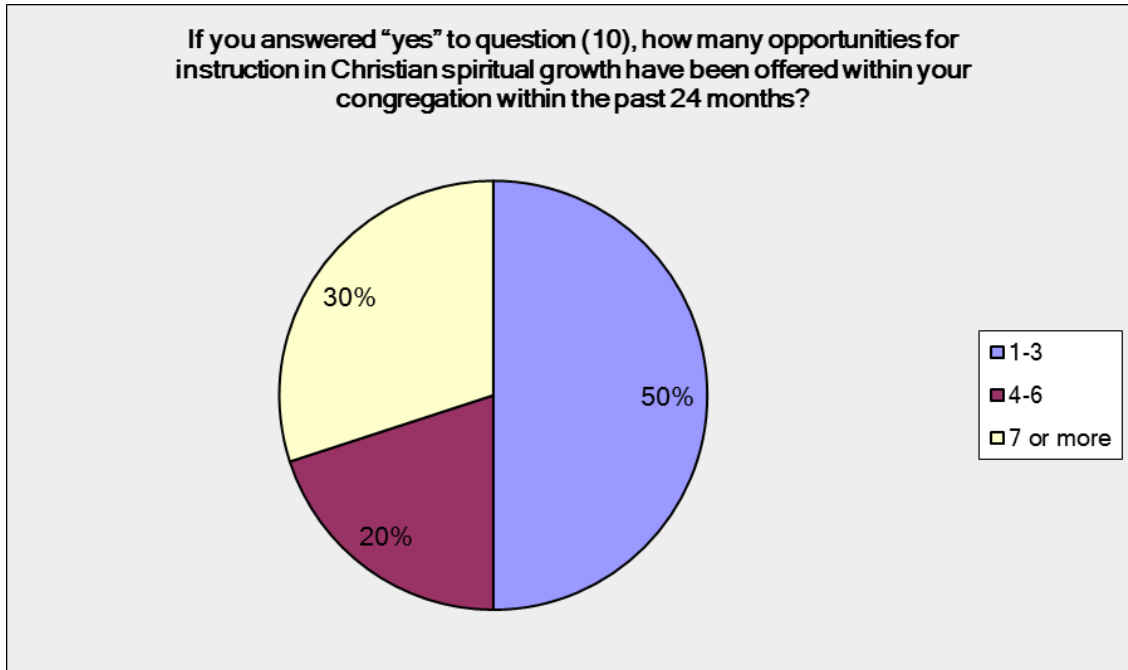
Figure 4.7: Number of People Participating in Christian Spiritual Growth in Past 24 Months

How many people have participated in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

10%
5%
15%
15%
10%
45%

Legend:
None (0)
1-4
5-9
10-14
15-20
More than 20
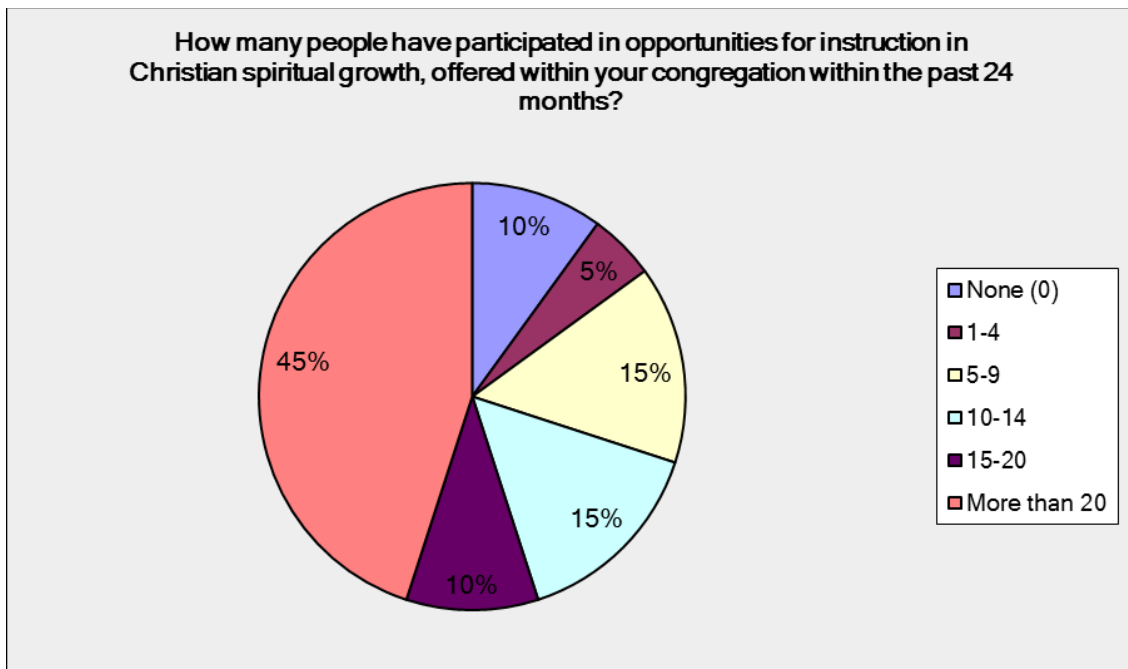
Figure 4.8: Congregational Knowledge of Christian Spiritual Growth

How would you rank you congregation's overall knowledge of Christian spiritual growth?

- Much Below Average — 9%
- Below Average — 19%
- Average — 43%
- Above Average — 24%
- Much Above Average — 5%
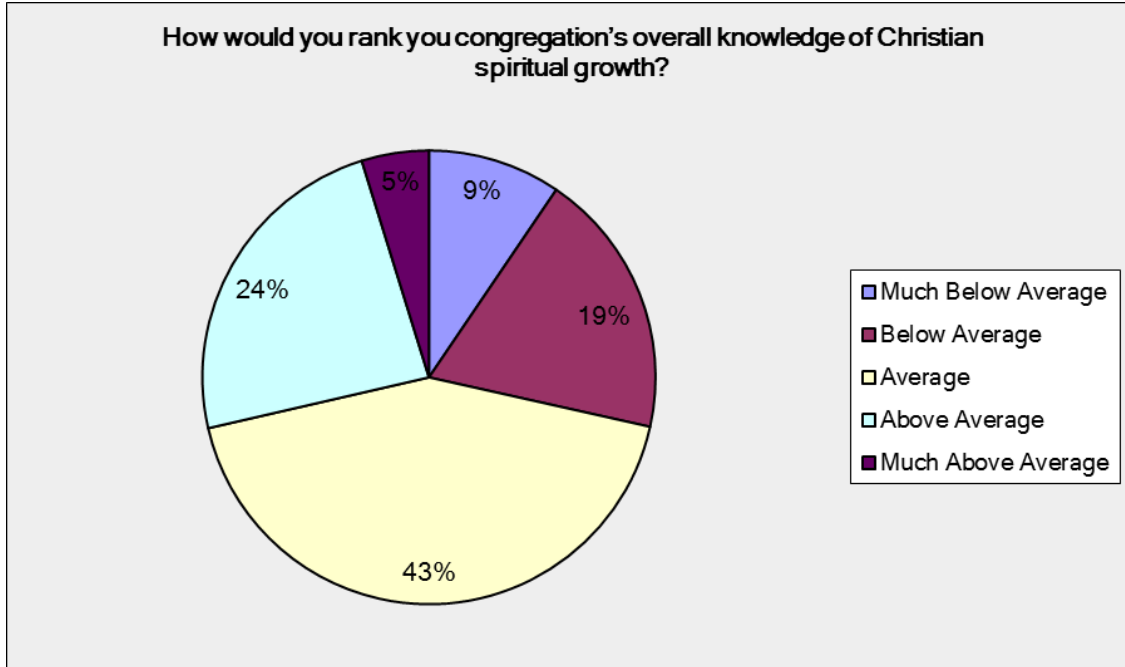
Figure 4.9: Congregational Knowledge of The Three Ways

How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of The Three Ways (Purgation, Illumination, Union)?

- Much Below Average — 28%
- Below Average — 48%
- Average — 19%
- Above Average — 5%
- Much Above Average — 0%
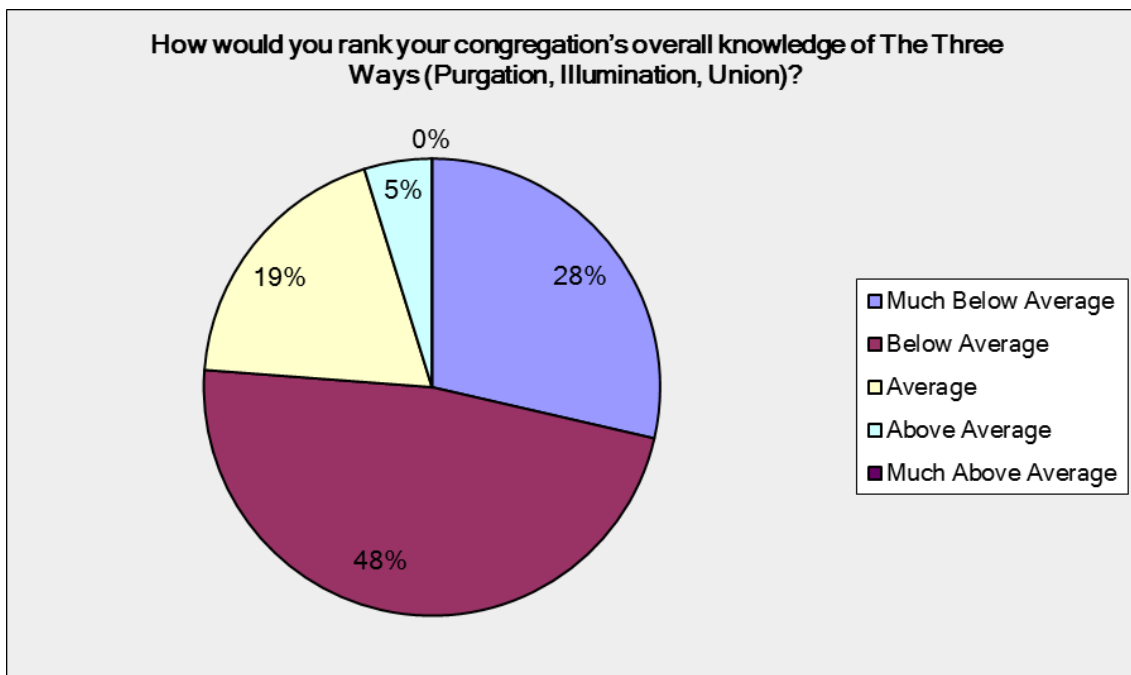
Figure 4.10: Congregational Knowledge of The Wesleyan *ordo salutis*

How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of the Wesleyan ordo salutis (Justification, Sanctification, Glorification)?

- Much Below Average
- Below Average
- Average
- Above Average
- Much Above Average

5%, 9%, 10%, 33%, 43%
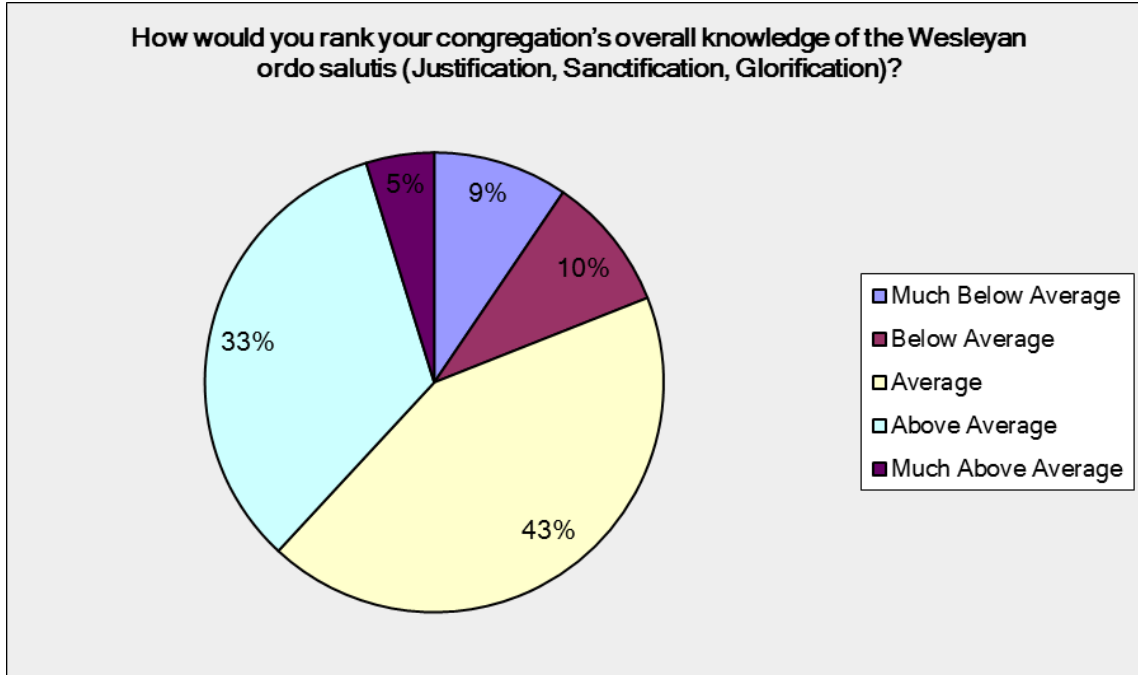
Figure 4.11: Congregational Enthusiasm for Instruction in Spiritual Growth

How would you rate your congregation's enthusiasm for instruction in Christian spiritual growth?

- Not Enthusiastic
- Somewhat Enthusiastic
- Very Enthusiastic

20%, 20%, 60%
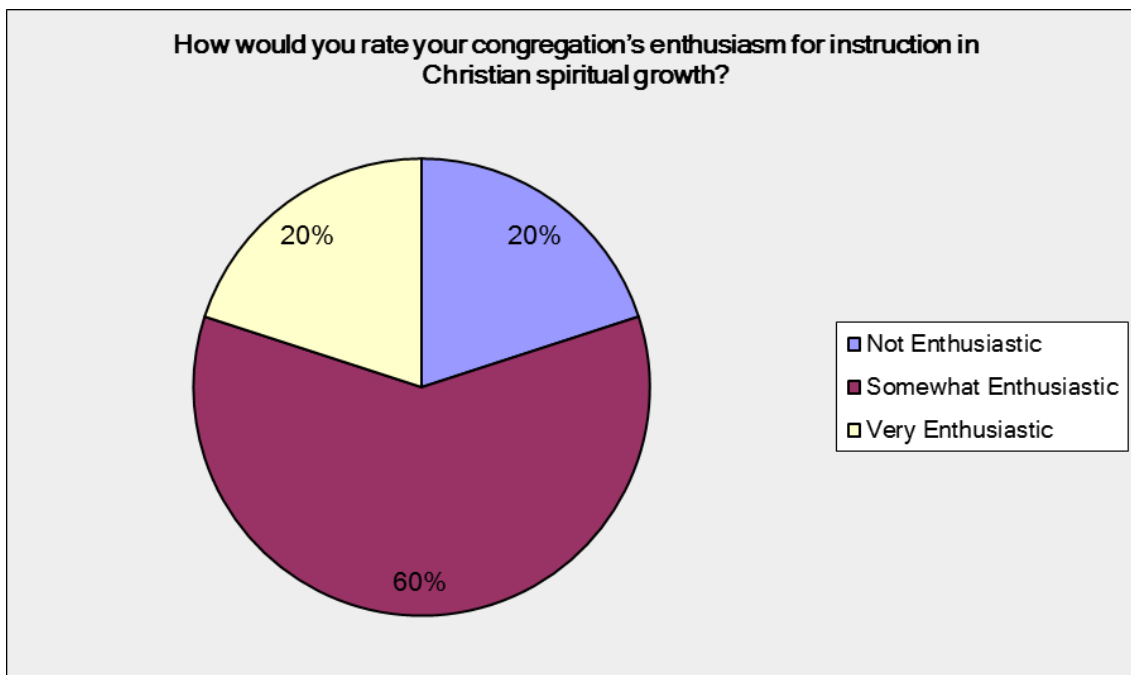
Table 4.1: Spiritual Disciplines Practiced within the Congregation

Which of the following spiritual disciplines (works of piety) are regularly practiced as organized practices within the life of your congregation?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Private Prayer	90.5%	19
Reading the Bible	90.5%	19
Devotional Reading	66.7%	14
Bible Study (offered by the church)	90.5%	19
Journal Writing	4.8%	1
Acts of Charity	81.0%	17
Tithing	71.4%	15
Group Prayer	47.6%	10
Public Worship	100.0%	21
Christian Meditation	14.3%	3
Contemplation	14.3%	3
Answered question		**21**
Skipped question		**1**

Participants reported a variety of levels of participation in spiritual disciplines. Journal Writing, Christian Mediation, and Contemplation were the disciplines with the lowest reported levels of participation. Private Prayer, Reading the Bible, Bible Study, and Public Worship rated as the spiritual disciplines with the highest levels of reported congregational participation.

It is also relevant to assess the data obtained in RQ1 according to the demographic

distinctions of the congregations and participants. Therefore, the next series of charts will assess

the answer to these questions according to the varying demographic data that was collected about

the participant clergy and congregations. The first data set will address the difference in

outcomes between congregations of varying average age ranges. This data is shown in Figures

4.12 through 4.17. The first figure shows the data relative to opportunities for instruction in

spiritual growth in Figure 4.12. This will be followed by data relative to the number of

opportunities in spiritual growth offered in a 24-month period in Figure 4.13, as well as the

number of people participating in opportunities for instruction in spiritual growth in Figure 4.14.

The remaining data sets will show congregational levels of familiarity with spiritual growth

(Figure 4.15), The Three Ways, (Figure 4.16), and Wesley's *ordo salutis* (Figure 4.17).

