

ABSTRACT

CONSULTING FOR CHURCH HEALTH: A LOOK AT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DAVID VAUGHN CONSULTING FOR INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

by

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Outside of the family unit, the Lord's church is the most important spiritual organization in human history. The importance of the health of the church cannot be overstated as she has a mission vital to the betterment of mankind, the spiritual well-being of people, and the drawing together of people from all walks of life around one eternal purpose. Focusing on improving the health of such an organization is vital.

This study focused on finding out if the system of evaluation and subsequent coaching of the D. Vaughn Consulting team is improving the primary principles that lead to a healthy Independent Christian Church. There are nearly 8,000 Independent Christian Churches in the United States. These churches are a part of a loosely defined grouping of churches that maintain a fierce independence and resistance to denominational oversight. These churches identify as a part of what has been known as the Restoration Movement and are commonly called Christian Churches or Churches of Christ.

This study found that the D. Vaughn Consulting process was able to increase the awareness of the principles and practices that can lead to a healthier church. It also discovered that the perception of health can be raised in specific areas that are targeted for improvement by this process. Finally, this study shows that the consulting process can

have an overall positive impact on the leadership of a congregation, namely its Lead Minister or Senior Pastor, and the church's eldership.

**CONSULTING FOR CHURCH HEALTH:
A LOOK AT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DAVID VAUGHN CONSULTING FOR
INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
CHAPTER 1 NATURE OF THE PROJECT	1
Overview of the Chapter	1
Personal Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Purpose of the Project	5
Research Questions	5
Research Question #1	6
Research Question #2	6
Research Question #3	6
Rationale for the Project	6
Definition of Key Terms	8
Delimitations	9
Review of Relevant Literature	10
Research Methodology	11
Type of Research	12
Participants	12
Instrumentation	13
Data Collection	14
Data Analysis	15

Generalizability	15
Project Overview	16
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT	17
Overview of the Chapter	17
Biblical Foundations	17
The Early Church	19
The Restoration Movement	30
David Vaughn Consulting	53
The Seven Systems	56
Summary of Literature	110
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT	113
Overview of the Chapter	113
Nature and Purpose of the Project	113
Research Questions	113
Research Question #1	114
Research Question #2	115
Research Question #3	117
Ministry Context	118
Participants	119
Criteria for Selection	119
Description of Participants	120
Ethical Considerations	120
Instrumentation	121

Reliability & Validity of Project Design	123
Data Collection	124
Data Analysis	125
CHAPTER 4 EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT	127
Overview of the Chapter	127
Participants	127
Research Question #1: Description of Evidence	130
Research Question #2: Description of Evidence	132
Research Question #3: Description of Evidence	133
Summary of Major Findings	136
CHAPTER 5 LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT	137
Overview of the Chapter	137
Major Findings	137
First Finding	137
Second Finding	140
Third Finding	143
Ministry Implications of the Findings	146
Limitations of the Study	148
Unexpected Observations	150
Recommendations	150
Postscript	151
APPENDIXES	
A. Congregational Survey	153

B. Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey	160
C. Sample Congregational Letter	169
WORKS CITED	172

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 4.1. Qualifying Churches	128
Table 4.2. Congregational Survey Participation	129
Table 4.3. Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey	129
Table 4.4. Church Survey Results for Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Above Average to Outstanding Performance	131
Table 4.5. Identified As Areas of Concern on Initial Congregational Survey	132
Table 4.6. Initial Congregational Survey Areas Identified as Trending Towards Concern	133
Table 4.7. Performance Comparison of Congregational Survey for Most Affected Areas	134
Table 4.8. Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey Response to: “What level of impact do you feel the DVC Process had on the leadership of the Elders?”	135
Table 4.9. Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey Response to: “What level of impact do you feel the DVC Process had on your leadership as the Senior Minister?”	135

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides the framework for investigating health within an Independent Christian Church that has utilized the D. Vaughn Consulting group to assist their congregation towards becoming healthier. The researcher provides information concerning the genesis of this study, as well as the methodology used by D. Vaughn Consulting to determine health within a congregation. Included in this overview are introductions to research methods used by D. Vaughn Consulting to interact with congregations across their entire spectrum, from paid staff and volunteer leaders and congregational members. This chapter concludes with discussion concerning the implications of this study for churches within the Independent Christian Church or Restoration Movement.

Personal Introduction

I have a passion and fire for the church. I love the way a church works, and the way in which a leader can watch others find their ministry opportunities and then thrive in those ministry roles. I love the way a vision can set people on fire, and the way that a little success along the way to accomplishing that vision can fuel more vision and more success. However, I am frustrated at times with how to know if the church is actually being effective. How can one measure the effectiveness of an organization whose main purpose is seen, not in numbers but in growth; not in people, but in impact; not in cash but in stewardship; not in volume, intensity, and rhythm or music, but in participation in worship? How can one measure effectiveness, health, and growth within an organization

that is 100% spiritual in nature, yet functions in a world that needs data-driven results to mark success, health, and effectiveness? This project, and my journey, are born out of these frustrations.

In September of 2000 I was added to the staff of the Church of Christ at Mountain View (Winchester, VA) as their youth minister. What transpired over the next twelve months was almost magical. The church surged in growth in the twelve-month period. Average attendance rose from 400 people to 600 people on Sunday morning. It seemed as if everything we were doing was in line with the Holy Spirit, and we added a second morning service to accommodate the growth.

It would take almost two years before I recognized a significant issue: while over a two-year period we had added more than 140 new members to our church, average attendance remained stagnant. As I began to discuss this in our leadership meetings, we strategized potential fixes that would allow us to retain our older members while assimilating new members into the body of Christ. However, no matter what strategies we changed, we were still seeing as many people leaving as we had new members coming. This recognition of the data would spark a fire in me to want to know what we could do differently.

Two key events would happen during this time that would change my directional thinking concerning the church. First, I read a book by Kennon Callahan entitled, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (1983). This book allowed me to think through strategic long range planning with an ability to achieve measurable success. Second, I became friends with one of our new additions to the church. He was a retired systems management guru from the DuPont Company named Tom Palmitory. Tom and I had a few conversations,

and it appeared that we had much in common in the way we thought concerning the church as an organization. So, I invited Tom to breakfast and what transpired over those two hours left me puzzled, excited, and eventually angry.

Our conversation began with the normal cordial things that men talk about. However, with one statement and one question I opened a window that could not be shut. The statement was loaded with all the buzzwords that I knew about leadership: “we seem lost as a church as if we have no purpose.” And the question seemed simple enough: “what do I need to do to drive the purpose of our church?” Tom’s response was a two-hour long tutorial on how to manage systems within systems, how to build a purpose statement, and how to get people moving in the same direction.