**Figure 4.12: Opportunities for Instruction in Christian Spiritual Growth by Age in Past 24
Months**

Figure 4.13: Number of Opportunities for Instruction in Christian Spiritual Growth by

Age in Past 24 Months

Figure 4.14: Number of People Participating in Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual

Growth by Age in Past 24 Months

Figure 4.15: Congregational Knowledge of Spiritual Growth by Age

Figure 4.16: Congregational Knowledge of The Three Ways by Age

Figure 4.17: Congregational Knowledge of the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* by Age
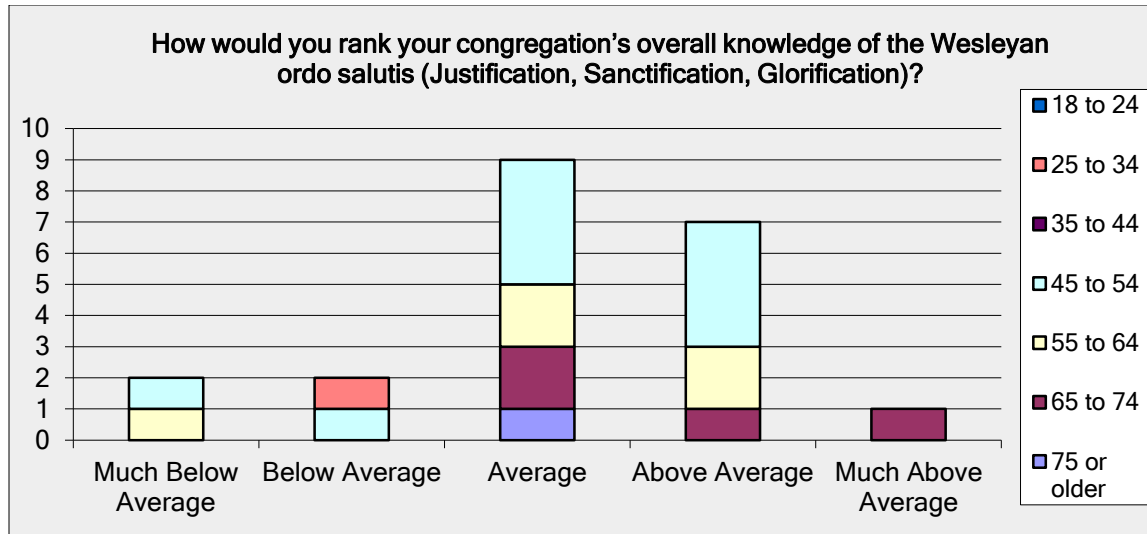
The next data series will address how congregations with varying levels of average household income were likely to respond to the RQ1 questions. This data is reported in Figure 4.18 through Figure 4.23. The first data set, which reported opportunities for instruction in spiritual growth offered over a 24-month period by average congregational income level, is reported in Figure 4.18. This is followed by data reporting the number of opportunities for instruction offered (Figure 4.19), and rates of participation in spiritual growth opportunities (Figure 4.20). Figures 4.21 through 4.23 show congregational levels of familiarity with spiritual growth, The Three Ways, and Wesley's *ordo salutis* respectively.
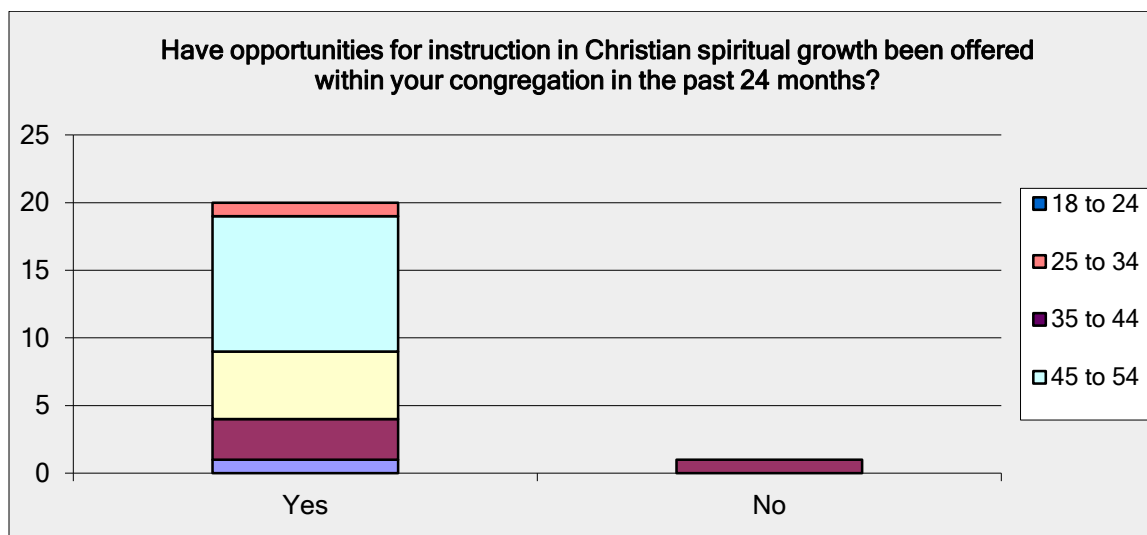
Figure 4.18: Opportunities for Instruction in Christian Spiritual Growth by Average Income in Past 24 Months
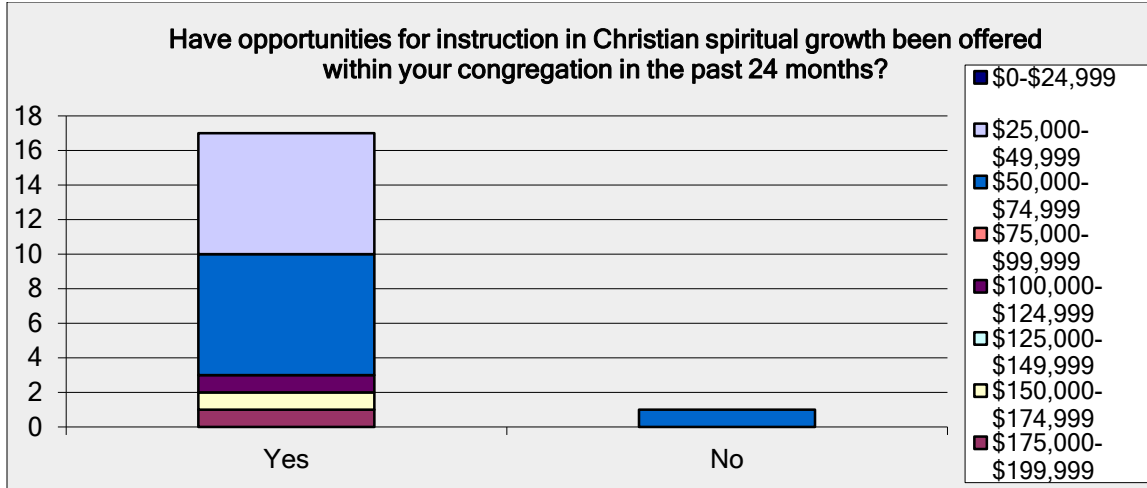
Figure 4.19: Number of Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual Growth offered by

Average Income in Past 24 Months
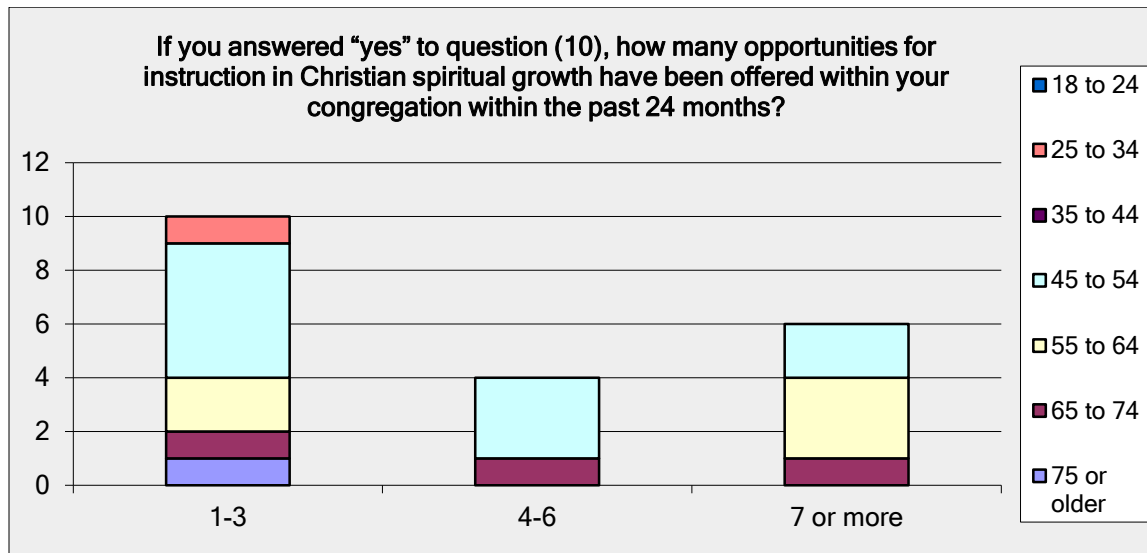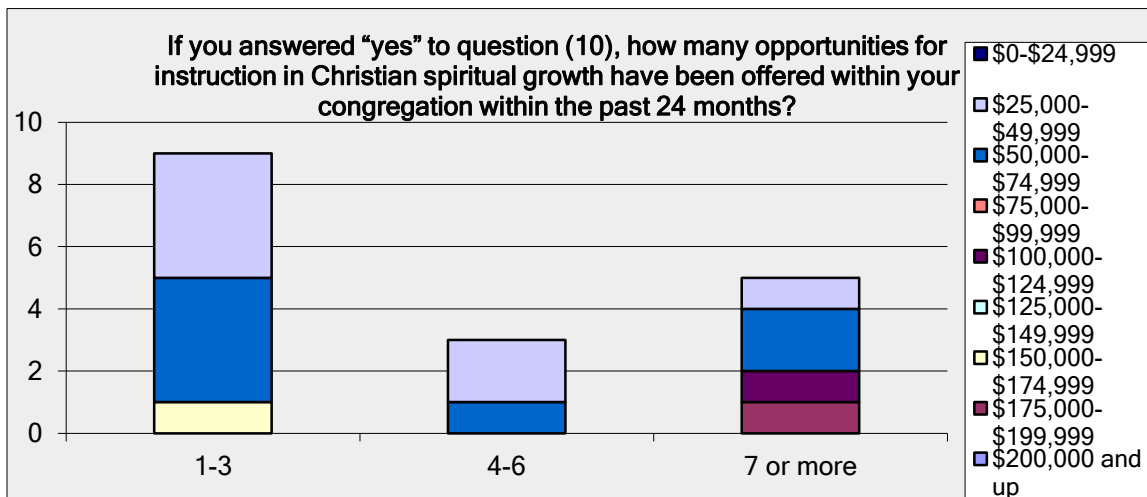

Figure 4.20: Number of People Participating in Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual

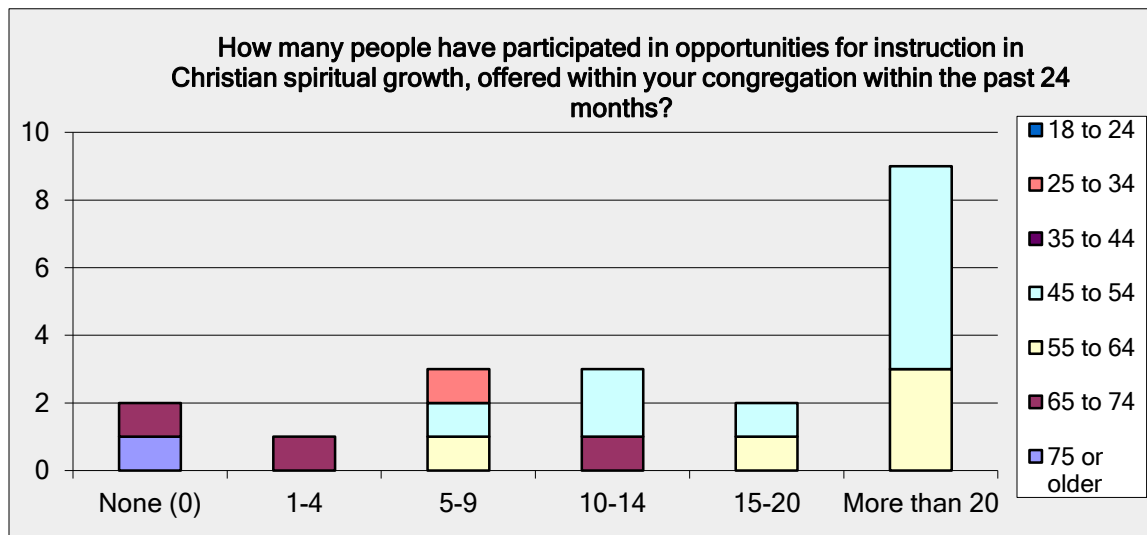**Growth by Average Income in Past 24 Months**
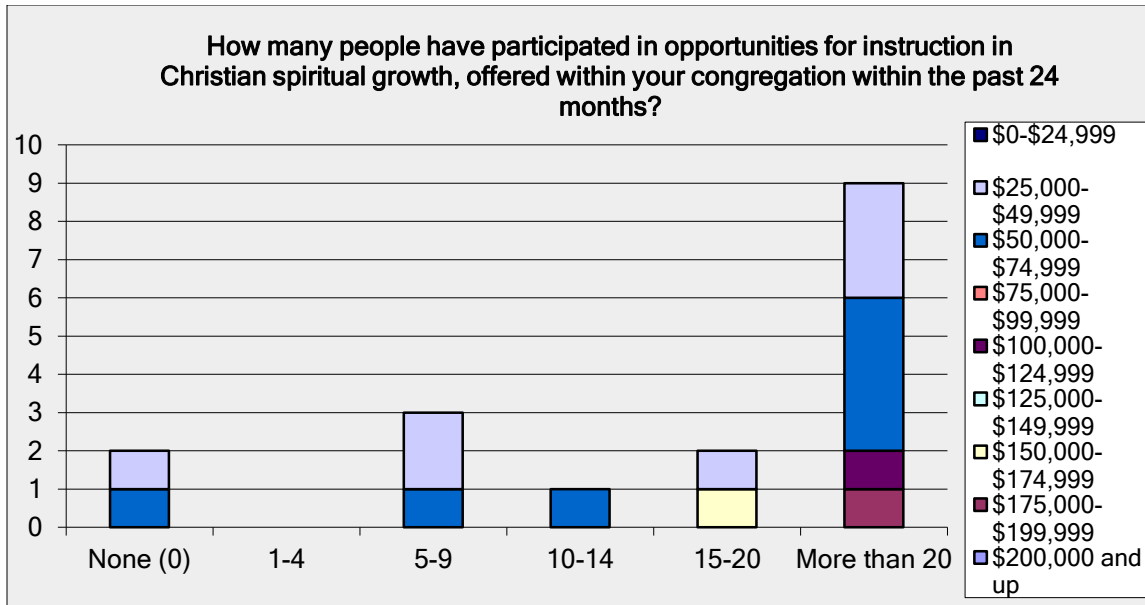
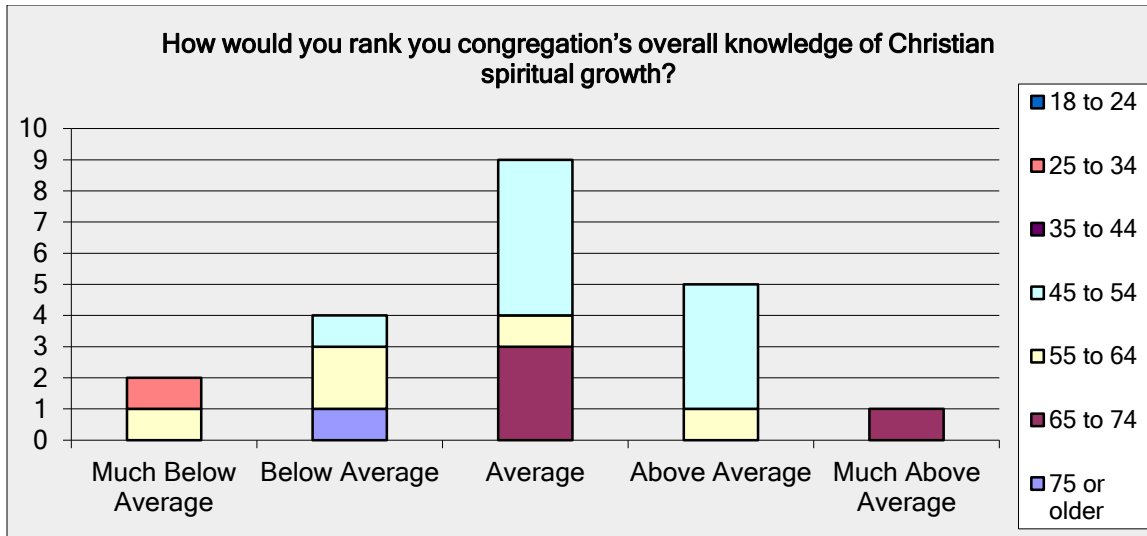**Figure 4.21: Congregational Knowledge of Spiritual Growth by Average Income**
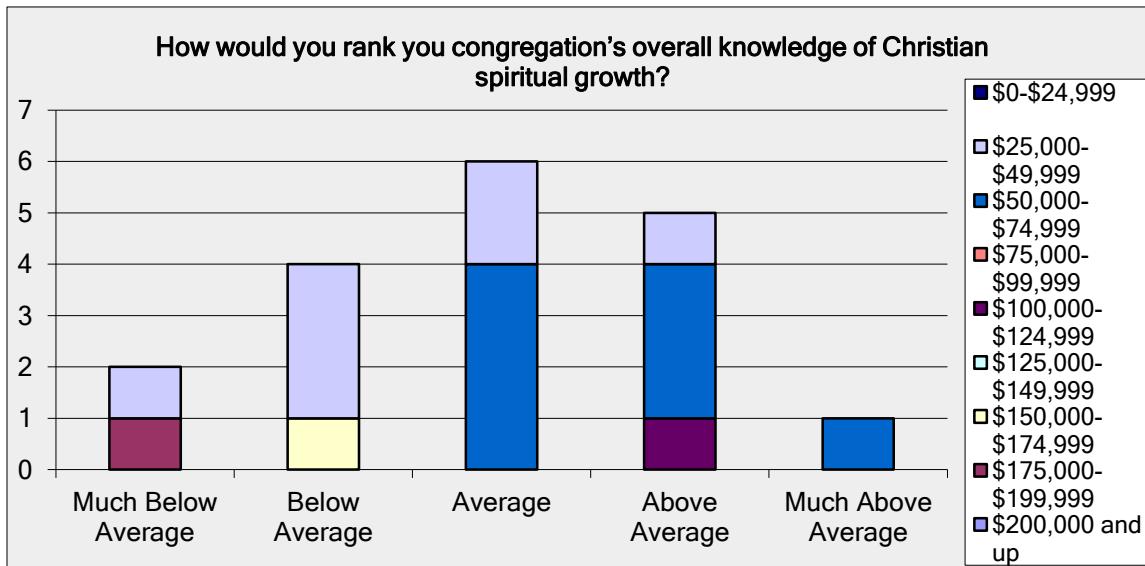
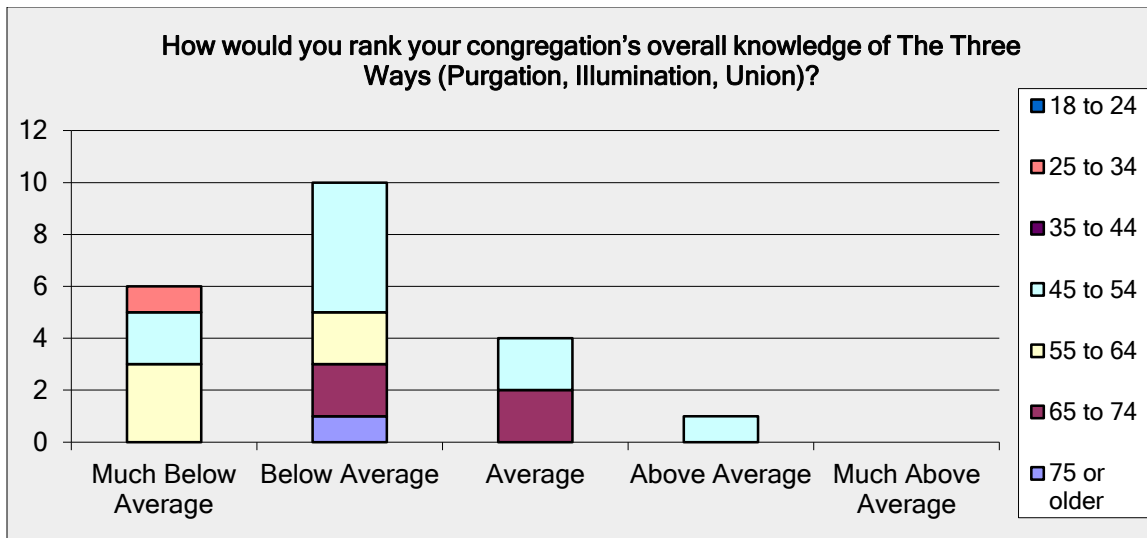**Figure 4.22: Congregational Knowledge of The Three Ways by Average Income**

How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of The Three Ways (Purgation, Illumination, Union)?
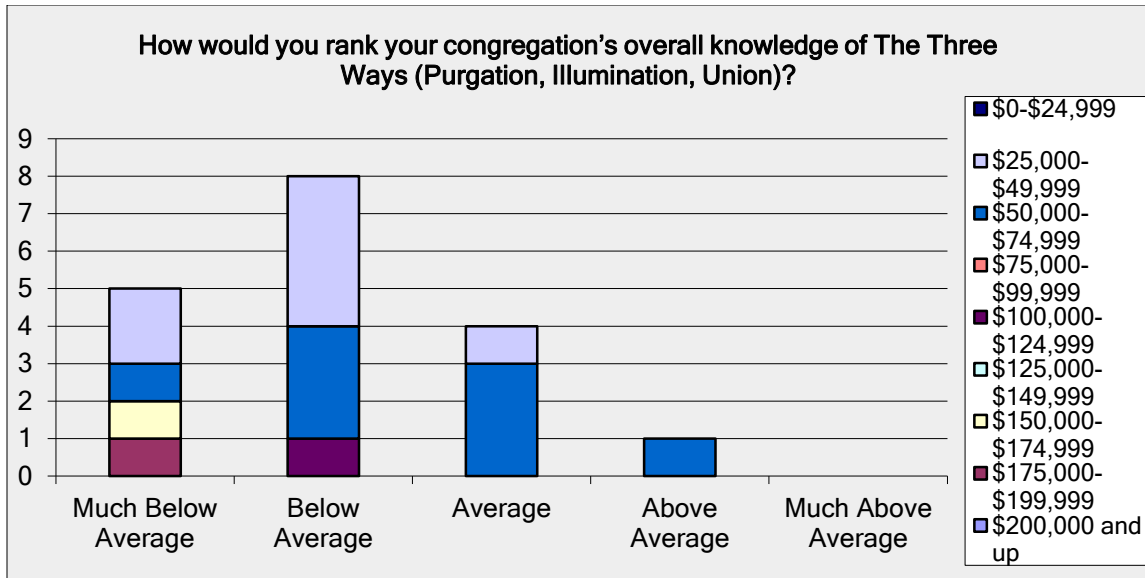
Figure 4.23: Congregational Knowledge of the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* by Average Income

How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* (Justification, Sanctification, Glorification)?
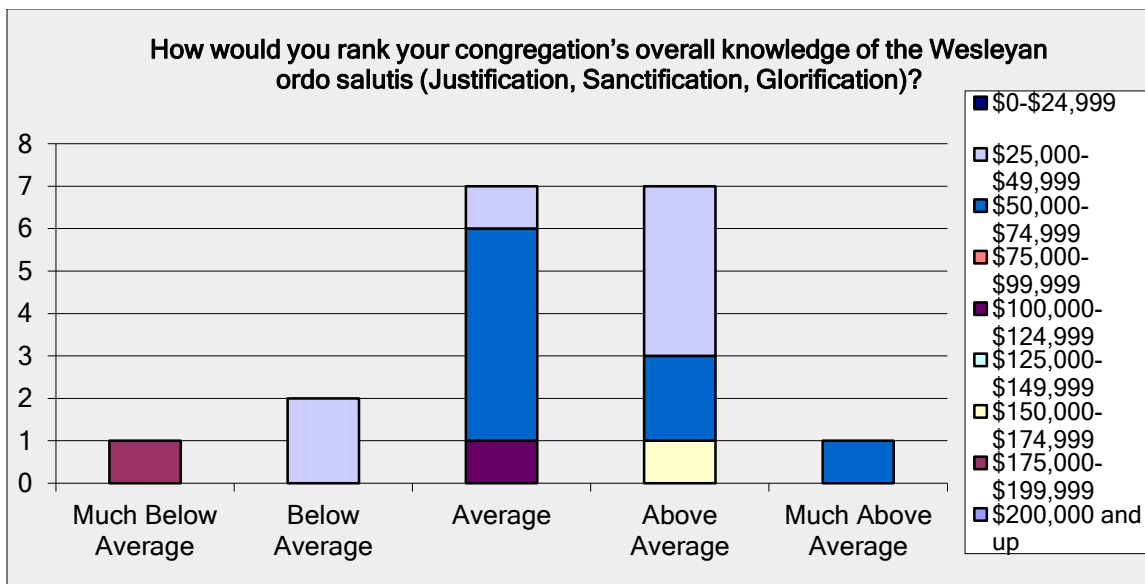
The next set of demographic data will focus on geographic distinctions as reported in Figures 4.24 through 4.29. The first data set, reporting opportunities for instruction in spiritual growth offered over a 24-month period by congregational geographic distinction, is reported in Figure 4.24. This is followed by Figures 4.25 and 4.26, which report the number of available opportunities for instruction in spiritual growth and rates of participation in the same. The final

three data sets (Figures 4.27 through 4.29) will report congregational levels of familiarity with

spiritual growth, The Three Ways, and Wesley's *ordo salutis.*

Figure 4.24: Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual Growth Offered by Geographic

Area
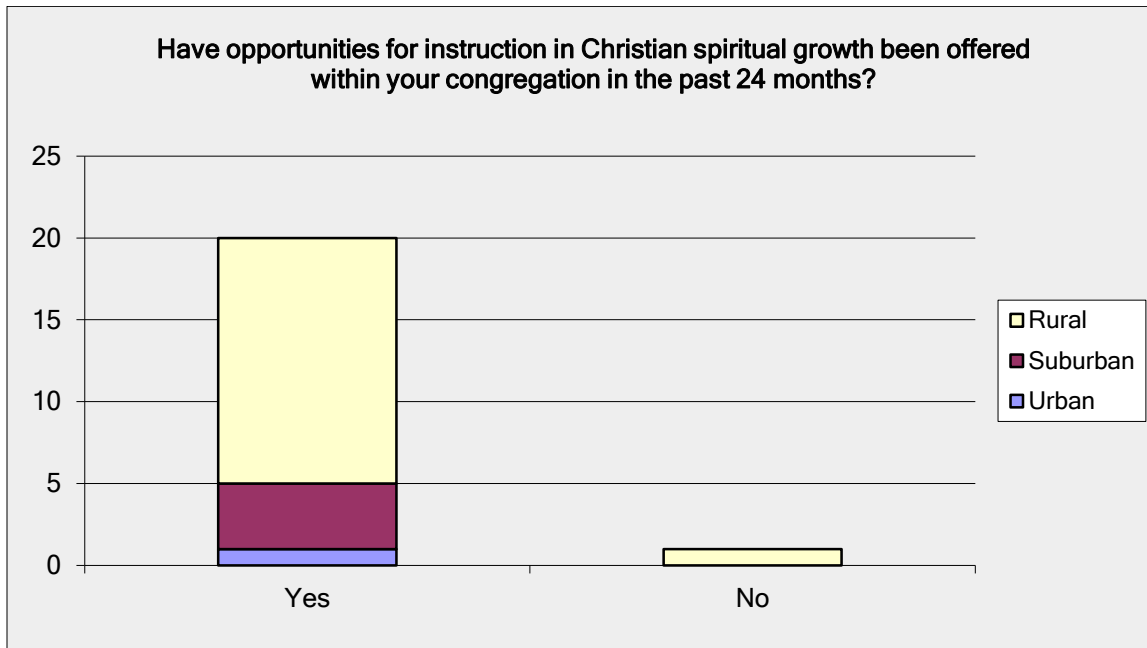
Figure 4.25: Number of Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual Growth Offered in Past

24 Months by Geographic Area
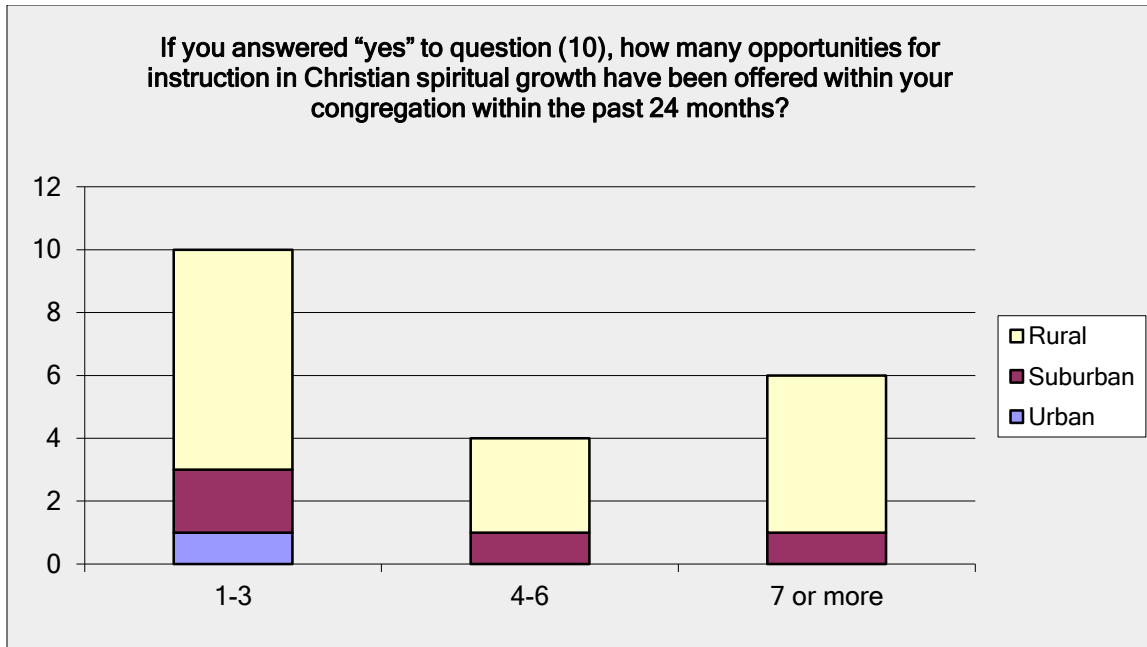
Figure 4.26: Number of People Participating in Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual Growth in Past 24 Months by Geographic Area
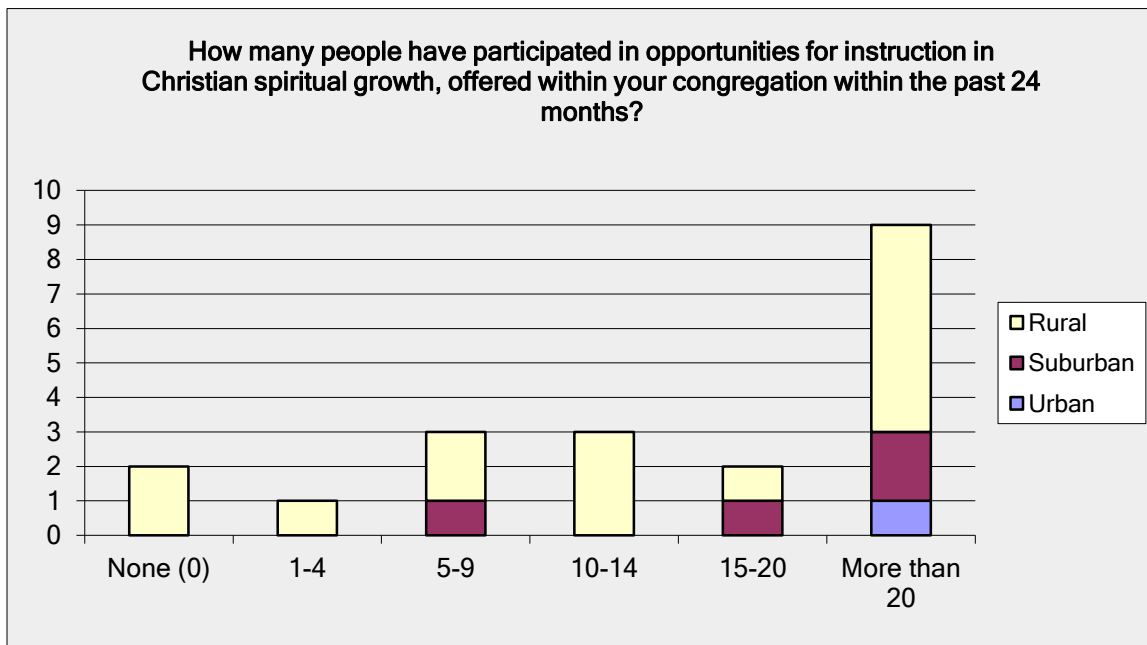
Figure 4.27: Congregational Knowledge of Spiritual Growth by Geographic Area
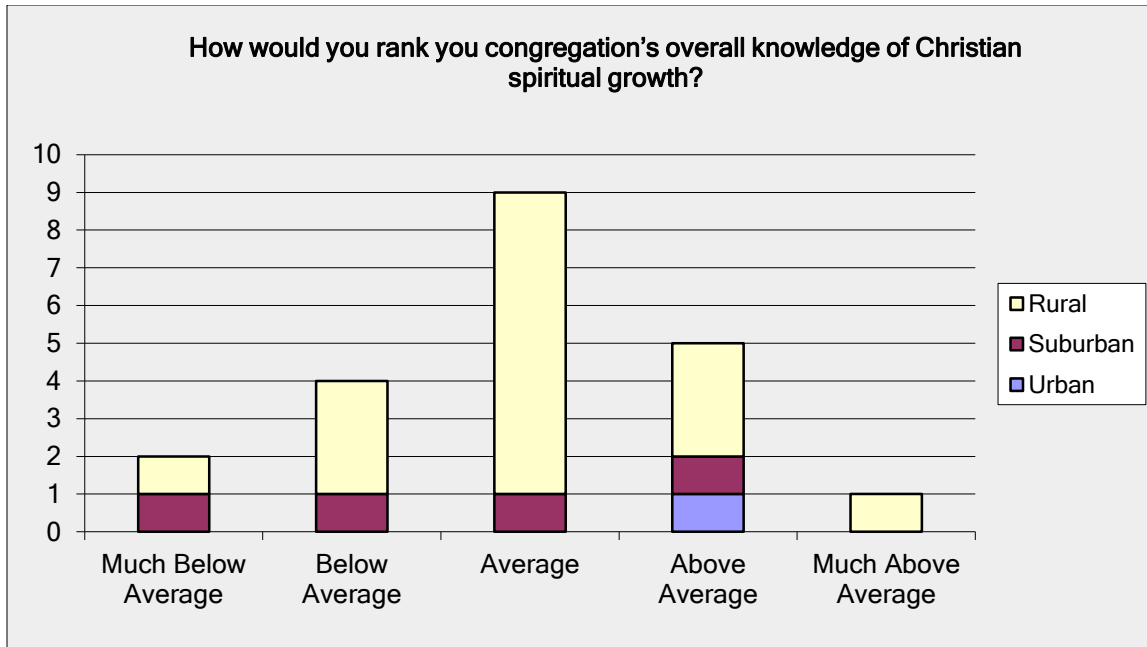
Figure 4.28: Congregational Knowledge of The Three Ways by Geographic Area
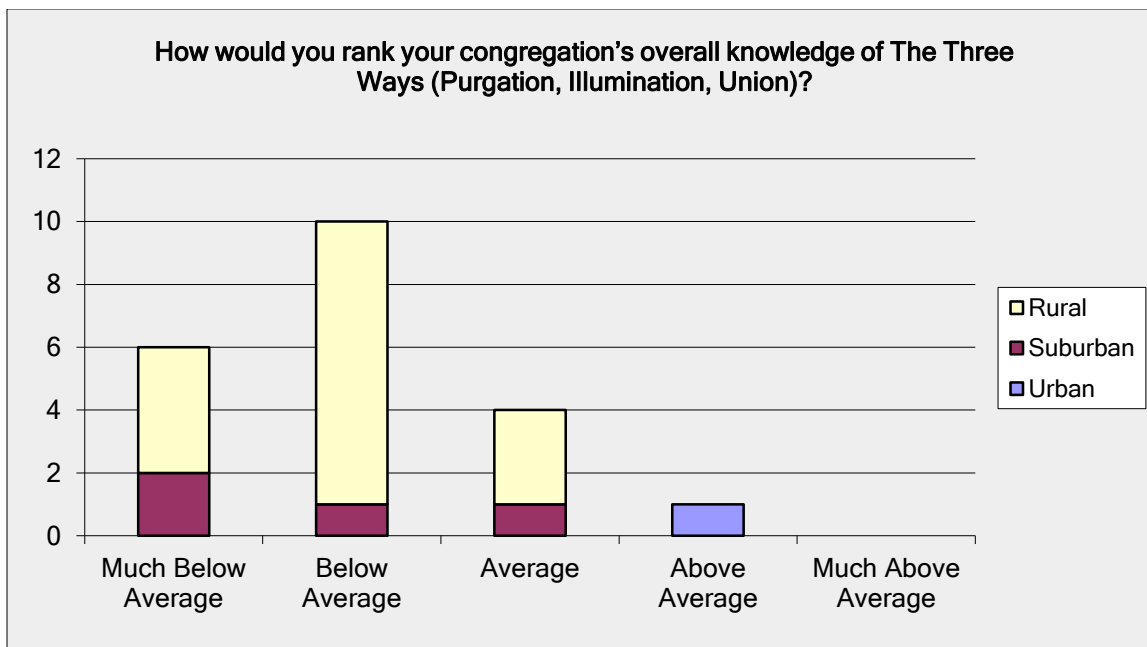
Figure 4.29: Congregational Knowledge of the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* by Geographic Area

How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of the Wesleyan ordo salutis (Justification, Sanctification, Glorification)?
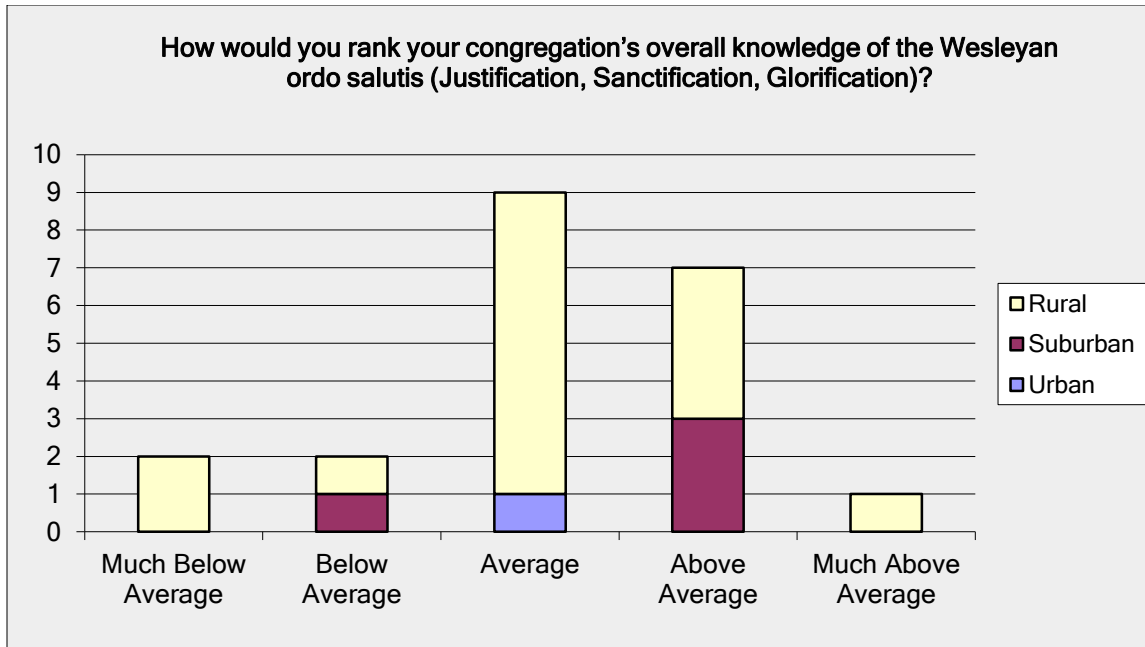
Research Question 2: Description of Evidence

This question sought to obtain data relative to determining the level of missional involvement within the identified congregations. Missional involvement (according to the survey) includes and is limited to: local, national, and international mission trips scheduled through an outside missional organization or planned entirely by the local congregation as well as local outreach opportunities that have as their primary intent the goal of providing any kind of service to or building relationships with individuals and communities that are not currently included in the membership of the church (Roxburgh 159–160). This question was answered using questions 16-22 of the survey and questionnaire in Appendix B. This survey and questionnaire was sent electronically to all of the senior appointed clergy throughout the Wichitas district of the OKUMC. Of the 22 congregations that participated in the study, 21 reported offering opportunities for missional service within the past 12 months and one participant opted not to answer the question. Of those who participated, 57.1% reported offering

1-3 opportunities within the past 24 months, 19% reported offering 4-6 opportunities within the

past 24 months, and 23.8% reported offering 7 or more opportunities within the past 24 months.