I soon realized I needed to be the change agent within our church that could lead to a revitalized fire for discipleship and evangelism. I was convinced that everyone in our leadership team would gravitate towards this new-found fire. I was convinced that once, it would be clear that what we were struggling with was not so much our purpose as it was the way in which we went about doing the business of a multi-ministry approach. I was convinced they were ready, and I was convinced that I was ready. I was wrong about the others, and, most importantly, wrong about myself. What I found was frustration and rejection and denial. I became discouraged and eventually left the congregation.

In my next ministry I began to try to establish some new ideas and new ways of leading. We implemented some community service projects, mission trips, and new classes. Once again I took a stab at vision casting, and once again I failed. Driven by frustration and failure I retreated to an entirely new ministry at Central Christian College of the Bible, Moberly, MO (CCCB).

While working at CCCB my family and I attended Timberlake Christian Church. It would be there that I discovered many of the programming ideas I had proposed and unsuccessfully implemented in my last ministry were thriving within the ministry of Timberlake. This did not bring joy to my life, but further frustration. I was frustrated that a strategy could work in one ministry context and fail in another.

Out of this frustration and confusion my mind has gravitated with curiosity to understand why churches can use similar strategies and receive vastly different results. It is this curiosity that has driven this study.

Statement of the Problem

According to the World Christian Database, the Christian population in the United States will not expand at the same rate as the population of the United States (World Christian Database 19-22). The percentage of Christians in the US will continue to decline, and with that decline there will also be a decline in churches. It is imperative for the church in the United States to pursue a healthier existence, focusing on the fulfilling of the Great Commission, producing disciples that will in turn produce disciples, even if the communities in which they are ministering show a decline in the acceptance of the Gospel message.

This study is focused on finding if the system of evaluation and subsequent coaching of the D. Vaughn Consulting (DVC) team is improving the primary principles that lead to healthy Independent Christian Churches. The consultation process is primarily concerned with helping churches focus on their mission by moving them towards “the ability for the church to function naturally without the hindrances of any internal problems” (Macchia 47). It is imperative for these churches to maintain healthy

ministry functions so that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ might maintain her influence within a fallen world. This material is designed so that Independent Christian Churches can use this study and its findings to help them move beyond their current situation and improve their impact for the Kingdom of God.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the performance of the D. Vaughn Consulting firm as they apply their Seven Systems Church Health approach within the unique structure of their Independent Christian Church clientele.

Research Questions

Church health is vital for the work of the church. As leaders within the church work to perform ministry in their local context it is important for them to have a sense of success or accomplishment for the overall purpose of their congregation. Finding a means of identifying that success can be accomplished through carefully crafted, thoughtful research methods. Consideration must be given as to what kind of scorecard can be used to determine “healthy” within an independent Christian church. Health could be determined simply by activities, programs, expenses, classes, discipleship efforts, and form of and practice of polity, or there may be a combination of other factors that play a role in overall health. The D. Vaughn Consulting team uses the Seven Systems Church Health approach to evaluate church health and to coach churches towards greater health. This study will measure the effectiveness of their coaching model within the framework of their seven systems as applied within the Independent Christian Churches who, once their contract with D. Vaughn Consulting had been completed, were willing to take a follow-up survey once their contract with D. Vaughn Consulting had been completed,

along with a Leadership Survey taken by the Lead Minister or Senior Pastor for those congregations.

Research Question #1

What are the earmarks of a healthy church using the DVC metrics?

The D. Vaughn Consulting Congregational Survey is used to ascertain expectations of the congregation versus the performance of the congregation.

Research Question #2

What are the earmarks of an unhealthy church using the DVC metrics?

The D. Vaughn Consulting Congregational Survey is used to ascertain expectations of the congregation versus the performance of the congregation.

Research Question #3

What are the areas being most and least affected by the DVC team?

Analysis will be made between a pre-consultation survey and a post-consultation survey to assess the expectations of the congregation versus the performance of the congregation after the application of the Seven Systems Health System.

Rationale for the Project

Measuring Church health is a difficult task. Bob Russell says, “God doesn’t define success in the same terms that we do. Although we rejoice over numerical growth, we know that God doesn’t measure success in terms of attendance, offerings, or size of buildings. He measures effectiveness in terms of faithfulness to His word, conformity to Jesus Christ, and ministry to those in need” (8). However, there needs to be some way in which to measure how churches are doing, especially in terms of whether a church’s leadership can see signs of health or sickness within the local church body.

First, this study is important because God loves His church, and for His church to continue to prosper, she needs to be healthy. Healthy churches make for healthy disciples, who will in turn continue to make healthy disciples of Jesus. This study will help to provide a tangible matrix for church health for churches whose history and uniqueness make them easy to overlook.

Second, this study is important for the Independent Christian Church movement as little research has been undertaken that focuses specifically on Independent Christian Churches. These churches often find themselves isolated from one another and from other churches within their own communities. This study will help connect churches with similar beliefs and similar demographic characteristics. This study will give these churches, commonly known for their independence from denominational hierarchy, a means to evaluate material specifically tailored towards their own theological convictions concerning independence.

Third, this study is important for the communities that are being served by these churches. Every community, regardless of its size, can reap the benefits of healthy churches. As healthy churches minister to their communities, the communities in turn are able to see the love of Christ in action. These churches provide stable environments in which to introduce people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and where new converts can grow in their faith.

Fourth, healthy churches are needed for healthy families to grow. Churches are an incubator for families to mature spiritually. In the non-urban environment, churches have challenges for family health that are not the same as their urban counterparts might face.

This study could help these churches determine strategies for growing their outreach and discipleship specifically for family health.

Finally, the D. Vaughn Consulting program can be a valuable tool in helping Independent Christian Churches find an avenue through which their health can be measured and unhealthy tendencies can be highlighted. This coaching approach can help move these churches towards a system of health for the future.

Definition of Key Terms

Independent Christian Church: Churches that have no ecclesiastical conference or denominational hierarchical infrastructure.

Restoration Movement: A religious movement begun on the American frontier in the early 19th century that pushed for unity of all believers under the authority of Scripture, not under the authority of the church. The aim of this movement was to return to the New Testament as its only rule of practice. Sometimes referred to as the Stone-Campbell movement after two early leaders (Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone). This movement is divided into three broad movements:

The Disciples of Christ: A more ecumenical collection of churches whose purpose is to bring unity of all believers.

Christian Churches: Distinguished from the Disciples of Christ by their desire to maintain independence as a church; this group is known to have divided from the Disciples in the middle of the 20th Century.

Church of Christ: Formally recognized in 1906, these churches moved to establish their own identity as independent churches that do not use a mechanical instrument in their worship gatherings.