The data reporting levels of missional involvement is offered in Figures 4.30 through

4.34. The data reporting opportunities for missional involvement offered in the past 24 months is

presented in Figure 4.30. Figure 4.31 reports congregational rates of participation in missional

involvement, while Figure 4.32 reports congregational levels of familiarity with missional

practices. Figure 4.33 reports data relative to congregational levels of interest in participating in

missional involvement, and congregational interest in building relationships with people and

communities outside of the local congregation is reported in Figure 4.34.

Figure 4.30: Opportunities for Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months
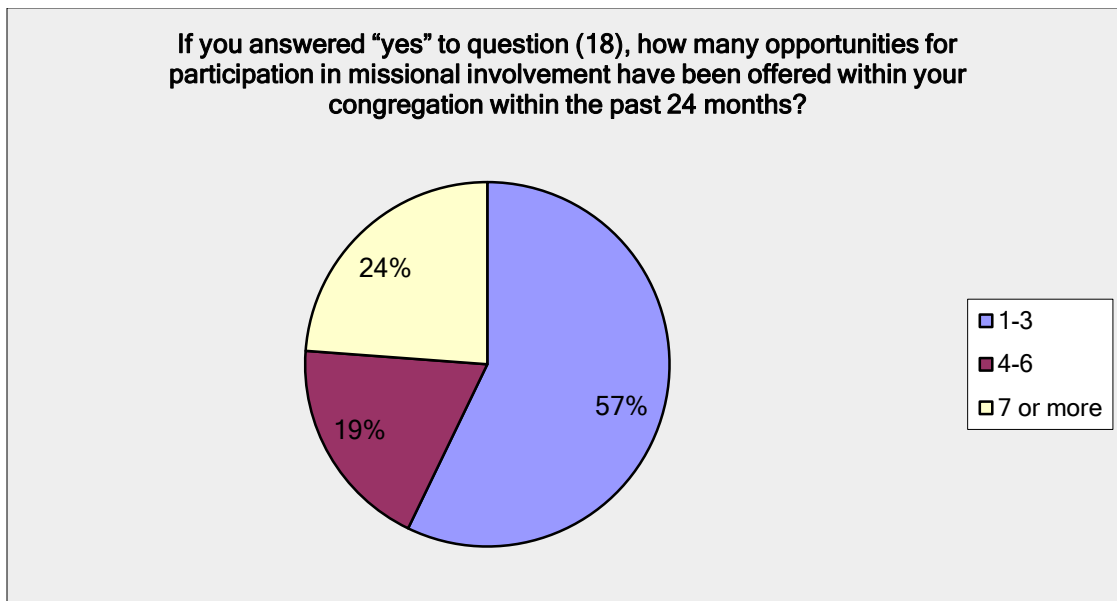
Figure 4.31: Number of People Participating in Opportunities for Missional Involvement in

Past 24 Months

How many people have participated in opportunities for missional involvement, offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

0%

29%

29%

9%

19%

14%

- None (0)
- 1-4
- 5-9
- 10-14
- 15-20
- More than 20
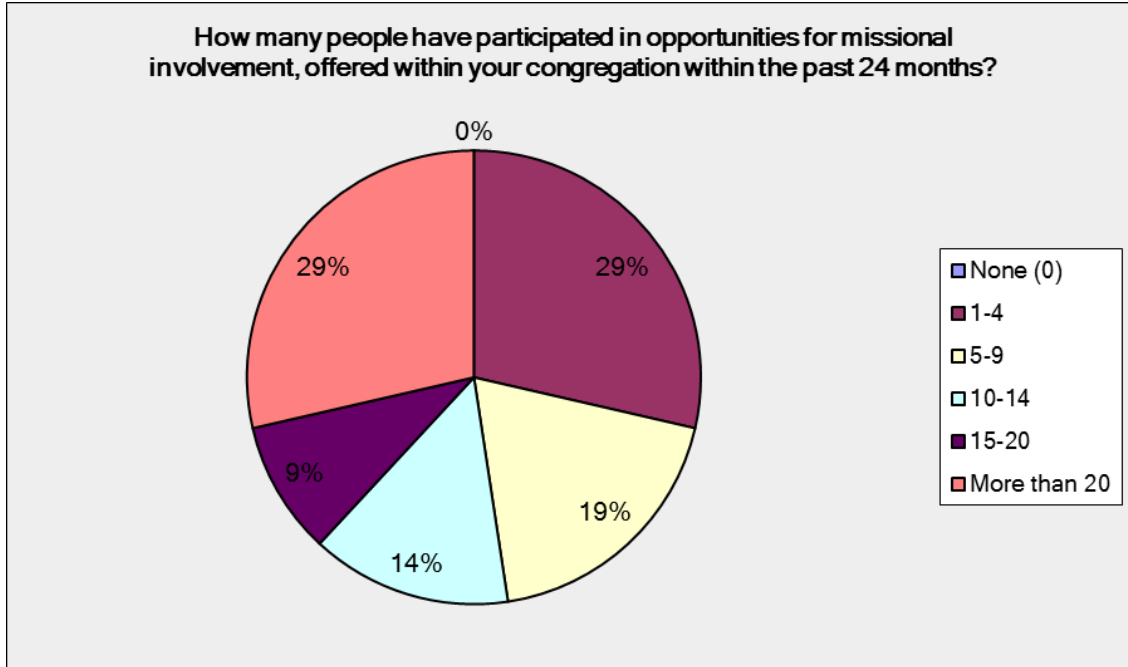
Figure 4.32: Congregational Knowledge of Missional Practices

How would you rank you congregation's overall knowledge of missional practices?

0%

10%

9%

33%

48%

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not so familiar
- Not at all familiar

Figure 4.33: Congregational Interest in Missional Opportunities

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in seeking missional opportunities?

15%

30%

55%

- Not Interested
- Somewhat Interested
- Very Interested
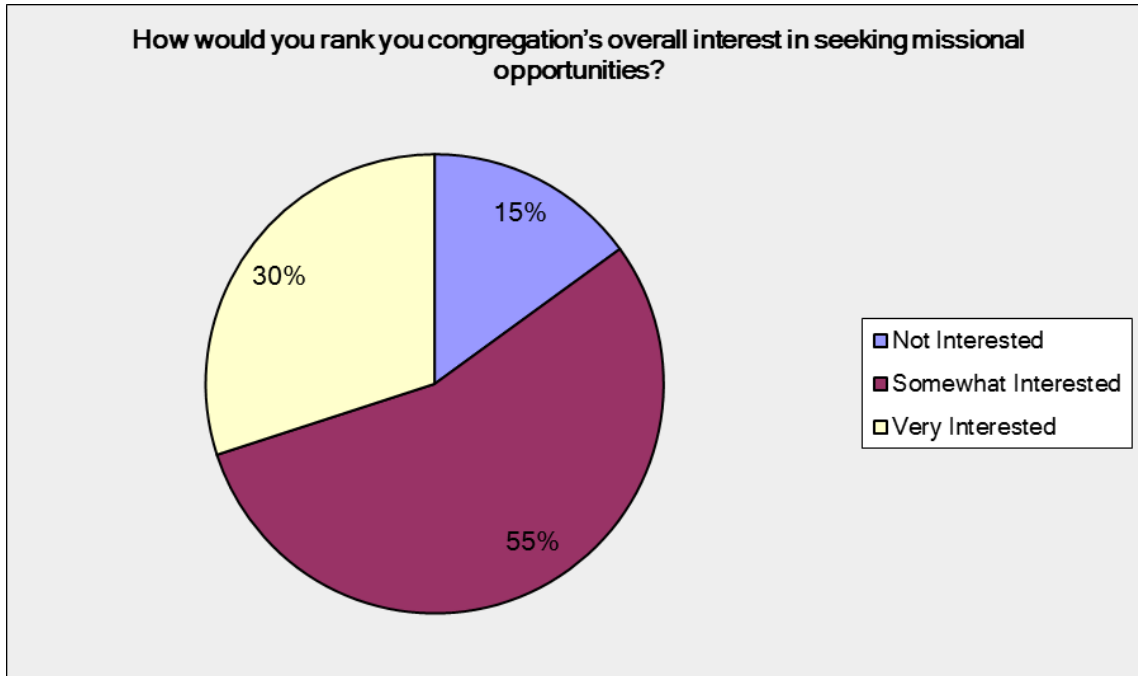
Figure 4.34: Congregational Interest in Building Relationships with People/ Communities outside of Church Membership

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in building relationships with people/communities outside of your church membership?

0%

19%

81%

- Not Interested
- Somewhat Interested
- Very Interested
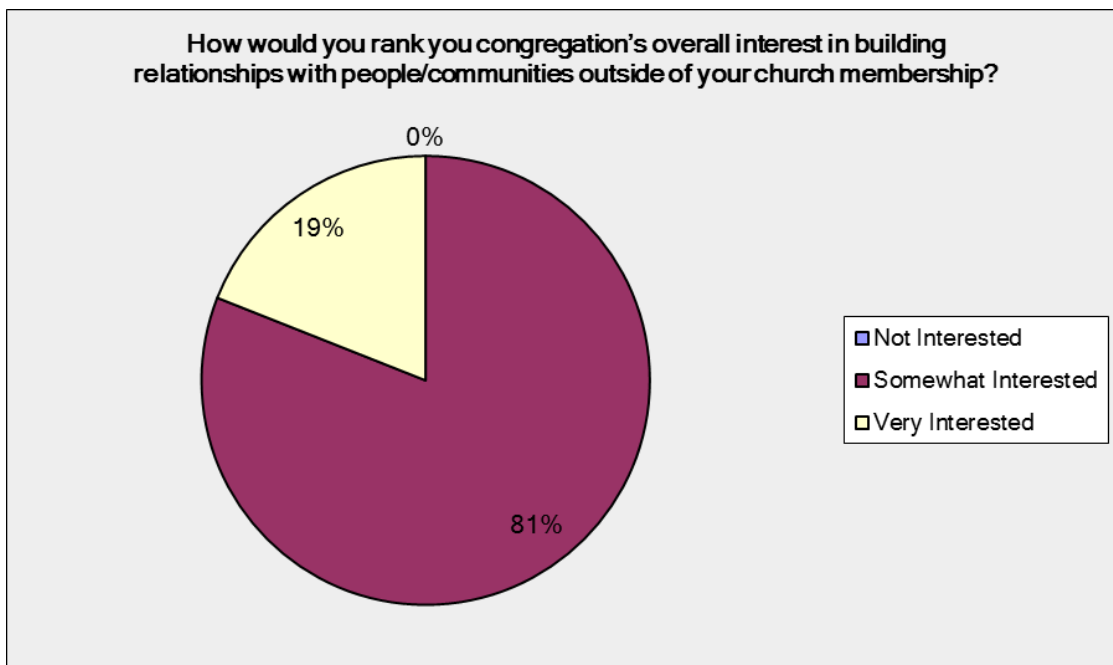
It is relevant to assess the data obtained in RQ2 according to the demographic distinctions of the congregations and participants. Therefore, the next series of charts will assess the answer to these questions according to the varying demographic data that was collected about the participant clergy and congregations. The first data set will address the difference in outcomes between congregations of varying average age ranges. The data reporting opportunities for participation in missional involvement in the past 12 months by average congregational age is presented in Figure 4.35, while the data reporting the number of opportunities for participation in missional involvement offered in the past 22 months by average congregational age is presented in Figure 4.36. The data reporting the number of people participating in opportunities for missional involvement in the past 24 months by average congregational age is presented in Figure 4.37. The data reporting congregational familiarity with missional practices by average congregational age is presented in Figure 4.38. The data reporting congregational interest in seeking missional opportunities by average congregational age is presented in Figure 4.39. The data reporting congregational interest in building relationships with communities outside of church membership by average congregational age is presented in Figure 4.40.

Figure 4.35: Opportunities for Participation in Missional Involvement in Past 12 Months by Average Age

Figure 4.36: Opportunities for Participation in Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months by Average Age
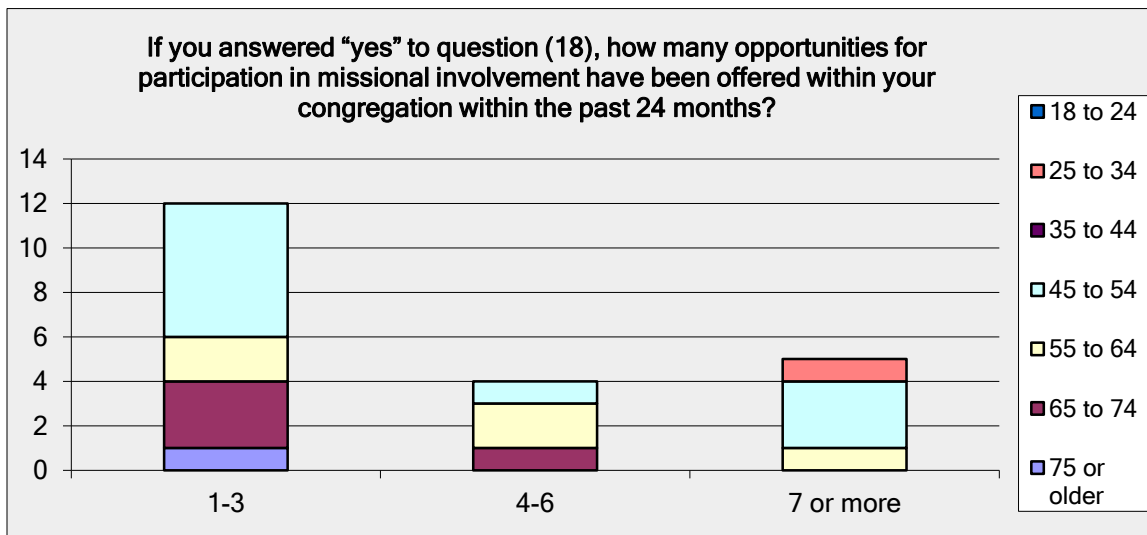
Figure 4.37: Number of People Participating in Opportunities for Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months by Average Age

Figure 4.38: Congregational Knowledge of Missional Practices
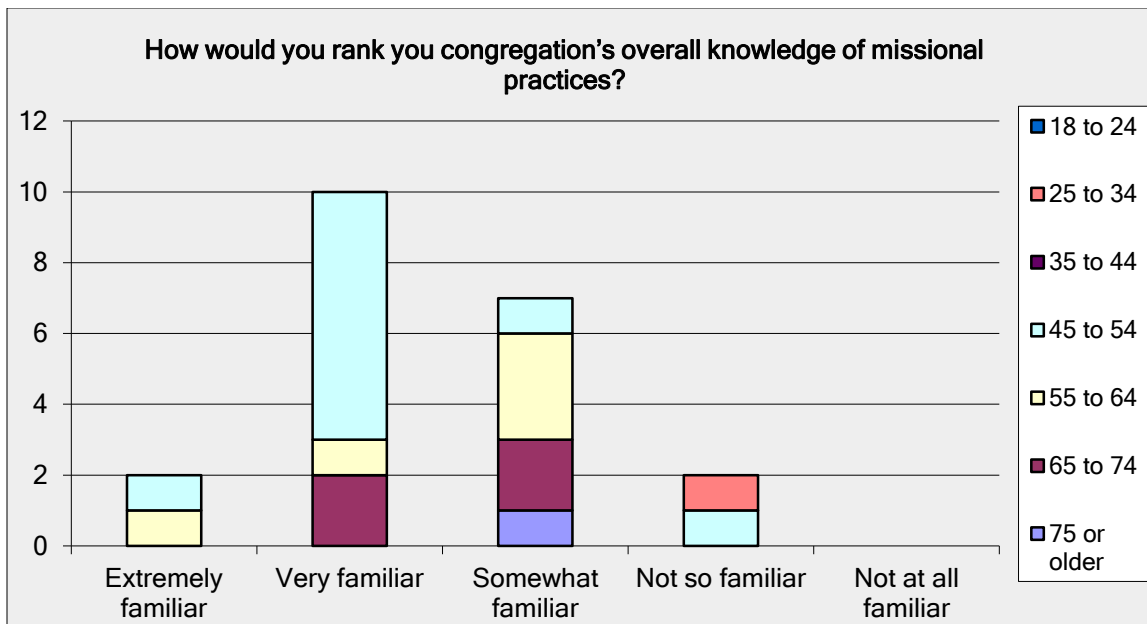
Figure 4.39: Congregational Interest in Seeking Missional Opportunities by Average Age