Church Health: The ability for the church to function naturally without the hindrances of any internal problems (Macchia).

Seven Systems Church Health: A system for measuring the health of the church in seven distinct systems: church health systems, the evangelism system, the worship service system, the connection system, the volunteer system, the giving (stewardship) system, and the facility/elder/staff support systems.

Delimitations

For this project the researcher chose to work only with Independent Christian Churches. These churches were selected for participation based solely on their commitment to the D. Vaughn Consulting process in which their leadership structures, activity within the congregation, and overall ministry effectiveness, would be evaluated.

Other churches were excluded from this study based on their denominational affiliation. Independent Christian Churches have a unique “non-connectedness” that may have certain advantages and disadvantages that churches with a more structured denominational cohesiveness may not face. Due to those factors, only churches without denominational headquarters (i.e. district, state, national or international governing bodies) and those who ascribe to a certain doctrinal confession which are similar to one another would be included.

Finally, Independent Christian Churches that have not committed to the D. Vaughn Consulting team and their coaching are excluded from this study.

Review of Relevant Literature

In this research project, the author used a mixture of voices to frame the discussion around church health and the effectiveness of D. Vaughn Consulting. Those

voices come from popular authors, effective leaders within the Independent Christian Church movement, and researched dissertations into the subject of church health and leadership. Thomas Rainer with work with Lifeway Christian Resources is designed to be of help to churches of all sizes, from all denominational backgrounds, and across almost all demographic settings. Several popular authors contributed heavily to this study on the issues of discipleship within the local church include Francis Chan, Dan Spader, and Greg Ogden. In the area of church leadership, the works of Lyn Anderson, Alexander Strauch, and Gene Getz are major contributors to this study.

This author relied heavily upon the works of Bob Russell, a leading voice for leadership within the Independent Christian Church community for the last half-century. Russell's leadership in Louisville, KY over a 30-plus-year ministry was instrumental in leading to one of the largest Christian churches in North America (Southeast Christian Church). Russell's writing, speaking, and mentoring within the Independent Christian Church movement has led to many leaders pressing on in the cause of the church and bringing millions into the kingdom through his influence.

This work is also based on many academic sources such as dissertations on church health and historical works concerning the Restoration Movement. Among the historical voices contributing to this study are James DeForest Murch, whose deep dive into the history of the Restoration Movement, provides much of the backdrop for the modern movement. Author Thomas W. Phillips also contributes greatly to the understanding of the Restoration Movement and several of the "mini-movements" that it has spurred. Providing the greater historical context for the Restoration Movement within

the overall context of Christendom, are the voices of church history scholars such as Everett Ferguson, Kenneth Scott Latourette, and Phillip Schaff.

Biblical work on theological and practical church leadership and health come from many commentators, largely based on the book of Acts. Scholars such as Gareth Reese, Donald Nash, and F. F. Bruce provide the historical and theological underpinnings for the modern church. Their work of expounding on the church as she is revealed in Scripture has provided the Biblical foundation for much of the restoration movement, as well as giving a foundation for churches to rest their convictions upon.

Research Methodology

The researcher contacted D. Vaughn Consulting concerning data collected and analyzed in the normal process of their church consultation work with Independent Christian Churches. The researcher will use data collected by D. Vaughn Consulting through a pre-consultation Seven Systems Church Health congregational survey. The researcher will also analyze the data collected by D. Vaughn Consulting through a post-consultation Seven Systems Church Health congregational survey, also collected by D. Vaughn Consulting. The researcher will administer a follow-up survey with the Lead Minister or Senior Pastor of the congregations that contracted D. Vaughn Consulting to ascertain their assessment of the D. Vaughn Consulting experience. The researcher will analyze the data collected in the pre-consultation and post-consultation surveys, as well as the Lead Minister Senior Pastor survey for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of the consultation work performed by D. Vaughn Consulting in the Seven Systems Church Health process they use to help lead Independent Christian Churches towards a great sense of health.

Type of Research

This study was designed to be a post-intervention study. Research gleaned through this study can provide constructive feedback to D. Vaughn Consulting as well as a basis for future structures and health within a church. However, there was no direct action taken or recommendations made to the churches involved in this study. The researcher used a mixed design to glean information. Congregational surveys taken before D. Vaughn Consulting began the coaching process are compared with congregational surveys taken after the consulting team had finished their contract with each congregation. A statistical analysis was used to gather quantitative data for the pre-consulting and post-consulting surveys. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with D. Vaughn Consulting staff as well as willing church leaders who have been through the coaching system.

Participants

The researcher contacted DVC to help identify Independent Christian Churches that had participated in their coaching system. DVC subsequently contacted those churches to identify which would be willing to do follow-up surveys to help them identify areas in which DVC was helping Independent Christian Churches move closer towards church health.

Churches for this study were selected based on the following criteria. First, the leadership of the church would identify the church as being a part of the Restoration Movement (or Stone Campbell Movement). This would mean they would adhere to doctrinal positions that would be similar to one another. They would identify themselves as independent of denominational affiliation, have established their own form of self-

government utilizing Biblical models for leadership, participate in weekly communion, and practice baptism by immersion. Second, these churches would need to have been through the entire consulting process with DVC.

Instrumentation

In this study there were two means of instrumentation used. A Congregational Survey was administered by DVC utilizing their Seven Systems Church Health survey to assess the congregation's expectation and current view of competency of the seven systems analyzed by DVC prior to the consulting work taking place. Second, DVC administered this same survey after their consulting work had been completed. Finally, statistical information comparing the pre-consultation work with the post-consultation work was assessed for the purpose of measuring effectiveness of the consulting work within each of the seven areas being measured.

Research Question 1 (What are the earmarks of a healthy church using the DVC metrics?) will be answered using data gleaned from the Seven Systems Church Health congregational survey. Research Question 2 (What are the earmarks of an unhealthy church using the DVC metrics?) will be answered using data gleaned from the Seven Systems Church Health congregational survey. Research Question 3 (What are the areas being most and least affected by the DVC team?) will be answered by cross-referencing data gleaned in answering Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 with the answers submitted in the follow-up Seven Systems Church Health congregational survey post-consultation provided by DVC as well as the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey administered by the researcher.

Data Collection

The researcher contacted DVC and received access to the data they had collected concerning Independent Christian Churches with whom they have consulted over the last five years. This data includes pre-intervention as well as post-intervention survey work using the same tool known as the Seven Systems Church Health congregational survey. All data was collected by DVC and not the researcher. Each congregation that has been analyzed was contacted independent of the researcher, and data was collected by DVC prior to the analysis performed by the researcher. In conjunction with the data collected there was an interview conducted by the researcher with David Vaughn, the founder and president of DVC. Mr. Vaughn was contacted by the researcher and arranged a time for the researcher to conduct the interview and gain access to surveys and data analysis. The researcher traveled to DVC and conducted the interview, while the congregational survey was dispensed using an online format through DVC.