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in seeking missional opportunities?
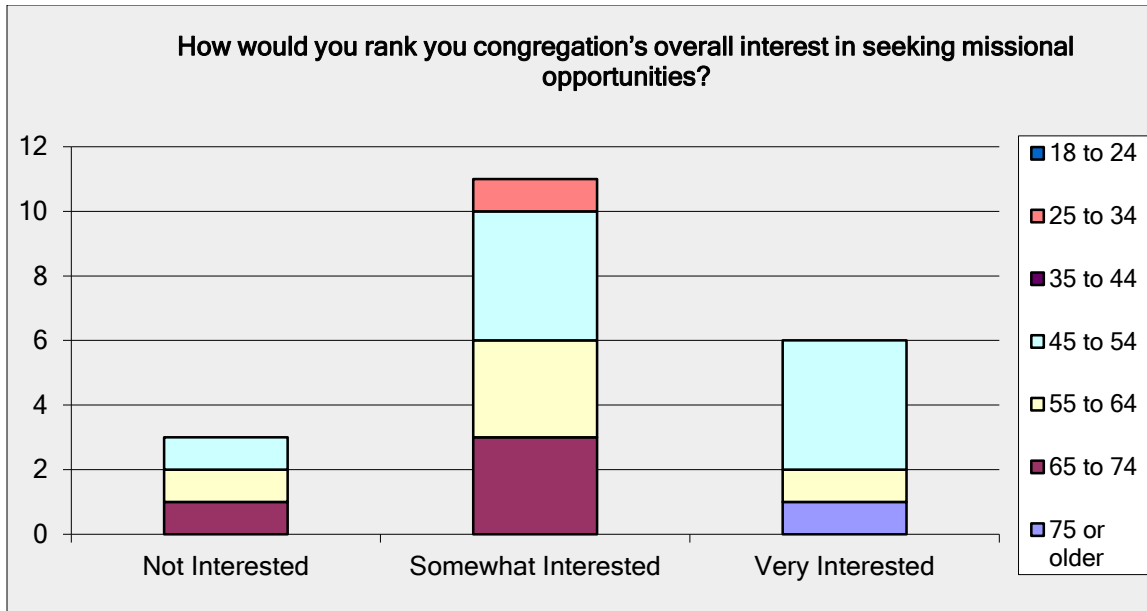
Figure 4.40: Congregational Interest in Building Relationships with Communities Outside Church Membership by Average Age

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in building relationships with people/communities outside of your church membership?
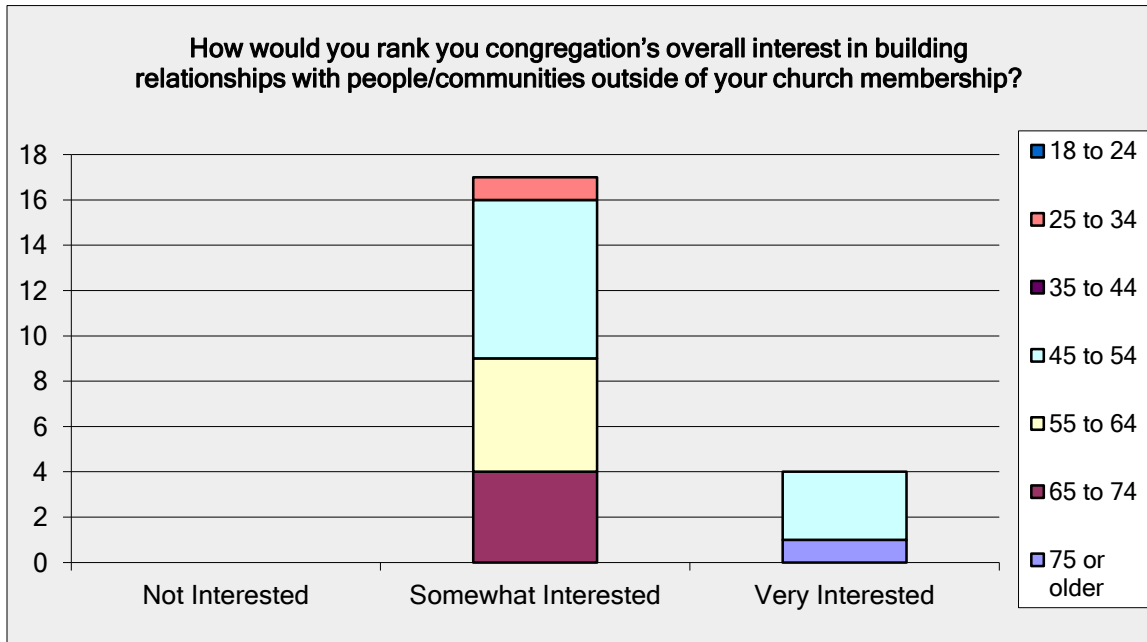
The next data set will focus on distinctions between congregation of varying average household income levels. The data reporting the number of opportunities for missional

involvement offered in the past 24 months by congregational average income is presented in

Figure 4.41. The data reporting the number of people participating in opportunities for missional

involvement offered in the past 24 months by congregational average income is presented in

Figure 4.42. The data reporting the congregational familiarity with missional practices by

congregational average income is presented in Figure 4.43. The data reporting the congregational

interest in seeking missional opportunities by congregational average income is presented in

Figure 4.44. The data reporting the congregational interest in building relationships with

communities outside of church membership by congregational average income is presented in

Figure 4.45.

Figure 4.41: Opportunities for Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months by Average
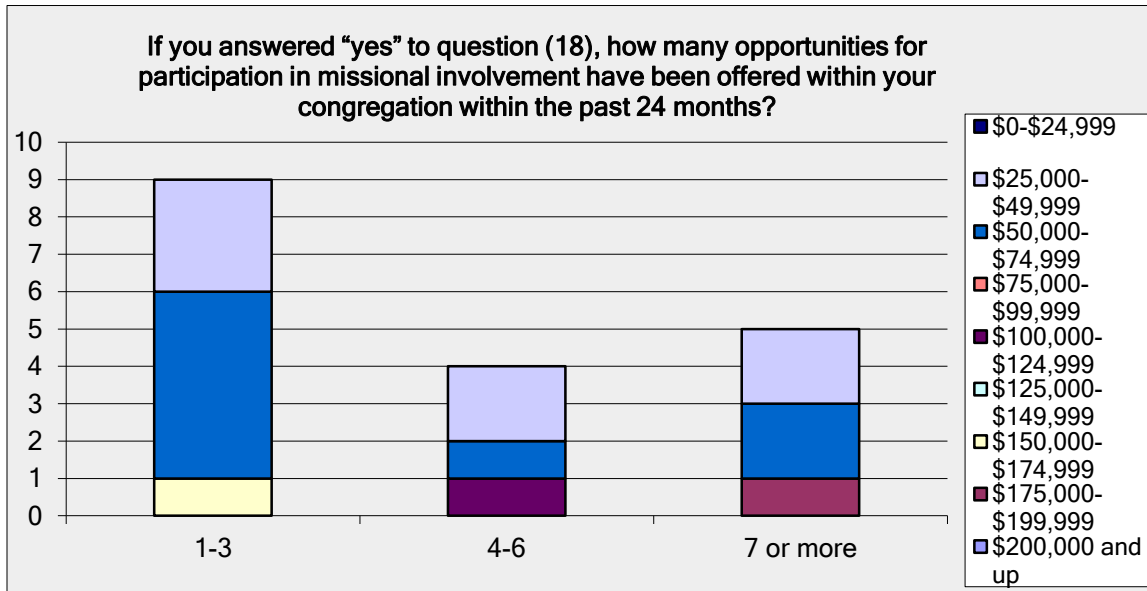
Income

Figure 4.42: Number of People Participating in Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months
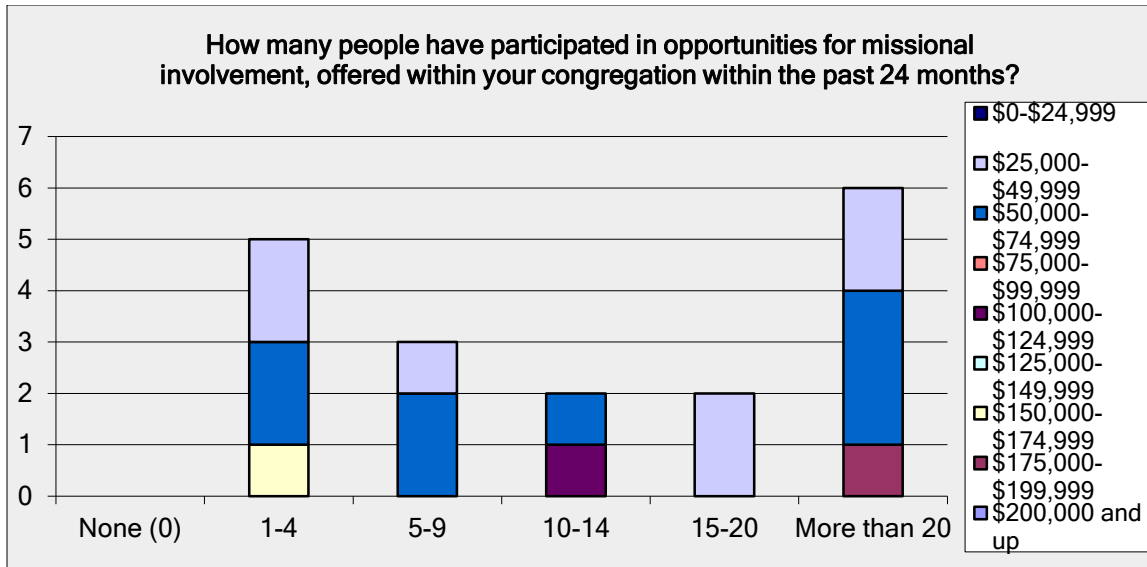
by Average Income

Figure 4.43: Congregational Knowledge of Missional Practices by Average Income
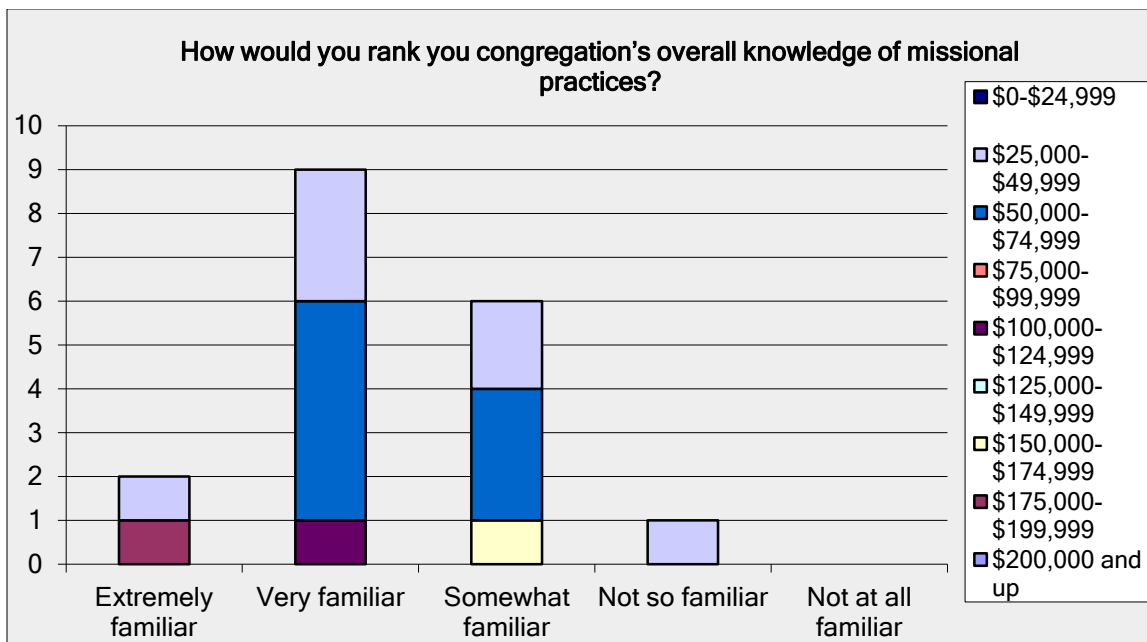
Figure 4.44: Congregational Interest in Seeking Missional Opportunities by Average
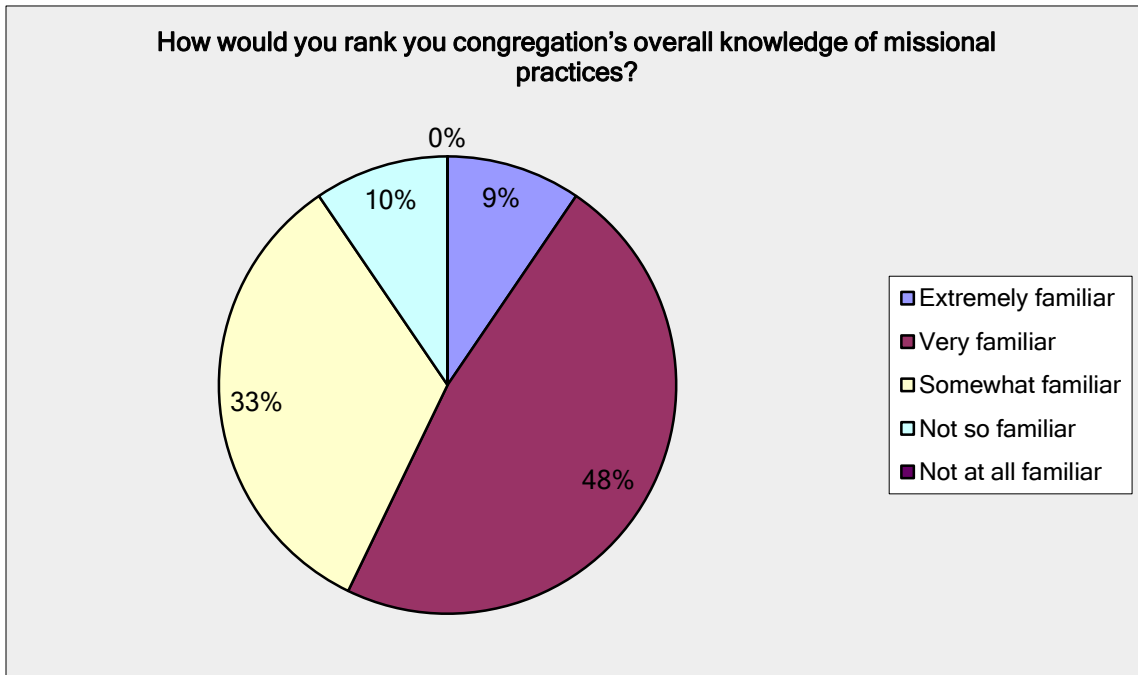
Income

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in seeking missional opportunities?
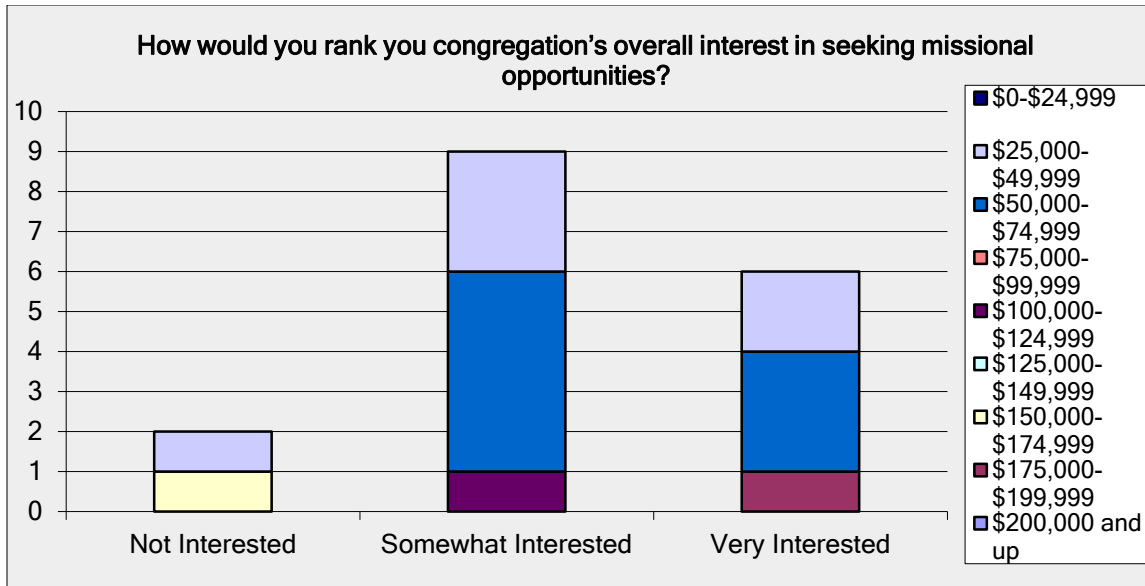
Figure 4.45: Congregational Interest in Building Relationships with Communities Outside of Church Membership by Average Income

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in building relationships with people/communities outside of your church membership?
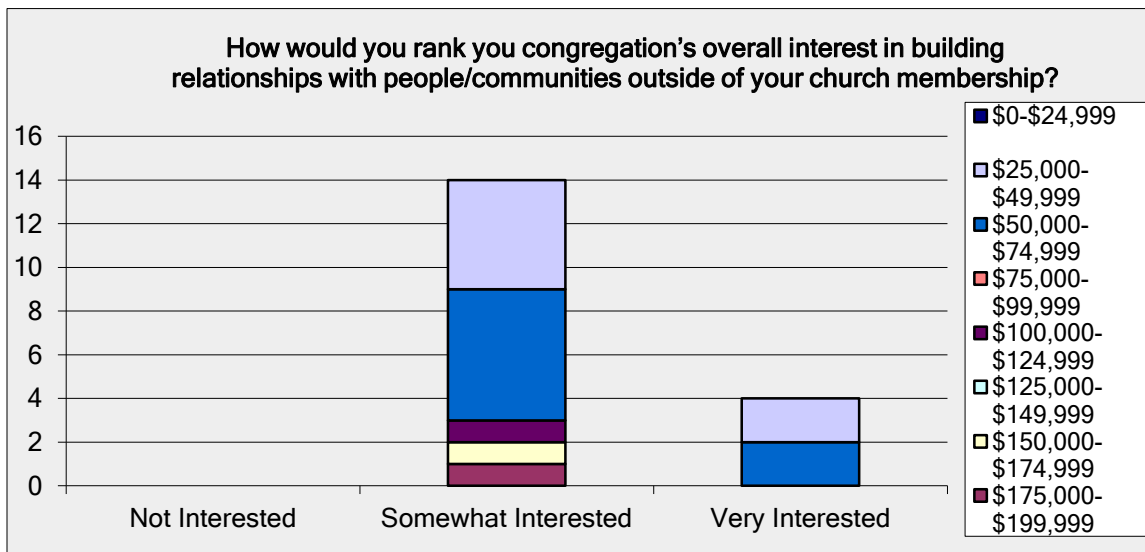
The following data set will focus on geographic distinctions represented in the RQ2 questions. The data reporting the number of opportunities for participation in missional involvement over a 24-month period by congregational geographic distinction is presented in Figure 4.46. The data reporting the number of people participating in opportunities for missional

involvement over a 24-month period by congregational geographic distinction is presented in

Figure 4.47. The data reporting congregational familiarity with missional practices by

congregational geographic distinction is presented in Figure 4.48. The data reporting

congregational in seeking missional opportunities by congregational geographic distinction is

presented in Figure 4.49. The data reporting congregational in building relationships with

communities outside of church membership by congregational geographic distinction is

presented in Figure 4.50.

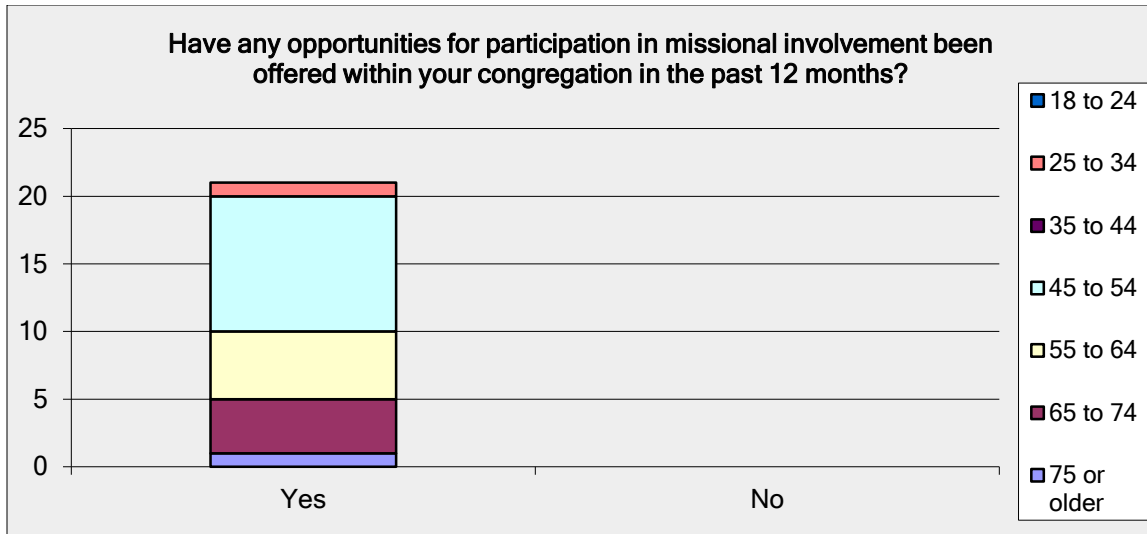**Figure 4.46: Opportunities for Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months by Geographic**
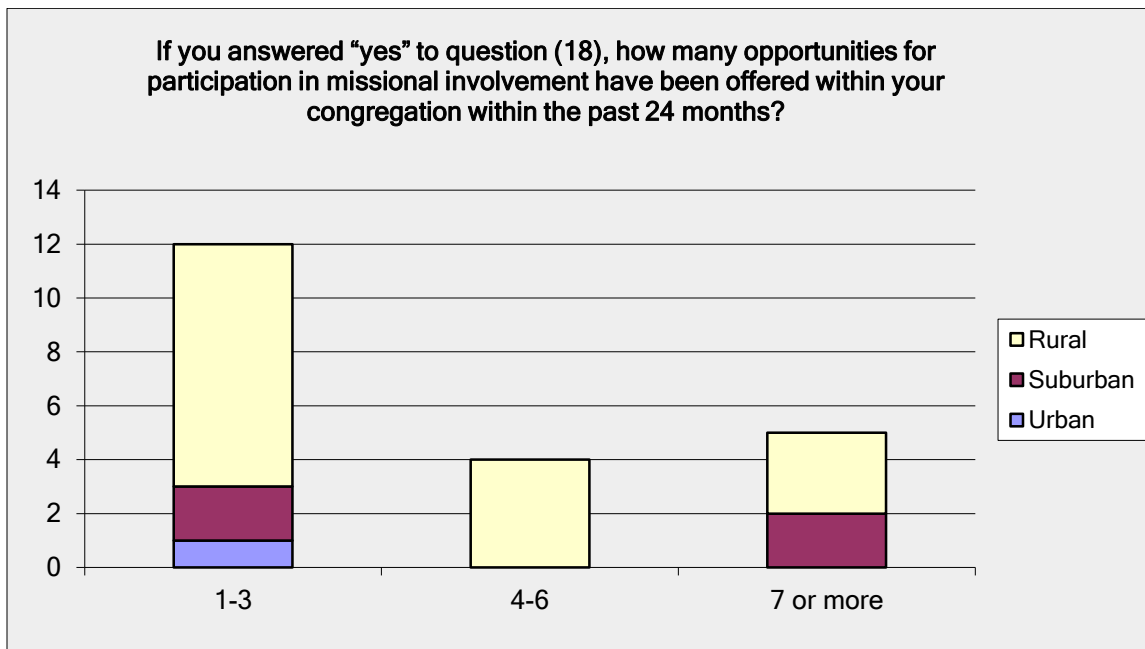
Area

Figure 4.47: Number of People Participating in Missional Involvement in Past 24 Months

by Geographic Area

How many people have participated in opportunities for missional involvement, offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

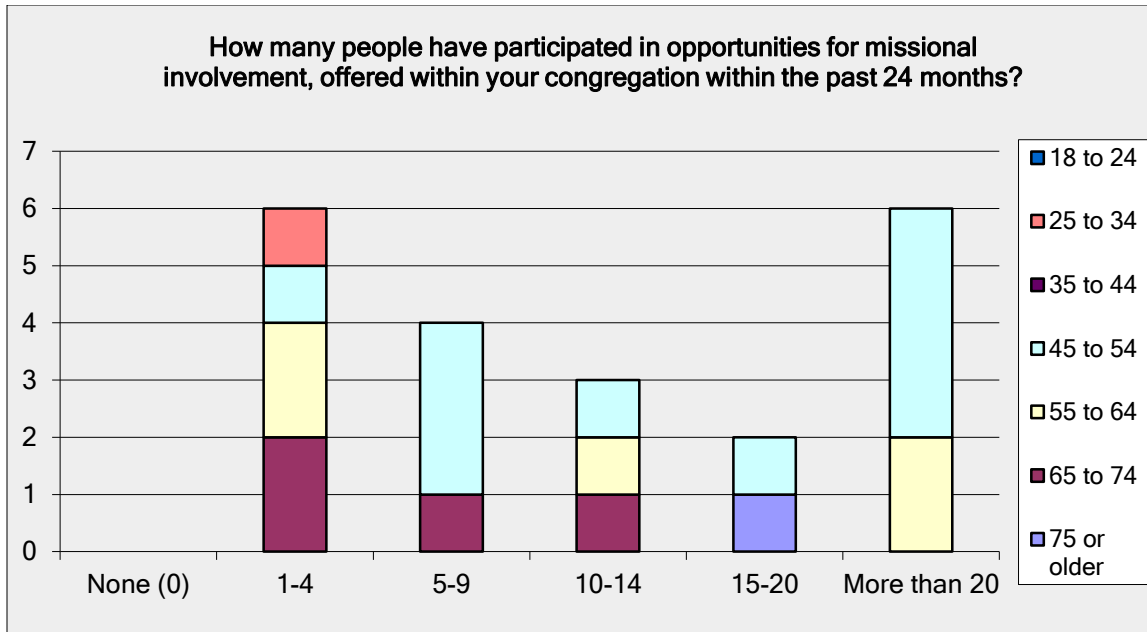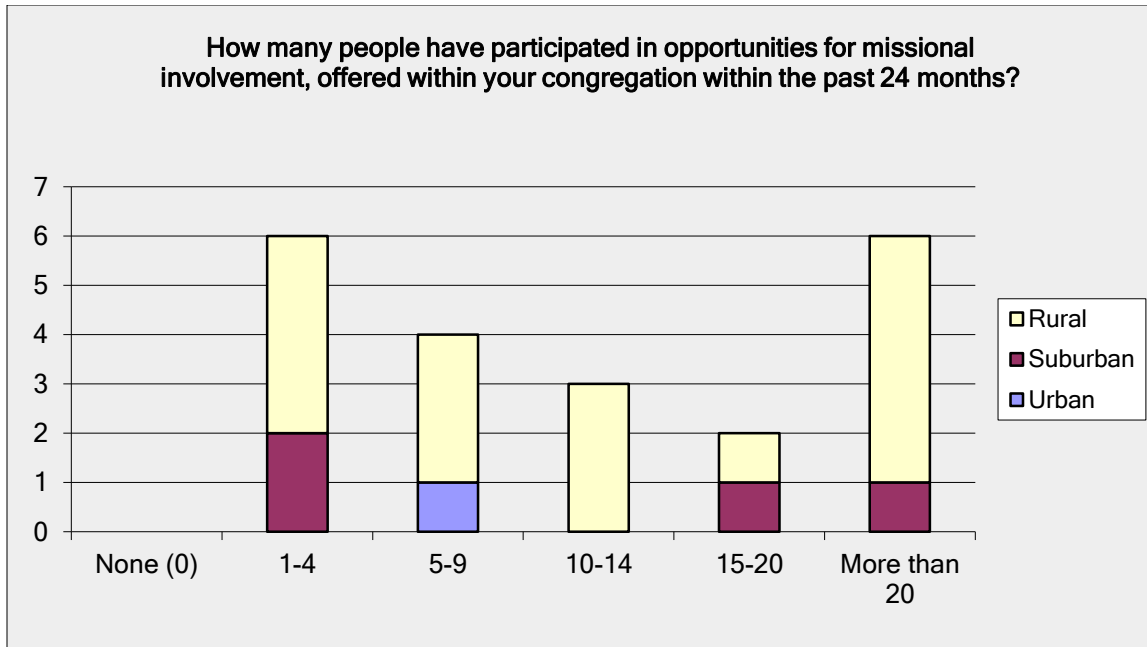**Figure 4.48: Congregational Knowledge of Missional Practices by Geographic Area**

How would you rank you congregation's overall knowledge of missional practices?

Figure 4.49: Congregational Interest in Seeking Missional Opportunities by Geographic Area

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in seeking missional opportunities?

Chart: Stacked bar chart with categories Not Interested, Somewhat Interested, Very Interested. Legend: Rural, Suburban, Urban. Y-axis from 0 to 12.

Figure 4.50: Congregational Interest in Building Relationships with Communities Outside of Church Membership by Geographic Area

How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in building relationships with people/communities outside of your church membership?

Chart: Stacked bar chart with categories Not Interested, Somewhat Interested, Very Interested. Legend: Rural, Suburban, Urban. Y-axis from 0 to 18.

Research Question 3: Description of Evidence

The purpose of the third and final research question was to provide qualitative data that could be used to assess the participants' impressions relative to the relationships that do or do not exist between the availability of opportunities of instruction in Christian spiritual growth (RQ 1) and participation in missional involvement (RQ 2). This question was answered using the semi-structured interview questions 2-6 from Appendix B as well as by comparing the results from questions 9-10 with question 18 from the survey and questionnaire. These questions were used in semi-structured interviews of randomly selected senior appointed clergy within the Wichitas district of the OKUMC. Five senior appointed clergy chose to participate. Interviews were conducted over the phone, in a one-on-one environment that included only the author and the interviewee.

In comparing responses to questions 8-10 with question 18 of the survey and questionnaire, the results were as follows:

Table 4.2: Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual Growth in Past 24 Months by Rates of Participation in Missional Service Opportunities

If you answered "yes" to question (10), how many opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth have been offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?								
	How many people have participated in opportunities for missional involvement, offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?							
Answer Options	None (0)	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	More than 20	Response Percen	Response Count

							t	
1-3	0	5	3	0	1	1	50.0%	10
4-6	0	0	1	1	1	1	20.0%	4
7 or more	0	1	0	1	0	4	30.0%	6
Answered question								20
Skipped question								1

The data shows that congregations with the highest rates of participation in missional service were also likely to have the greatest number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth. Likewise, congregations with the lowest rates of participation in missional service were also likely to have the smallest number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth. The data reporting rates of congregational participation in spiritual growth and missional service as a percentage of total congregational membership is reported in Figure 4.51. The actual participation numbers are presented in Table 4.3.

Figure 4.51: Participation in Spiritual Growth and Missional Service as a Percentage of Total Membership

Table 4.3: Participation in Spiritual Growth and Missional Service as a Percentage of Total Membership

Church Number	Total Membership	Participation in Spiritual Growth (Number of People)	Spiritual Growth as Percentage of Total Membership	Participation in Missional Service (Number of People)	Missional Service as Percentage of Total Membership
1	213	104	48.83%	28	13.15%
2	308	80	25.97%	50	16.23%
3	122	48	39.34%	0	0.00%
4	174	78	44.83%	63	36.21%
5	967	116	12.00%	95	9.82%
6	255	146	57.25%	160	62.75%
7	226	49	21.68%	7	3.10%
8	328	57	17.38%	6	1.83%
9	224	52	23.21%	18	8.04%
10	55	9	16.36%	4	7.27%
11	328	57	17.38%	6	1.83%
12	151	18	11.92%	5	3.31%
13	153	14	9.15%	0	0.00%
14	2407	364	15.12%	201	8.35%
15	246	64	26.02%	25	10.16%
16	229	17	7.42%	0	0.00%
17	120	11	9.17%	0	0.00%
18	136	23	16.91%	0	0.00%
19	581	174	29.95%	137	23.58%
20	1081	206	19.06%	73	6.75%
21	168	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
22	99	2	2.02%	0	0.00%

The above data shows that in all but two instances (churches 2 and 11), churches with higher rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth also have proportionately higher rates of participation in missional service opportunities, even when adjustments are made for variance in total congregation size (by analyzing the results as a percentage of total membership). The data comparing the number of people participating in opportunities for instruction in spiritual growth over a 24-month period with participation rates in missional service opportunities over a 24-month period is presented in Figure 4.52.

Figure 4.52: Number of People Participating in Opportunities for Instruction in Spiritual Growth within the Past 24 Months by Participation in Missional Service Opportunities
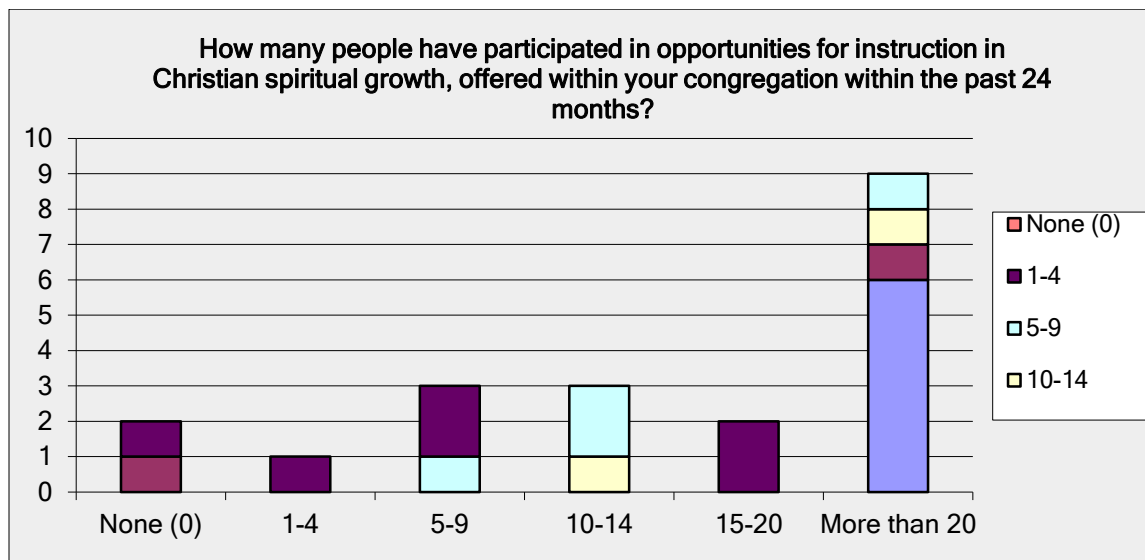
The semi-structured interview questions were also a significant part of the qualitative research used to explore the relationship between opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional service. Responses to the semi-structured interviews are structured according to the following themes that developed within the interviews. The researcher has also provided sample statements that reflect the selected theme.

1) Formative factors that contribute to congregational participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth.

  a. Participant 1: "I think that there are two main reasons. Number 1, to be honest, I think is out of obligation: because I am a church person and that's what I do. That is one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that I believe that there are people within the congregation who are seeking to grow into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. I think that those people seek out ways to study the scripture more and dig deeper into theological themes and issues."

b. Participant 2: "Oh, I think that it is a direct part of their relationship with God. I mean, if you take any kind of relationship, there is this longing to, in any way that you can, draw closer to that other person that you're interested in or care about and I think that the same thing applies to God. So, I think that the spiritual growth stuff is just a part of the natural response if you really want that relationship to go deeper."

c. Participant 4: "I think that people do participate because they have a desire to know and understand God better. Sometimes it is a faith crisis. You know, sometimes it is something that is happening in life, some kind of wake-up call. Sometimes I think that it is looking at people who are further along in their faith journey or looking at a faith mentor or the matriarchs and patriarchs in the church."

2) Important outcomes of participating in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth

a. Participant 1: "Obviously the most important outcome would be that they are transformed by the renewing of their minds and through the scriptures. You know, that growth may be a long process. They may grow quickly, and then slowly, and then quickly again. I think that the ultimate outcome is that they are growing, and that they continue to have a hunger to grow, and that they want to share that growth with other people."

b. Participant 2: "I think that people grow deeper in their relationship with God, and in most of those practices you're doing those things in some sort of community.

So, I think that the other part of that is drawing closer to each other at the same time."

3) Formative factors that contribute to congregational participation in missional involvement.

    a. Participant 2: "I think that part of it is out of obligation in response to their relationship with God. Um, I think that there is a part of it that connects people in a completely different way, whether it is a local mission or something global. When that happens, you're connecting, whether it is something as simple as collecting food for a food bank or going and serving somewhere in the middle of dirt somewhere, it connects with people on a different level…that humanity thing. We're more connected."

    b. Participant 3: "Um, a desire to serve, to make a difference. I think there is, especially with the younger generations, a real need to be doing for someone else. I think if it is like mission trips, there are some who just want to go on a trip. They just want to leave town and do something different for the week. But the biggest key is the desire to know that they're making a difference because most days we don't necessarily feel like we are making a difference."

4) Important outcomes of participation in missional involvement.

    a. Participant 1: "I think that it is to be changed. Often times we go to participate in missional opportunities more to change someone's environment, then really I think that it is the fact the we're changed inside. I would argue that spiritual growth and missional involvement are linked strongly together because as you grow deeper in Jesus Christ you want to fulfill His command to be the hands and

feet of Christ. As you are being the hands and feet of Christ you are also growing deeper in your relationship with Christ through serving Him with other people."

b. Participant 3: "Um, you know everybody says that when you go on a mission trip, you go thinking that you're going to serve someone else and you come back realizing that you're the one who was served. It can be a huge eye-opener in that, you know I pastor in rural Oklahoma, a lot of times people think that everybody lives like me, and so seeing that, you know, there are people with less than what we have, or that struggles are different somewhere else. So, I think that one of the biggest keys is just eye-opening to the fact that not everybody is the same, but by the same token we really are the same in the terms of our love for each other and our love for God."

c. Participant 4: "I've heard this at annual conference, I've experienced it personally as well, that I thought that we were going to help those people, and instead I figured out that we were helping us. It does point to what I was saying before, you kind of set out with this goal to just be a helpful person but you realize that the personal satisfaction that you experience because you are connecting with, and to me it's not just the action but it's the connection with the people with whom we work."