In addition to the data collected by DVC, the researcher administered the Lead Minister or Senior Pastor survey tool by partnering with DVC to distribute an online survey tool to collect follow-up information concerning the DVC consultation experience. This data was collected by the researcher, with contacts given by DVC and individual results hidden from DVC. The collective results were shared with DVC while maintaining anonymity for the Lead Minister or Senior Pastor who completed the survey.

Data Analysis

In the demographic section of the congregational survey there is a place to identify the role of the respondent in connection to the congregation. The survey itself measures the level of importance a category has with a respondent and the level of performance the respondent believes the congregation is attaining. This research will

analyze the pre-intervention survey results based on expectations and performance with congregational members and their leaders and compare those results with the results of the post-intervention surveys with congregational members and their leaders. These results will be analyzed according to the seven systems measured by DVC and make a determination as to what areas were most and least affected by the DVC intervention.

Generalizability

This study was designed to provide a general summarization of the effectiveness of the consultation work performed by DVC on Independent Christian Churches. This study can provide a matrix through which church health could be determined and coached for a segment of churches that are often underserved. Therefore, churches in similar non-denominational or independent situations can glean material from this project and apply it to their own context. It will provide them with a means through which they can see success or a lack thereof in order to give them tools through which corrections can be made to put them on a path towards overall church health.

Project Overview

This project evaluates the effectiveness of the Seven Systems Church Health approach as applied by the D. Vaughn Consulting firm within the unique structure of the Independent Christian Church. Chapter Two discussed the most influential authors and practitioners in the field of church growth and development of leaders, as well as the unique challenges that might be found within Independent Christian Churches, the Seven Systems Church Health approach as applied by the D. Vaughn Consulting, and overall church health. Chapter Three outlines the research methods used to investigate DVC and to determine their effectiveness within each of the seven system as applied to

Independent Christian Churches. Chapter Four analyzes the findings that emerged from the pre-consultation and post-consultation work of DVC. Chapter Five outlines the study's major findings with implications for each discovery in hopes that DVC can improve their effectiveness in coaching other churches in similar situations through the Seven Systems Church Health coaching system. It is the hope of this researcher that these findings can lead to a pathway towards Independent Christian Churches becoming healthier.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will explore the Biblical, historical, and theological foundations for the church. It starts with the defining principles of the church as given by Jesus in the Gospels and continues through the carrying out of those principles by His apostles throughout the book of Acts. As the church progressed and became further organized beyond the local level denominational alliances began to arise around strong personalities or doctrinal disagreements. This chapter also explores the Biblical, historical, and theological foundations for the Restoration movement: a movement whose origins are steeped in bringing simplicity back to the local church by returning to the Scriptures as the solitary basis for its faith and practices.

This chapter will give definition to DVC, as well as define and review relevant literature concerning the Seven Systems of church health as defined and used by DVC. In the process of discussing the Seven Systems, this chapter will further define the concept of church health and explain the process used to evaluate the effectiveness of the DVC system as it is applied within the context of participating Independent Christian Churches.

Biblical Foundations

James DeForest Murch opens his classic book on the church thus: “When Christ announced His intention to establish His church (Matthew 16:18), He certainly intimated His intention to preserve and perpetuate it in all its pristine purity and power. This He has done, as history abundantly attests” (9). The point that Murch is attesting to, and that is

abundantly clear in the Scriptures, is that God cares deeply for His church. Jesus, having been sacrificed, buried, and raised to life and then presenting Himself alive over a 40-day period, set about to establish His church. “The ascension of Christ to heaven was followed 10 days afterwards by the descent of the Holy Spirit on earth and the birth of the Christian church” (Schaff, 225). From that first Pentecost celebration of the Church (see Acts 2), the church has been a constant throughout the ages. No matter the continent, language, century, or peoples, the church of Jesus Christ has maintained steadily on the pages of history. It is not the institution of the church or the people of the church that leaves their mark on the pages of history, but the movements and networks of the church have impacted life, culture, history, philosophy, and countless movements throughout the last two-thousand years. As Os Guinness observes, “ideas spread best through networks, rather than through either individuals or institutions. Christians of all traditions have a far better record here, and the rollcall of influential Christian networks is illustrious—the 12 apostles, the Benedictines and the many influential Catholic orders respond, the white horse in Cambridge, the Moravians and their hundred year prayer meeting, the cell groups of John Wesley, the Clapham Circle of William Wilberforce, the Inklings discussing their ideas at Oxford’s tiny pub The Eagle and Child, and so on” (100).

The church also has great resiliency with which it has survived and marched forward, even when facing opposition from governments, cults, or within. Church historian Bruce Shelly aptly describes the church’s resilient nature:

Time and again the church has discovered some unseen Power turning aside a threat to its existence or transforming a crisis into an opportunity for growth. Torrid persecutions served to purge the household of faith. Heresy’s spread

clarified the church's basic beliefs. And the sudden appearance of barbarian hordes opened doors to further expansion. This ability to face new challenges and to tap the sources of renewal is one of the secrets of Christianity's growth (518).

The Early Church

The unity of the early church. The first church began “on the seventh Sunday after the resurrection of Christ” (65) writes Sheldon as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts. Specifically, in Acts 2 a group of followers first accepts the message that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (29-41). They quickly adopted practices that are based in Jewish practices (42-47). Sheldon writes, “As the child is born into certain unavoidable dependence on established conditions, so was it with Christianity” (66). Everett Ferguson notes, “There was initially no radical break with Jewish institutions. The early Jerusalem church frequented the temple and observed Jewish customs. It constituted a ‘synagogue’ with some distinctive rites and beliefs, but there were other such groups in the broad spectrum of Judaism” (34).

Within this church there appears to be three broad groups of believers: those who followed Jesus throughout most of His Galilean ministry and were led mostly by the Apostles; those who converted from Judaism and had much in common with James, the brother of Jesus who would become a powerful voice in the Jerusalem church; and those of the Greek Diaspora and the ones who would show sympathy for them with appeared to gravitate towards the leadership of Stephen (Ferguson 34). The division that arises from the 6th chapter of Acts would indicate that even within this dispute there is a commonality

of purpose within the Jerusalem church and a love and care for unity that would prevail. In this matter the Apostles had been able to maintain their focus on the importance of Scripture and delegate the common needs of the church to those that could carry it out with an upright diligence. In this moment, as early as it is in the development of the church, the Apostles are the “highest authority, and starting-point from which all subordinate authority was derived” (Sheldon 119).

Upon the death of Stephen, those following his leadership appear to disperse (see Acts 8). This would leave two factions within the Jerusalem church. The unity of the group that is left in Jerusalem is seen in the Jerusalem Council that meets and decides how the church will respond to the mass conversion of the Gentiles to the Christian faith and whether or not they would need to convert to Judaism before becoming Christians (Acts 15:1-2; 4-5). In this council of leadership, and their response, all three original groups will be observed by Luke as he writes. First, Peter responds to the question (6-11); next Paul and Barnabas, perhaps assuming the role of Stephen and speaking for the voice of those who had been scattered (12); and, finally, James, the voice of “the most conservative Jewish Christians” (Ferguson 35), would speak (13-21). The influence of James, and perhaps the Jewish Christian block of the church, is seen in the letter written to these new Christians. The instructions in the letter sent to these churches (23-29) retains much of the words of the speech James gives to the council of elders and apostles in Jerusalem (20-21). The outcome of this council is not some form of ecclesiastical structure, but a unity of faith throughout this fledgling kingdom (31). This outcome would serve as a slow and continued withdrawal from the Jewish faith that had given birth to the Christian faith (Sheldon 67).

The controversy over Gentile conversion did not stop with the council at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas decided to make Antioch a basis for their ministry outreach to the Gentiles (see Acts 15:35), and while in Antioch Paul confronted the Apostle Peter about his practice of alienating Gentile converts based on dietary laws that were present in the Law of Moses (Gal. 2:11-14). What emerges from this confrontation is not a schism but an acknowledgment of Paul's authority by Peter (2 Pt. 3:15-18) and a freedom of faith (see Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:15-21) that allows for an explosion of evangelism within the Gentile community.

The common theme throughout this earliest form of the church was that of unity. This would not be a unity that would be superficial in nature but one of depth of substance, breadth of care for one another, and above all an appeal to love for the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). With each struggle the church came against, there appears to be an appeal to the unity of the believers for the sake of Christ (see John 17:20-23). I am certain that Paul proclaimed a strong message of unity to the church and seems to give a platform from which unity can be achieved (Eph. 4:1-5). These seven unified doctrines would appear to be all the early church would need to maintain unity. It would take nearly 300 years before another such document would arise and appeal for a uniformity of doctrine but would ultimately bring a larger platform for division.

Unity within the church of the first century seemed to revolve easily around doctrine and less around practices within the church. The doctrinal consistency was based in large part to the consistency of the apostolic preaching and teaching. According to Philip Schaff, "The substance of all apostolic teaching is the witness of Christ, the gospel, and the free message of divine love and salvation, which appeared in the person of Christ,

was secured in mankind by his work, gradually realized in the kingdom of God on earth, and will be completed with the second coming of Christ in glory” (513). Interestingly, many of these important elements of faith are described in the Apostle Creed, which appears to be familiar with many of the church fathers as early as 390 AD (Ferguson, Schaff, Sheldon). The Creed itself has been recognized by many denominations throughout history, including the Catholic Church, Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and many forms of congregationalist. It does not appear that the Creed was used as a means of division within the church. It was merely commonly held beliefs concerning the Christian faith.

Scholars such as Everett Ferguson (1933), Henry Sheldon (1895), and Kenneth Latourette (1953) seem to agree to there being no uniformity for faith and practice within the early church. As the church expanded from a regional Jewish sect to a world faith, it evolved practices that fit local traditions or rituals without violating “a common faith in Jesus and a common core of apostolic teachings that would set the limits for diversity” (Ferguson, 43). This diversity would be seen in some of Paul’s writings to the early church where controversy over celebrations had arisen (see Romans 14). The diversity of celebration had arisen because the church, less than a generation removed from the resurrection of Jesus, was now predominately Gentile in nature (Latourette, 75) and would be established as its own formal faith apart from its Jewish roots. However, with this new faith and ever-expanding diversity of practice, some historians have found a level of common ground within the early church. Ferguson writes, “certain common practices served as uniting factors from quite early times; practices such as baptism, the

Lord's Supper, Sunday assemblies, and a moral emphasis; entrance in the Christian community required faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and baptism in His name" (43).

With these common practices in place, the early church was able to be effective in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and emphasize the unity of the body of believers. They kept their celebrations simple and yet regionally diverse. Ferguson says, "the special meeting of the Christians (occurring on the Lord's day or first day of the week to mark the resurrection of Jesus) included the observance of the Lord's supper, prayer, singing, reading from the Scriptures, and a message of instructions or exhortations" (43).

Doctrinal division within the Apostolic Church. While the church, under the leadership of the Apostles, was continuing to grow and be effective in spreading the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire, there arose from within certain teachings that not only threatened the unity of the church but also threatened the very foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. Schaff points out that there were three basic forms of doctrinal heresy within the apostolic age and continuing throughout the preceding centuries in varying degrees (565-567). First is the "Judaizing tendency of the early church." This heresy in various forms provided that Christianity was simply a newer or improved version of the Jewish faith. People who believed this saw Jesus as another Moses, which completely stripped him of deity. Counterarguments to this false teaching can be found in the books of Philippians, Galatians, and Hebrews. The second heresy was the opposite of the first in that many taught a "Paganizing" Christianity. This heresy is more recognized as Gnosticism with basic tenants that taught that all matter was bad, that God is virtually unknowable, and that sin does not really exist, only ignorance. The Apostle Paul would address this heresy in letters to the Colossian church and to the evangelists Timothy and

Titus. The third heresy was “Syncretistic” bringing either a pagan form of Judaism or a more “Gnostic Ebionism.” They believed in the Messianic character of Jesus but denied his divinity and supernatural origin; observed all the Jewish rites, such as circumcision and the seventh-day Sabbath; and used a gospel according to Matthew written in Hebrew or Aramaic, while rejecting the writings of Paul as those of an apostate (Kohler, Kaufmann 376). Generally speaking, both were extremes of a “shadowy mysticism, or heathenistic Judaism” (Schaff 567). The common thread throughout each of these heresies was to deny the central truth of the Gospel as “the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of the world” (Schaff 89).

To combat these heresies the Apostles and leaders within the first century began to write letters to churches. These letters would be passed from church to church, beginning with the church to which it had been specifically written, copied many times, and sent on to other churches. While it would be impossible to know the exact number of letters written, more letters were written than were preserved in the New Testament. However, every epistle in the New Testament canon was written for the purpose of addressing some need within the church. These letters written during this period of time, for the specific purpose of addressing the most pressing doctrinal needs of the day, are what is compiled in the New Testament. For the last 2000 years the church has held these writings with varied degrees of significance. Many, more-orthodox churches hold these writings to be sacred, while others value them with less significance.