5) There is a relationship between instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional involvement.

a. Participant 2: "Um, I mean the Sunday School answer is, yeah, there is a connection. I think at the end of it, the thing, the response that come out of that is love. You're doing spiritual formation because you want to grow deeper in your

love for God. And love, only works if it creates a response. It doesn't do any good for me to tell my wife every day that I love her if I never show it, so love creates a response, which would be the mission."

    b.   Participant 4: "I have seen a connection, and I think that happens in a variety of ways. I've always kind of seen it, as far as study vs. mission, as two different entry points. Some people are like, I'm not a head person, I'm a hands-on person. So their entry point is not going to be in a small group or bible study, their entry point into faith formation really comes with hands on, and vice versa. Some people are like, I'm not much of a doer, but I sure kind of like exploring the Christian faith from a head perspective. I've seen both achieving that end goal of helping people in their spiritual formation. Sometimes you see bleeding from one to the other. Oh, this was my entry point and now I get it from a spiritual perspective why I need to be hands on.

Summary of Major Findings

This section highlights five of the major findings from the research conducted in this study.

Finding 1: Congregations with the highest rates of participation in missional service were likely to have the greatest number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth.

Finding 2: Congregations with the highest rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth also reported the highest rates of participation in opportunities for missional service.

Finding 3: While congregations believe that they have an average to a high level of familiarity with the concepts of Christian spiritual growth practices and John Wesley's order of salvation,

they do not have even an average level of familiarity with the traditional three-stage process of Christian spiritual growth, known as The Three Ways (purgation, illumination, union).

Finding 4: Congregations with an average age range between 45-64 are most likely to have higher rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, while congregations with an average age range of 45-74 are most likely to have higher rates of participation in opportunities for missional involvement.

Finding 5: While the clergy appointed to the congregations that comprise this study group do share a belief that participation in missional service is a natural result of personal spiritual growth as a result of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, there is also a belief expressed that participation in missional service opportunities meets differing needs among differing kinds of people.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will discuss each of the five major findings summarized in Chapter 4. Findings will be discussed through three separate lenses. The first lens involves the personal observation of the author and researcher. The author will discuss observations before, during, and after the research was conducted. The second lens will be that of the literature review. Each finding will be assessed in the context of the literature review in order to determine whether or not the findings of this study are supported in the research. The third lens will be that of the biblical and theological framework identified in Chapter 2 that undergirds this study. This chapter will also include sections that address possible ministry implications of this study, limitations of the study, and the unexpected observations of the author.

This study began with the identification of a problem. It seemed possible that when churches remove the valuable theology of spiritual growth, as taught by Wesley and passed on by the tradition of the Church, they may also remove the reason for people to participate in the instituted means of grace through the Church. It is also possible that there is a connection between the availability of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional involvement. The purpose of this study was to assess whether or not a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. This study does not propose or assume that instruction of this nature is the only factor that influences participation in missional involvement within a congregation. Rather, this study seeks to assess whether the availability of such instruction correlates in any way to rates of participation in missional involvement within a congregation. This study has found the following: 1. Congregations with the highest rates of participation in missional service were also likely to have the greatest number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth; 2. Congregations with the highest rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth also report the highest rates of participation in opportunities for missional service; 3. While congregations believe that they have an average to a high level of familiarity with the concepts of Christian spiritual growth practices, and John Wesley's order of salvation, they do not have an average level of familiarity with the traditional three-stage process of Christian spiritual growth, known as The Three Ways (purgation, illumination, and union); 4. Congregations with an average age range between 45-64 are most likely to have higher rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, while congregations with an average age range of 45-74 are most likely to have higher rates of participation in

opportunities for missional involvement, and 5. While the clergy appointed to the congregations that comprise this study group do share a belief that participation in missional service is a natural result of personal spiritual growth as a result of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, there is also a belief expressed that they meet differing needs among differing kinds of people.

Major Finding

Finding 1: Rates of participation in missional service and instruction in Christian spiritual growth.

Personal Reflections: Prior to the study, the author had considered that there might be a correlation between the number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the number of people participating in opportunities for missional service. It seemed reasonable to assume that a congregation that makes spiritual growth a priority would also find that its members would be more likely to move toward spiritual maturity than a congregation that did not take spiritual growth seriously. If more members within the congregation were moving toward spiritual maturity, then it also seemed reasonable to conclude that spiritually mature members would express that maturity by participating in the means of grace, specifically in works of mercy as identified by Wesley.

During the study, the author noted that a pattern appeared to be developing that supported the belief that there might be a correlation between the availability of spiritual growth programs and participation rates in missional service opportunities. The data coming in from the district-wide surveys and the results of the semi-structured interviews seemed to support this notion. This was further confirmed in the quantitative analysis of each participating congregation's Christian formation and missional service participation data reported to the Oklahoma Annual

Conference and listed in the Oklahoma Annual Conference journal. After the study, the author

noted that the research supported this conclusion, given that there were few instances in which

this comparative correlation did not exist in some capacity within the congregations studied.

Literature Review: The literature review seems to indicate that works of piety have as their

ultimate end the goal of growth toward spiritual maturity for the individual Christian. The

literature review has found that works of piety consist of the "instituted" means of grace, or what

Wesley believed to be the means of grace clearly identified by Scripture (Headley 133). These

clearly identified means of grace consisted of: 1) Prayer, 2) Searching the Scriptures, 3) The

Lord's Supper, 4) Fasting, and 5) Christian Conference (Headley). These means of grace for the

post-Aldersgate Wesley are the result of growth toward a mature relationship God (Outler). The

literature review found that this mature spirituality is often lived out through works of piety as

well as that which might commonly be called "works of mercy" or mission and service by

modern-day Christians (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 267). These are opportunities to

live out the holy love of God with the neighbor in a way that helps the neighbor to better

understand, experience, and embrace God's love for themselves.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that this finding of the study is supported in the

research. Specifically, the research seems to note that a focus on the instituted means of grace

should naturally lead to a kind of spiritual maturity that finds the growing Christian drawn to

participate in the prudential means of grace, or more specifically in works of mercy (Collins, *The*

Theology of John Wesley 258). The findings of the study show that when more opportunities for

spiritual growth are present within a congregation, there is also likely to be a higher rate of

participation in missional service.

Biblical/Theological Framework: This study sought to explore the realities present within the biblical and theological framework that seeks to better understand the effect of the three-fold process of movement toward Christian spiritual maturity. This framework began with a study of Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The biblical and theological framework found that the flaw in interpretation that tends to distort the understanding of perfection lies within the translation itself. In this case, the word used in this verse that is translated as "perfect" (teleios), is a word that quite literally means "whole" (France 228–229). This is likely why the most recent cooperative denominationally supported scholarly attempt to translate the scriptural text into readable English (The Common English Bible) translates this word as "complete" as opposed to "perfect." The meaning of the verse can therefore be adequately assessed when the additional meanings are substituted in translation: "Be complete, therefore, as your heavenly Father is complete," or perhaps: "Be mature, therefore, as your heavenly Father is mature." The understood intention of the verse itself is therefore transformed by the understanding that the world "perfect" is not used here in any sense that indicates that one is expected to be free from flaw, as might be the modern western interpretation of the word. Rather, the verse points to a movement into completion or maturity, conveying the notion that perhaps one is considered "perfected" when one becomes whole, mature, or complete in the same way that God is.

The framework is based upon an exegetical engagement with what biblical perfection entails as well as the experiences of Christian saints and mystics and the teaching of John Wesley and Wesleyan theologians regarding the process of growth toward perfection, more aptly understood as Christian spiritual maturity. While previous research has sought to explore the impact that engaging in spiritual growth related programs has on the individual Christian

participant (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology*), this study sought to explore the effect of the availability of such programs on congregational rates of participation in missional service. This finding shows that there is a correlation between the two: that the biblical and theological foundational suppositions are supported by the actual work of the Church (Maynard).

Finding 2: Rates of participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and rates of participation in opportunities for missional service.

Personal Reflections: This finding is similar to the previous finding with important differences. While it is valuable to assess what participation rates in missional service opportunities are in correlation to opportunities offered for spiritual growth, it is likewise valuable to assess the correlation between participation rates in both spiritual growth and missional service. Prior to the research, the author had considered that many of the same criteria could potentially apply to this finding as would have been relevant for the previous finding. It is reasonable to consider that congregations with higher rates of participation in Christian spiritual growth opportunities (not only congregations with more opportunities available) could also experience higher rates of participation in missional service opportunities. Prior to the research, the author had observed in his own pastoral ministry (anecdotally) that those who frequented opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth also tended to frequently participate in opportunities for missional service.

During the study, the author noted that this pattern appeared to be developing both within the quantitative results and also within the qualitative research. The results of the district-wide surveys and semi-structured interviews both appeared to confirm that there was indeed a relationship between rates of participation in each category. This was further confirmed in the quantitative analysis of each participating congregation's Christian formation and missional

service participation data reported to the Oklahoma Annual Conference and listed in the Oklahoma Annual Conference journal. Once the study was completed, the author noted that this relationship existed in each congregation that participated, save for three. Congregations 2, 3, and 11 showed an inverse relationship between spiritual growth and missional service. While congregations 3, 13, 16, 17, 18, 21, and 22 reported 0 participants in missional service to the journal of the Oklahoma Annual Conference, it was likewise clear that each of those reporting congregations, save for one (congregation 3) reported less than 20% of the total membership involved in spiritual growth opportunities. Each of those congregations but two (congregations 3 and 18) reported less than 10% of the total membership involved in spiritual growth opportunities. The author therefore observed that the data suggests that congregations with more than 10% of the total membership involved in spiritual growth opportunities are also likely to have participants in missional service opportunities. Likewise (with the exception of congregations 3, 7, and 9) congregations with more than 20% of the total membership involved in spiritual growth opportunities are likely to have more than 10% of the total membership involved in missional service opportunities.

Literature Review: The findings of the research are supported by the literature review in much the same way as those of the previous finding are supported, largely because the findings are so similar. Importantly, the literature review identified that there is a link between participation in spiritual growth opportunities and formation as a servant leader. For example, in 2011 Steven Pulliam conducted a twelve-week study comprised of twenty-three people that focused on "Wesleyan discipleship and spiritual disciplines" at Central United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas (Pulliam 1). The study sought to determine whether or not there was a connection between exposure to "Wesleyan discipleship and devotional practices," and how well

equipped the members of the study group were for "servant ministry and servant leadership" (Pulliam 1).

Pulliam defined the "spiritual disciplines" by associating them with Wesley's means of grace. The results of the study showed that as a result of participation in the study, participants increased their knowledge about the Wesleyan means of grace, as well as their willingness to participate in servant leadership and servant ministry (Pulliam). Pulliam's results support the finding of this research in that he clearly identified a formative component of participation in spiritual growth opportunities that better prepares participants for servant leadership and ministry.

Biblical/Theological Framework: Again similar to the previous finding, the biblical and theological framework for this study focused on growth toward Christian perfection as a result of a Wesleyan movement through the *ordo salutis*. This finding of this study shows a propensity to respond to movement toward spiritual maturity, as evidenced by participation in spiritual growth opportunities (spiritual growth opportunities have already been shown to have a formative impact on moving the individual toward spiritual maturity) (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology*; Pulliam) by participating in works of mercy (the prudential means of grace) through missional service. This finding illustrates the reality of the progression asserted through the framework, as the reality of the human response to growth toward spiritual maturity is lived out in the lives of Christians participating in missional service in and through the local church.

Finding 3: Congregational familiarity with Christian spiritual growth and Wesleyan salvation.

Personal Reflections: With regard to this particular finding, my own observations mirror those of the results of the study. Prior to engaging in this research the author had the opportunity to

teach The Three Ways and Wesley's *ordo salutis* (which the author normally teaches

simultaneously as per the chart in table 2.1) to multiple congregations. While there has always

been a certain level of familiarity with the terms and concepts associated with Wesley's *ordo*

salutis in the congregations where the author has taught it, the author is unable to recall a time in

which there has been any level of familiarity, even mildly so, with the terms and concepts

associated with The Three Ways. Throughout the course of the study, the author observed that

the findings (as they were coming in) were in keeping these prior experiences. The findings of

the study, as it was being conducted, also helped to illuminate one potential reason why there

might be a higher level of familiarity with Wesley's *ordo salutis,* and limited familiarity with

The Three Ways. During the semi-structured interviews, the clergy who participated were

themselves quite familiar with Wesley's *ordo salutis,* while expressing limited to no familiarity

with The Three Ways, even indicating in some instances that the term itself was not familiar.

One clergy participant served to be an exception to this rule, regularly teaching The Three Ways

in his own congregation.

After the study was completed, the author was curious as to the reasons for such limited

familiarity with The Three Ways among the clergy and congregations that participated in the

study. Drawing from his own experience, it is possible that the lack of familiarity by clergy

might be because The Three Ways were not addressed in their seminary education as it was also

lacking in his own training. On the other hand, as evidenced by the author, such teaching on the

three ways is still taught in Roman Catholic churches through radio programming.

Literature Review: While the research itself does not directly deal with levels of familiarity

specifically, there are indicators in the research literature that support the findings of this study.

In 2001, Daniel Slagle conducted a study within a congregation in the North Georgia Annual

Conference of the United Methodist Church that focused on the impact of a Wesleyan model of spiritual formation on the lay leadership within that congregation (Slagle). To accomplish this goal, Slagle prepared a model of instruction based on Christian spiritual growth which focused specifically on the instituted and prudential means of grace (Slagle). It was Slagle's hypothesis that those who participated in the study would be better equipped to serve as leaders within the United Methodist congregation in question (Slagle).

Slagle found improvement in seven of the nineteen characteristics throughout the course of the study, with at least three of those improvements able to be directly linked to the study (Slagle). While it was not immediately clear which components of the study had a direct impact on spiritual growth, Slagle did report that eighty percent of those who participated in the test group self-identified that their own capacity for leadership had increased as a result of participating in the study (Slagle). The participants reported that regular prayer, participation in Holy Communion, and the study itself had the most substantial effect (Slagle).

Likewise, in 2011, Steven Pulliam conducted a twelve-week study comprised of twenty-three people that focused on "Wesleyan discipleship and spiritual disciplines" at Central United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas (Pulliam 1). The study sought to determine whether or not there was a connection between exposure to "Wesleyan discipleship and devotional practices," and how well equipped the members of the study group were for "servant ministry and servant leadership" (Pulliam 1). Participants completed a survey before and after participating in the study that sought to assess the participants' level of knowledge with regard to Wesleyan spiritual disciplines and their level of participation in servant leadership and servant ministry (Pulliam). Pulliam defined the "spiritual disciplines" by associating them with Wesley's means of grace. Furthermore, in 2002, Brian Law conducted a study of the relationship between

church health and church growth in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church

(B. Law). Law found that those participants who self-reported that they participated in spiritual

disciplines "tended to view church health higher than those who did not participate in spiritual

disciplines" (B. Law 93). Each of these studies made use of an approach based strongly upon

Wesley's *ordo salutis,* an indicator that it is likely that other such programs, when implemented

in United Methodist contexts, could share a similar focus and have similar results. However,

although such programs tended to focus on concepts associated with Wesley's *ordo salutis, they*

do not tend to focus on concepts associated with The Three Ways.

Biblical/Theological Framework: The biblical and theological framework for this project

focuses on the process of spiritual growth that leads one to move toward Christian perfection, as

defined and understood through the lens of Wesleyan theology. Entering into this state of

"perfection" or "completion" wherein God has replaced sin (barriers to relationship with God)

with holy love certainly requires that old destructive habits be replaced by healthy ones, as is the

case with initial sanctification. However, replacing sin with love is not the only transformative

process necessary if the individual Christian is to move into unitive wholeness. In order for such

a movement to take place, the Christian must also learn to communicate in real time with God as

opposed to simply doing so historically (Scraper, *Franklian Psychology* 132). Entire

sanctification therefore immerses the individual Christian heavily in the main focus of the

Illuminative Way, that of learning to "hear" God.

This concept has been touched on, as previously mentioned, by theologians who

acknowledge Wesley's understanding of the dynamic of the awakening of "spiritual senses" as a

result of the New Birth (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 202). Collins writes:

In light of these dynamics, Runyon aptly notes that the new birth, for Wesley, in addition to everything else, was "an epistemological event that opens a new way of knowing." The avenue of such spiritually discerned knowledge was, of course, faith, now seen as a spiritual sense in terms of the seeing eye and the hearing ear. And though Wesley's views on this score have often been understood in a Lockean, utterly empiricist way, it is perhaps best not to press this comparison too far or in an exclusive manner, for there are important differences as well. For one thing, though empiricism has often been presented as an "objective" approach to knowledge, in which the mind is at the center of the knowing process, Wesley's tack is on some levels subjective and participatory, in that the truths that emerge out of the awakening of the new birth cannot be known apart from transformation. (Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley : Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* 202)

This "subjective and participatory" engagement of new "spiritual senses" is something that aptly indicates Wesley's own mystical nature. This kind of language locates Wesley firmly within the tradition of the Christian mystics and in keeping with the best tradition of the Christian saints as one who attempted to identify his experiences through the use of the accepted academic theological language of the day. In order to better understand this, it will be helpful to briefly engage Evelyn Underhill's 1911 publication of *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness.* Although there has been some discussion as to whether or not Christian spiritual growth via Christian mysticism is a helpful area of study for individuals seeking to grow toward spiritual maturity, (Eddins), Arthur Holder nonetheless notes that "Until the late 1970's this 500 page book served as the best single introduction in English to

the subject of mysticism, a research tool for scholars and a survey for the general reader" (Holder

316). As Evelyn Underhill writes:

> The true mystic – the person with a genius for God – hardly needs a map himself. He
>
> steers a compass course across the 'vast and stormy seas of the divine.' It is characteristic
>
> of his intellectual humility, however, that he is commonly willing to use the map of the
>
> community in which he finds himself, when it comes to showing other people the route
>
> which he has pursued. Sometimes these maps have been adequate. More, they have
>
> elucidated the obscure wanderings of the explorer; helped him; given him landmarks.
>
> (Underhill 121)

Though Wesley was himself steering a "compass course across the 'vast and stormy seas

of the divine,'" he attempted to communicate his "subjective and participatory" experience

according to the "map of the community in which he" found himself (Collins, *The Theology of*

John Wesley 202; Underhill 121)

If individual Christians who participate in spiritual growth related opportunities within

the context of their own local churches are to be able to grow toward Christian perfection as

defined and understood through the lens of Wesleyan theology, then an understanding of both

the process of growth that leads to perfection (The Three Ways) as well as Christian perfection

as understood through the lens of Wesleyan theology (Wesley's *ordo salutis*) is essential. If the

clergy are focusing on one to the exclusion of the other, as has been found in this study, then

more research should be considered in focusing on what is actually being taught. The biblical

and theological framework includes growth as a necessary component of the salvific process.

The findings of the research seem to show a strong focus on salvific theology in local

congregations and a very limited exposure to the theology of spiritual growth.

Finding 4: Participation rates in Christian spiritual growth and missional service by congregational average age ranges.

Personal Reflections: This finding was the most surprising to the author. Prior to the study, the author held the belief that the younger generation was more apt to participate in missional service opportunities than the older generations. This belief was personal and not supported by any research save for research that had been anecdotally cited in blog posts and speeches given at Annual Conference events that the author has participated in. As a result of exposure to popular blog posts and Annual Conference events where such claims have been made, the author's own belief has been that the generations under the age of thirty are only likely to actively participate in congregational life that provides ample opportunity for missional service. The result of this study helped to clarify for the author that this belief is an assumption based upon hearsay and modern rhetoric. During the study, the author began to note that the survey data showed that churches within the study group comprised of younger adults and families were less likely to participate in either missional service or spiritual growth. In reflecting upon the results of the study after its completion, the author believes that this particular finding could be among the most helpful to congregations and pastors alike. If other clergy are hearing through the denominational hierarchy that millennials are looking for congregations with ample opportunities to participate in missional service, but the reality is that congregations with an average age range between 45-74 are the most likely congregations to have higher rates of participation in missional service opportunities, then it stands to reason that there is misinformation circulating regarding the appropriate methodology for engaging millennials.

Literature Review: The research shows that two distinct cultural changes have affected the North American Church in unique ways as a result of "globalization and postmodernism"

(Roxburgh 128). On the one hand, many of those being brought into membership within congregations are already baptized Christians, transferring from other congregations (Roxburgh 128). On the other hand, much of the church culture that has developed in North America, which represents many of the churches that these new members are transferring from, is a culture that centers around what Roxburgh refers to as an "attractional model" of church leadership (Roxburgh 128). It is the attractional model of church leadership that seeks to identify what would be attractive to a particular generation and then to create a structure that provides those opportunities with the hope of attracting that generation. Perspectives such as Roxburgh's generally support the findings of this study. Roxburgh's work indicates that the attractional model of church leadership, especially as it relates to missional involvement, is a prevalent culture among churches in North America. At the same time, this finding in this research project also demonstrates that congregations and denominational leaders have misinterpreted what they believe to be attractive to the generation that they focus on attracting.

Biblical/Theological Framework: The biblical and theological framework for this study identified the prudential means of grace as works of mercy that would include "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously affected; such as the endeavoring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner"(Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* 267). The framework shows that Wesley connected his understanding of "works of mercy" to what might commonly be called "works of mercy" or "mission and service" by modern-day Christians. These works of mercy or missional service give the individual Christian opportunities to live out the holy love of God with the neighbor in a way that helps the neighbor to better understand, experience, and embrace God's love for themselves. To embrace a spiritually mature understanding of Wesleyan spiritual growth

is to therefore move toward participation in the prudential means of grace as an opportunity to live out the love of Christ in the world. This finding highlights the likelihood that congregations of varying average age ranges portray a propensity to do so.

Finding 5: Participation in missional service opportunities meets differing needs among differing kinds of people.

Personal Reflections: Prior to the study, the author suspected that there might be a link of some kind between the emphasis that a local congregation places upon spiritual growth and the result of movement toward spiritual maturity expressed through participation in missional service. While the findings of the study have indicated that there is a relationship between the two, the findings of the semi-structured interviews likewise offered some insight into the complex nature of that correlation. The clergy who participated in the semi-structured interviews were largely affirming in their assertions that there is a correlation between participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional service opportunities. However, they also affirmed that both opportunities serve as points of entry for people to live out their faith through their congregational life. Moreover, they affirmed that their experience showed that some people prefer an intellectual engagement with spiritual life while others preferred a hands-on engagement with spiritual life. As a result, these clergy affirmed that some people prefer to participate in opportunities for instruction in spiritual growth, while others prefer to participate in opportunities for missional service. Reflecting on this finding seems to indicate that while the clergy who participated in the study do believe that there is a link between these two types of opportunities, they also believe that in some cases that differing opportunities meet the needs of different types of people.

Literature Review: In relation to this finding, Phil Maynard wrote, "…over the years, particularly coming out of the modern scientific era, discipleship ministries have been based on the core definition of a disciple as a 'learner.' This was easy and convenient. We could 'teach' about what it means to be a disciple. So the Church developed a very academic approach to equipping disciples" (Maynard 72). However, the research further shows that the educational model of discipleship has failed, largely because "we missed the part of the definition of disciple as learner that focused on actually becoming like Jesus, not just learning about Jesus" (Maynard 73). The conclusion of this part of the research finds that to become like Jesus requires that followers allow the Holy Spirit to transform their behaviors, such that they begin to participate in the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in the world; that they become mission-minded and missionally involved (Maynard 72–74). This finding of the study suggests that discipleship ministry within the church should also include missional service as a valid point of entry in addition to spiritual growth opportunities; that one need not necessarily precede the other chronologically or in terms of importance, but that both opportunities complement one another.

Biblical/Theological Framework: The biblical and theological framework shows that Wesley would make a distinction between two different kinds of the "means of grace," referring to the "instituted" means of grace, and the "prudential" means of grace (Headley 133). For Wesley, the "instituted" means of grace consisted of what Wesley believed to be the means of grace clearly identified by Scripture. These clearly identified means of grace consisted of: 1) Prayer, 2) Searching the Scriptures, 3) The Lord's Supper, 4) Fasting, and 5) Christian Conference. By the "prudential" means of grace, Wesley referred to those means that were not clearly identified by the scriptures, but which still "served the life of faith". For Wesley, these consisted of both "circumstantial" and "contextual" opportunities to participate in the means of grace (Headley

2013). Additionally, the prudential means of grace might show themselves through in missional

involvement, although they might also include things done for the self. The biblical and

theological framework therefore asserts that works of piety and works of mercy are both means

of grace which Wesley defined as "outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and

appointed for this end – to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing

[prevenient], justifying, or sanctifying grace"(Burwash 152). The means of grace are therefore

not mutually exclusive of one another, nor does one necessarily precede the other, but instead

both complement one another as parts of a larger whole.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The implications of these findings could prove to be helpful to local church leaders,

clergy, and denominational leaders. Congregational and denominational leaders with an interest

in increasing rates of participation in missional service opportunities should also consider the

number of available opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth at the

congregational level. Because the findings of this study show a relationship between available

opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and rates of participation in missional

service opportunities and a similar relationship between rates of participation in opportunities for

instruction in Christian spiritual growth and rates of participation in missional service

opportunities, congregational and denominational leaders who want to increase participation in

missional service opportunities at the congregational level should consider offering more

opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth.

Likewise, congregational leaders looking to increase participation in missional service

opportunities by increasing the availability of opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual

growth should consider seeking out opportunities to learn more about the process of Christian

spiritual growth as it has been traditionally taught throughout the history of the global Church. Doing so will provide congregational leaders with the knowledge necessary to complement their above average knowledge of Wesleyan salvific processes with an understanding of the process of Christian spiritual growth.

The findings of this study also have implications for those congregational and denominational leaders who are interested in reaching out to younger generations of potentially active future Christians. The findings of this study show that conventional wisdom and popularly held beliefs about the connection between younger generations and a desire for missional service opportunities might be disconnected from the reality of congregational practice. If in fact congregations with a lower average age range are less likely to participate in opportunities for missional service, then congregational and denominational leaders should consider ceasing attempts to attract younger generations with such opportunities and consider allocating resources to determine which practices and opportunities are actually attractive to younger generations, assuming an attractional model of evangelism is to be continued.

Finally, the findings of this study have implications for congregational leaders who are interested in meeting the needs of congregational members and attracting new members by illustrating that congregational leaders should recognize that there are different needs and attractions within the congregation. This study shows that there is more than one viable approach to drawing people into missional service. Congregational leaders who want to increase rates of participation in missional service should therefore consider utilizing various strategies to address the different populations within congregations.

Limitations of the Study

There were important limitations of this study. In particular, the study only comprised one district, of one annual conference, of one denomination. Other denominations could potentially have different outcomes, as could other districts or other annual conferences. Likewise, the study only examined one geographic location. There could be differences in outcome based upon differing cultures in different parts of North America or within different countries. The semi-structured interviews consisted of the experiences and perspectives of participating clergy within the Wichitas District. The study could have been strengthened though interviews with the laity as well, in a semi-structured format. Likewise, of the 22 clergy who participated in the survey, only 5 participated in the semi-structured interviews. The study could have been strengthened with more qualitative responses from additional clergy had a greater number been willing to participate. Likewise, the study consisted of very few congregations with a lower average age range. This might have been relative to the geographic area defined by the parameters of the study and could have been different had the study been conducted in a different location. This limitation could also have been affected by the denominational demographics of the United Methodist Church.

Unexpected Observations

It was unexpected that congregations with a lower average age range would be less likely to participate in missional service opportunities. While this assertion is anecdotal, the author has heard countless presentations and read countless articles about the necessity of creating a missionally minded church culture as a means by which to engage the millennial generation in congregational life. Therefore, the finding that congregations with an average age range of 45-74 are more likely to participate in missional service opportunities means that what the author has

been taught about how to engage the millennial generation in congregational life may not be accurate.

It was likewise unexpected that the findings showed such a limited familiarization with The Three Ways. As is reported in the literature review, this is a means by which to engage Christian spiritual formation that has been taught by the Church for centuries. The author has already reflected upon not learning about this in seminary. It would be worth exploring whether other United Methodist approved seminaries are teaching this, and if not, then finding the reasons why.

Recommendations

Future and further research could assess the same correlations present or not present in different denominations or geographic areas and among differing cultures. Likewise, future research could be conducted to better assess what the correlation is between opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation rates in missional service. While the findings of this study indicate that there likely is a correlation, this study is not designed to determine what the correlation may be. Better understanding the correlation that exists could aid congregational and denominational leaders in structuring discipleship programs that help congregants to grow in the means of grace.

Additionally, further research could be conducted to determine the direction of the relationship that exists between opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation rates in missional service. This study was not designed to assess whether or not this relationship exists in one direction (spiritual growth leads to missional service) or whether each informs the other.

Postscript

The author would like to take the opportunity to express gratitude to Dr. Anthony Headley for his guidance, supervision, and support throughout this journey. Learning to research has been a joy that will likely last a lifetime.

Additionally, the author would like to express gratitude to his father, Dr. Randy L. Scraper for his research in Christian spiritual growth, and for taking time to teach the author, when the author was young, what it means to know God.

APPENDICES

A. Informed Consent Letter Templates

SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

4/5/16
Dear Colleague,

  I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on whether or not a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. I would like to survey the senior appointed clergy person from each congregation and you have been selected from your church as one invited to assist in the study.

  I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships in your church, so all participants in the survey and questionnaire will be assigned a three-digit number to refer to the church in which they serve. No one other than the author will know who actually participated in the study. The data will be collected using a code and all of the surveys will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person.   The survey will be administered online. You will be sent a link to complete the survey once you agree to participate.

  I believe spiritual growth and missional involvement are central elements of any church and I believe the findings from this survey will allow me to assist congregations as they design their own spiritual growth experiences. My hope is that churches from around the country will be helped because you and others like you have taken the time to participate. Once the research is completed in approximately three months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

  Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My number is 580-641-6551 and my e-mail is mbscraper@outlook.com.

  If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation. Please save and return this form to me via the email address above. Thank you for your help.

  Sincerely,

  Matthew Scraper

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

  Your signature: _____ Date:_____

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

4/5/16
Dear Colleague,

  I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on whether or not a relationship exists between the availability of programs of instruction in Christian spiritual growth and the level of participation in missional involvement within congregations of the Wichitas District of the OKUMC. I would like to interview twenty randomly selected clergy appointed to senior pastor positions throughout the Wichitas District and you have been selected from your church as one invited to assist in the study.

  I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships in your church, so all participants in the interview will be assigned a two-digit number to refer to the church in which they serve. No one other than the author will know who actually participated in the study. The data will be collected using a code and all of the interview transcripts will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person.

  I believe spiritual growth and missional involvement are central elements of any church and I believe the findings from this survey will allow me to assist congregations as they design their own spiritual growth experiences. My hope is that churches from around the country will be helped because you and others like you have taken the time to participate. With your permission, a digital recording device will be used to record our conversation. Once the research is completed in approximately three months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

  Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My phone number is 405-421-6901 and my e-mail is mbscraper@outlook.com.

  If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign, date, save, and return this letter below via the email address above to indicate your voluntary participation. Thank you for your help.

  Sincerely,

  Matthew Scraper

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

  Your signature: _____Date:_____
Confidentiality/Anonymity

B. Survey/Interview/Questionnaire Schedule and Questions

Survey Questions

Christian Spiritual Growth:

For the purposes of this study, the term "Christian spiritual growth" will refer to a process that has, as its intent, the purpose of advancing toward deep, personal, and mature relationship with the Triune God. This process is to be understood within the context of the three-part movement from the Purgative Way, to the Illuminative Way, and finally into the Unitive Way. For the purposes of this study, this three-fold movement will parallel the *ordo salutis* preached and taught by John Wesley which is approached through the threefold movement from justification, to sanctification, to glorification. In a more expanded form, this would include prevenient grace, repentance, justifying grace, justification, regeneration sanctifying grace, initial sanctification, entire sanctification, and glorification.

Missional Involvement:

For the purposes of this study, the term "missional involvement" includes and is limited to: local, national, and international mission trips scheduled through an outside missional organization or planned entirely by the local congregation; as well as local outreach opportunities that have as their primary intent the goal of providing any kind of service to or building relationships with individuals and communities that are not currently included in the membership of the church (Roxburgh 159–160).

Biographical Information

1. What is your gender?
○   Female
○   Male
* 2. What is your age?
○   18 to 24

○ 25 to 34
○ 35 to 44
○ 45 to 54
○ 55 to 64
○ 65 to 74
○ 75 or older

* 3. What is the name of the church that you are currently appointed to?

[   ]

* 4. What is the current membership of your church as reported in the most recent Annual Conference journal?

[   ]

* 5. What is the approximate average age range of your congregation?

○ 18 to 24
○ 25 to 34
○ 35 to 44
○ 45 to 54
○ 55 to 64
○ 65 to 74
○ 75 or older

* 6. What is the approximate average annual household income within your congregation?

○ $0-$24,999
○ $25,000-$49,999
○ $50,000-$74,999
○ $75,000-$99,999
○ $100,000-$124,999
○ $125,000-$149,999
○ $150,000-$174,999
○ $175,000-$199,999
○ $200,000 and up

* 7. What is the geographic distinction of your congregation?

○ Rural
○ Suburban
○ Urban

Christian Spiritual Formation

8. Have opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth been offered within your congregation in the past 24 months?

○ Yes

    ○ No

* 9. If you answered "yes" to question (8), how many opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth have been offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

    ○ 1-3

    ○ 4-6

    ○ 7 or more

* 10. How many people have participated in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth, offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

    ○ None (0)

    ○ 1-4

    ○ 5-9

    ○ 10-14

    ○ 15-20

    ○ More than 20

* 11. How would you rank you congregation's overall knowledge of Christian spiritual growth?

    ○ Much Below Average

    ○ Below Average

    ○ Average

    ○ Above Average

    ○ Much Above Average

* 12. How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of The Three Ways (Purgation, Illumination, Union)?

    ○ Much Below Average

    ○ Below Average

    ○ Average

    ○ Above Average

    ○ Much Above Average

* 13. How would you rank your congregation's overall knowledge of the Wesleyan ordo salutis (Justification, Sanctification, Glorification)?

    ○ Much Below Average

    ○ Below Average

    ○ Average

    ○ Above Average

    ○ Much Above Average

* 14. How would you rate your congregation's enthusiasm for instruction in Christian spiritual growth?

    ○ Not Enthusiastic

○ Somewhat Enthusiastic

○ Very Enthusiastic

* 15. Which of the following spiritual disciplines (works of piety) are regularly practiced as organized practices within the life of your congregation?

☐ Private Prayer

☐ Reading the Bible

☐ Devotional Reading

☐ Bible Study (offered by the church)

☐ Journal Writing

☐ Acts of Charity

☐ Tithing

☐ Group Prayer

☐ Public Worship

☐ Christian Meditation

☐ Contemplation

Missional Service

16. Have any opportunities for participation in missional involvement been offered within your congregation in the past 12 months?

○ Yes

○ No

* 17. If you answered "yes" to question (16), how many opportunities for participation in missional involvement have been offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

○ 1-3

○ 4-6

○ 7 or more

* 18. How many people have participated in opportunities for missional involvement, offered within your congregation within the past 24 months?

○ None (0)

○ 1-4

○ 5-9

○ 10-14

○ 15-20

○ More than 20

* 19. How would you rank you congregation's overall knowledge of missional practices?

○ Extremely familiar

○ Very familiar

○ Somewhat familiar

○ Not so familiar

○ Not at all familiar

* 20. How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in seeking missional opportunities?

○ Not Interested

○ Somewhat Interested

○ Very Interested

* 21. How would you rank you congregation's overall interest in building relationships with people/communities outside of your church membership?

○ Not Interested

○ Somewhat Interested

○ Very Interested

* 22. How would you rank you congregation's overall enthusiasm for missional involvement?

○ Not Enthusiastic

○ Somewhat Enthusiastic

○ Very Enthusiastic

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Christian Spiritual Growth:

For the purposes of this study, the term "Christian spiritual growth" will refer to a process that has, as its intent, the purpose of advancing toward deep, personal, and mature relationship with the Triune God. This process is to be understood within the context of the three-part movement from the Purgative Way, to the Illuminative Way, and finally into the Unitive Way. For the purposes of this study, this three-fold movement will parallel the *ordo salutis* preached and taught by John Wesley which is approached through the threefold movement from justification, to sanctification, to glorification. In a more expanded form, this would include prevenient grace, repentance, justifying grace, justification, regeneration sanctifying grace, initial sanctification, entire sanctification, and glorification.

Missional Involvement:

For the purposes of this study, the term "missional involvement" includes and is limited to: local,

national, and international mission trips scheduled through an outside missional organization or

planned entirely by the local congregation; as well as local outreach opportunities that have as

their primary intent the goal of providing any kind of service to or building relationships with

individuals and communities that are not currently included in the membership of the church

(Roxburgh 159–160).

1) What church(es) are you currently appointed to?
2) What do you believe to be the most formative factors that contribute to congregational participation in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth?
3) What do you believe to be the most important outcomes of participating in opportunities for instruction in Christian spiritual growth?
4) What do you believe to be the most formative factors that contribute to congregational participation in missional involvement?
5) What do you believe to be the most important outcomes of participation in missional involvement?
6) Do you believe that there is a relationship between instruction in Christian spiritual growth and participation in missional involvement? Why or why not?

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