Post-Apostolic church. The last third of the first century and all of the second century are often described as “tunnel periods” for the church (Ferguson 46). Many historical factors play a role in the lack of understanding of this period of the church. By

the mid to late 60s the most influential leaders in the Christian faith had been eliminated. James, the half-brother of Jesus, and the Apostles Peter and Paul had all been martyred for the faith. Jerusalem had been under attack by the Roman army from 66-70, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Church historian, Eusebius (Schaff 177-179) claims there were 16 bishops (after the model of James who would be seen as the chief leader among the other leaders) of the Jerusalem church from the time of the death of James until the time just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, the last of which was Marcus, the first Gentile to hold such a lofty position in the Jerusalem church. The constant threat of war and rumors of wars to come would lead the church away from the city for the first time since its founding at Pentecost nearly 4 decades earlier (see Matthew 24:4-26). The church would reemerge in Jerusalem post 70AD but never again to be the predominate factor for Christian literature.

As the Jerusalem church falters in its influence, the Gentile Christian movement flourishes in the post-apostolic age. Henry Sheldon writes, “With the freshness and vigor of divine youth Christianity made its way in the world. Thus, Christianity in the first three centuries penetrated into every corner of the Roman Empire, and in some directions passed beyond its bounds” (129-133). With its expansive influence the church will become a producer of an abundance of literature (Ferguson 49). This literature varies from addressing certain heresy that have arisen (much like with the apostolic epistles) to addressing church life as a whole (an example of this would be the Didache, a manual for the early church that describes moral teachings, the sacraments and organization of the church, and eschatological concerns). With the expansive writing and the massive growth of the church, prominent voices began to arise that would contradict each other in matters

of faith, specifically concerning the deity of Jesus. These divisions would lead to the study of theology, not a new concept for Jewish Christians, but certainly a new and controversial approach for the early church.

The chief concern within the early church was the theological fight over the deity of Jesus, known more precisely as Christology. Jack Cottrell writes, “From the very beginning of the Christian era it was readily understood that Jesus was more than just an ordinary human being, but it took a couple of centuries for the early Christians to identify the unacceptable ways of explaining his divine nature” (241-244). Cottrell’s point concerning “unacceptable ways of explaining” points to the difficulty the early church has in even identifying the fine theological lines that would emerge. Vanhoozer condenses the mass amount of literature on the topic to three simple essentials when it comes to Christology: “Jesus Christ is fully human but also the fully divine Son of God, and these two natures are united in one ‘person’ (the “hypostatic union”), though their properties remain appropriately distinct” (366).

The theological debate over how to explain Jesus as Divine still rages today. However, prior to 325 AD there appear to be several controversial positions on the issue of divinity. The most prominent of these explanations would become known as Ebionism, Docetism, and Arianism. Ebionism derives its name from the early Judaizing movement during the apostolic age (Erickson 711), which taught that God adopted Jesus because of his exceptional character (Cottrell 241, Erickson 747-748, Vanhoozer 364). Docetism, a Gnostic doctrine in nature, would teach that Jesus only appeared to be a man and that the “Christ” descended on the man Jesus (purely the son of Joseph and Mary) at his baptism, and could “only have seemed to have had a real body” (F.F. Bruce 413). Finally,

Arianism, named after Arius a popular Alexandrian theologian from the mid-3rd to mid-4th century, taught that only God the Father could be the “uncreated” being and therefore Jesus, or in his pre-existent form the Logos, would have been the first order of all creation, but a creation none-the-less (Cottrell, Vanhoozer, Erickson). It would be the teaching and popularity of Arianism that would force the church to the Council of Nicea in 325 AD (Erickson 715).

Council of Nicaea 325 AD. Many factors would lead to the calling of the first ecumenical council of the church in 325 at the city of Nicea in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Political and theological pressure would be a key component in the desire of the Emperor Constantine to convene and subsequently preside over the opening ceremonies, as well as be an active participant in the discussions of the theologians (Latourette, Ferguson, Sheldon). Despite the fact that he was not permitted to vote in the final decisions.

The council itself must be seen in the context of the theological friction within the church due to the Arius controversy. It is this theological pressure that was bringing political pressure to bear on Constantine. He had struggled to bring the empire under his control and had recently converted to the Christian faith. His desire would be to see unity within the largest organization within the empire, the Catholic Church, which at this time had spread even beyond the empire’s borders.

Henry Sheldon writes, “About the year 320, his (Arius) peculiar views had attracted sufficient attention to cause the summoning of a council of Egyptian and Libyan bishops, by which he and his followers were excommunicated”(421). Constantine, aware of these divisions, attempted to reconcile the principle parties by writing a letter to

Alexander and Arius “calling on them to compose their differences and forgive each other” (Latourette 153). When this attempt failed, Constantine was left with no recourse but to call a general council of the church to settle the matter.

In May of 325, an estimated 300 Bishops from the church would convene, at the expense of the Roman Empire (Sheldon, Latourette). At issue primarily would be the controversy over Arius and his followers, although many other lesser issues would be discussed and voted on while the month-long assembly was in session. Nearly a dozen pressing issues would be addressed: the time of the observance of Easter; the adoption of several canons for administration and discipline of the church; the ordination of bishops; treatment for those who had fallen away from the church under persecution; protocol for uniform excommunication, and improving the morals of the clergy (Latourette 156-157).

However, it would be the Arian controversy that would garner the bulk of the debate. Sheldon (424) describes the three principal parties of the council. First there were those that were sympathetic to Arius (a “small minority” of the council). Second the “semi-Arians” who would range in theological positions from very close to Arius to very near orthodoxy. The third group would be the Nicene, or the orthodox party. They represented the group that would emerge with the largest voice.

After much debate the council would emerge with a draft of the Nicene Creed that would get its moorings from a creed presented by Eusebius of Caesarea that had been handed down through his predecessors. The main body of this creed “would win the endorsement of the Emperor” (Latourette 155). Subsequently, after revisions to allow for specifically addressing the essence of God controversy and “allowing for the divinity of the Son” (Sheldon), the Nicene Creed would pass with only two bishops who would

refuse to sign. These two bishops, along with Arius, would be excommunicated and banned from the church (Sheldon 424).

The Council of Nicaea of 325 that was designed to bring unity to the church and put an end to the Arius controversy was not successful (Sheldon, Latourette). However, what would emerge, according to Everett Ferguson would be three monumental shifts for the catholic church, both the denominational Catholics, as well as the universal church. First, Nicaea would be the first “ecumenical” council. This concept of the universal authority of the church, or centralized authority, had not been seen to date. While the church experienced authority in its local setting this would be the first example of a universal authority of the church. Second, Nicaea would be seen as imperial involvement in the church. A political statement was made when bishops who bore the marks of earlier government persecution would now be those blessing the Emperor and welcoming him into the church’s mechanisms for decision making (Latourette 153). Third, and perhaps most importantly, creeds would be used for the first time as something more than a confession of faith. The church, from this moment forward, would use such creeds accompanied by “anathemas” (Ferguson 197) as a means of bringing punishment to those who would not agree to the creeds. These punishments could mean anything from denying the sacraments to excommunication. The creeds, which had their origins in a desire to bring clarity to the burgeoning Christian faith, had become formalized into methods of conformity instead of markers of identity.

The Restoration Movement

The modern Independent Christian Church is born out of a movement known as the Restoration Movement. The history of the Restoration Movement is largely an American

story with theological as well as practical connections to other European movements that touched the lives of the early “new reformers” (Simpson) of the church. James DeForest Murch, who has written a comprehensive history of the movement, describes the movement as a “movement to restore the New Testament church in doctrine, ordinances and life” (43).

Movements prior to the American movement. While credit for the modern Restoration Movement is largely American, the seeds of the restoration can be traced directly from the fallout of the first council of Nicaea. The constant friction of the Arians, Semi-Arians, and those of the orthodox group (perhaps only considered orthodox because they were the victors of the council’s vote) would continue throughout the next several decades. In the year 380 the church would be forced to deal with these divisions once again. The Emperor Theodosius who was “anti-Arian by heredity and conviction” (Latourette 163) issued an order for “all of his subjects to follow the faith which ‘Peter delivered to the Romans,’ ‘the deity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit of equal majesty in a Holy Trinity’” (Latourette 163). This decree was in part an answer to Arianism, but also a new Christological position taught by Apollinaris (named after the Bishop of Laodicea in Syria) which held that “the pre-existent Logos took the place of the rational soul in the Christ, so that His incarnation involved no assumption of this part of the human nature” (Sheldon 429). To address both issues a council would be called in the year 381. This Council of Constantinople, which would later be recognized as the second ecumenical council (Ferguson 209), would confirm the Nicene formula for the divinity of Jesus and the divinity of the Holy Spirit and would anathematize those who would not accept it (Latourette, Ferguson), naming specifically, “Eunomians (Neoarians),

Matomachians, Sabellians, the followers of Marcellus and Photinus, as well as the Apollinarians (Ferguson 209). Once again, an extra Biblical creed would be the determining factor for fellowship within the church and, more importantly, the denial of certain rights and privileges for people who desired to be a part of the Body of Christ. “Thus,” writes Murch “the Bible was no longer considered sufficient for the guidance of the churches without the addition of tradition and church dogma (11).

This lack of trust in the Scriptures and heavy reliance on the traditions of church leaders would lead the church towards a hierarchy that would allow for the development of the “clergy” and “laity.” This view of the organizational structure of the church would teach that there are some within the Body of Christ that are the “elect” or clergy and those that would be distinct from the clergy, known as the “laity” or “lay leaders” within the church. This view, which is antithetical to the Scriptures (see 1 Peter 2:4-9; Revelation 5:6-10; 1:4-6; 20:6; 1 Cor. 4:1), would place an unintentional barrier between those who serve in different roles within the church (see Ephesians 4: 11-16) which would lead to a permanent underclass within the church that was neither intended by the Scriptures nor by those who laid its foundation.

Murch concludes that, in spite of severe limitations, there is sufficient evidence to trace a line of people who urged followers to remain faithful to the primitive practices of the Biblical church and to forsake the ever-widening authority of the Catholic church (meaning universally centralized church recognized today as the mother of denominations). Many of these theologians and their followers, exclusively independent of one another yet increasingly inclusive of a “wide variety of thought and expression,” would leave themselves vulnerable to heresy and “susceptible to the charges of heresy of

those within the establishment church” and “makes it possible for its enemies to brand it with extremist characteristics” (Murch 11).

Early church theologians such as Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Montanus, as well as the post-Nicaean theologian Priscillian, and movements like the Paulicians, would call the church to “primitive practices” and forms of government that would stay largely autonomous. Murch describes the Paulicians as, “practicing baptism of believers in open streams, requiring antecedent repentance and faith; met for Bible study and the observance of the Lord’s Supper under the guidance of duly-ordained elders; and laid great emphasis on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and living a godly life” (12). These Christians would be scattered by persecution under the Empress Theodora, and, like the church of Acts Chapter 9, they would plant or leave churches everywhere they were scattered.

From the 920s to the Puritans of the 1600s groups such as the Bogomils (Slavic) and churches appearing in Armenia, Asia Minor, France, Italy, and Bohemia all appeared to be communicating with one another in a manner that maintained their independence (Murch 331). From the Waldenses of Bohemia to John Wycliffe in England, many Christians would arise that would cling to a similar motto of “apart from the Bible, they would have no confession of faith, no rules nor any authority of men” (Murch 12). They would strive to be truly independent of one another and especially independent of any hierarchical structures that would elevate the authority of creeds, mottos, confessions or ecclesial offices above the authority of the Scriptures.

Scotland’s Influence on the American Movement. Robert and James Haldane were brothers and passionate students of the Bible that ministered in Scotland in the late

1700s. Their reliance and passion for the Holy Scriptures led them to establish a ministry in which most of Robert's wealth would be spent distributing "Bibles and tracts and holding open-air meetings in which they taught the Word of God" (Murch 17). They were disturbed by the lack of compassion for the lost and the "coldness and immorality among the ministers and churches of northern Scotland" (Murch 17). Their passions for the purity of the faith taught in the Bible would lead them to break away from the Church of Scotland and eventually from the Congregationalists of Scotland. They would make a push to stand on the Bible alone as their "rule of faith and practice" and reject "extra-congregational church government" (Murch 17), making them effectively standalone congregations with their own form of government and free to practice their faith as they saw it revealed in the Scriptures. The fame of their movement would spread throughout the religious communities of Scotland and eventually to the Presbyterian churches of Scotland and to two of their preachers, a father and son named Thomas and Alexander Campbell, two of the earlier leaders of the American Restoration Movement.

America's revival. By 1800 the moral decay of the American nation was fully underway. Influences such as rationalism, the Infidel's Movement, and the continual cancer of slavery had caused a moral lapse in the young nation. The general weaknesses and decline of churches, not just in the fledgling frontier, but even within the east, had left a moral void that caused John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, to write a letter to President James Madison in which he said, "The church is too far gone ever to be redeemed" (Brown, M 2).

Into this moral decay, almost out of nowhere, several movements would begin to spring up throughout the United States independent of one another. Preachers were

beginning to emphasize “conscious conversions” and “the searching of conscience before coming to the communion table” (Latourette 1037). Among these pioneer preachers were James O’Kelly in the Carolinas, Barton W. Stone and “Raccoon” John Smith in Kentucky, Thomas and Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania, and Walter Scott, a Scotsman like the Campbells, who would launch out in Ohio. With the nation ripe for revival these men, and many others like them, would preach a primitive faith that harkened for the simplicity of the church as revealed in the New Testament. Within the story of each of these men is a fine line between the rebellious nature that brought men and women to the United States and a genuine desire to see the church reformed to her New Testament purity. Dr. Leslie Hardin writes, “The question that must be asked is whether or not it was actually rebellion, or rather a desire for restoration of the pure and simple New Testament church”(100). In most cases the answer was both rebellion and restoration, for at some level a disagreement, whether in faith or practice, lit the fuse of the explosion to come.

a. James O’Kelly

James O’Kelly was a pioneer Methodist preacher who had been ordained by Francis Asbury to supervise a group of Methodist pastors in Virginia and North Carolina. In 1792 at the Methodist General Conference, O’Kelly proposed a resolution to a dispute between Bishop Asbury and Methodist clergy of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina over the right of appeals for circuit assignments. The resolution was turned down and O’Kelly led an estimated 30 to 40 Methodist circuit preachers away from the Methodist church to form the Republican Methodist church, later changing their name to Christian Church (Latourette, Hardin, Murch). Part of the challenge set forth by O’Kelly to Asbury

and the Methodist church at large was to “put away other books and forms and let this [the Bible] be the only criterion” on which the church would be developed and governed (Hardin 100). Through the Republican Methodist movement, specifically Hope Hull, who had been an early supporter of O’Kelly’s uprising, there would be a loose alliance with the movements of Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. According to Murch, O’Kelly would never really leave Methodism’s theology (specifically concerning the argument over immersion) or evangelistic strategies, but he would find common ground in the desire to have autonomy within the local body and the freedom to practice a New Testament polity and worship(32). By the early portion of the 1800s O’Kelly would be seen as one of the Movement’s Southeastern leaders, though the Restoration Movement would later see the followers of O’Kelly branch off into an independent movement known today as the United Churches of Christ.

b. The Campbells

Perhaps, the most well-known and most widely published of the early Restoration Movement patriarchs would be a father and son that would begin ministering together in Pennsylvania named Thomas and Alexander Campbell. Their dedication to the diligent study of Scripture and their propensity for public speaking as well as publishing would make them invaluable to the ideas and themes of the Restoration Movement.

Thomas Campbell came to America in 1807 in search of better health (Latourette 1941). Once settled in western Pennsylvania he began to reach out to the Presbyterian community (of which he had been a minister) and formed churches in which Presbyterians of all doctrinal backgrounds were admitted for the Lord’s Supper. The presbytery would censure him for this practice (Latourette 1942), forcing Thomas to

break away and form the “Christian Association of Washington”. Historian Kenneth Latourette reports that Thomas had direct connection to one of the Haldean brothers and that their influence on Campbell would prove to be tremendous in Campbell’s decision to withdraw from the Presbyterian church.

In forming the Christian Association of Washington, Campbell published the Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington, PA, September 7, 1809. The original document is 56 pages in length and is composed of four parts: 1. The Declaration with stating the reasoning behind the formation of the association; 2. The Address with the principles for Christian unity and how they might be carried out; 3. The Appendix with added to amplify portions of the address and 4. A Postscript with added to enhance the carrying out of the organization’s crusade (Campbell 1-56). The document makes it clear that the intention of the association was not to begin a new denomination, but to allow the churches within the association to freely pursue New Testament Christianity. Murch (42-50) gives a concise framework for the important principles found in the Address as such: 1. the authority of the Holy Scriptures; 2. the individual Christian’s responsibility before God and the right of private judgment; 3. the evil of sectarianism, and 4. the way to peace and unity in the body of Christ is through conformity to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

Thomas Campbell’s desire and passion for the unity of the church can be seen in these lines from the Address:

It is, to us, a pleasing consideration that all the Churches of Christ which mutually acknowledge each other as such, are not only agreed in the great doctrines of faith and holiness, but are also materially agreed as to the positive ordinances of the

Gospel institution; so that our differences, at most, are about the things in which the kingdom of God does not consist, that is, about matters of private opinion or human invention. What a pity that the kingdom of God should be divided about such things (23)!

As a sign of his desperate plea for unity, upon the publication of the Declaration and Address Campbell welcomed feedback and debate from the clerical community but to no avail. For further evidence that Thomas had not desired to establish another denomination, he presented the Declaration and Address to the Synod of Pittsburg, 1810 as part of their application as a charter of the Presbyterian Church. Their charter was denied, and as a response, Thomas reluctantly formed a new, independent congregation on May 4 1811 in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania. On June 19, 1811 the association would hold its first worship services in a new building located on donated ground near West Middleton, Pennsylvania and would give itself the name Brush Run church (Murch 51).

By the time of the formation of the Brush Run church, Thomas Campbell's son, Alexander, had immigrated from Scotland and was actively helping his father in the ministry. On January 1, 1812 he would be ordained by the leadership of the Brush Run church (Foster 854). Alexander's influence on the Restoration Movement would come to overshadow his father's, as well as push names like O'Kelly and the Haldanes to the back pages of the movement's history. Murch states Alexander's influence clearly: "Thomas Campbell's greatest ally in his crusade for Christian unity through a return to the New Testament pattern was his son, Alexander. Indeed, the son was destined to be its chief advocate in the formative years." (53).

Alexander's temperament, public speaking ability, and academic acumen would make him a powerful preacher, masterful writer, and formidable debater. Upon the rejection of his father's appeal to the Synod of Pittsburgh in October of 1811, Alexander would address the Christian Association to respond to what he felt had been an ecclesiastical insult to Thomas. In his response Alexander was able to deliver a message that his father could not have delivered due to the fact that Thomas had been the one rejected by the Synod. Therefore, Alexander began to go point by point through the Declaration and Address, expounding with more clarity the difference between the theological position of the Christian Association and the Presbyterian church of Pennsylvania (and in reality, with the religious community at large). Alexander's charges delivered during this sermon can be summarized in six points: 1. Existing denominations had lost the Scriptural form of unity and had established unity on the basis of creeds; 2. Each congregation should be independently governed (establish its own leadership from a Biblical model) but should maintain fellowship with one another; 3. Congregations should abandon the distinction between clergy and laity (as in Campbell's view it lacked Scriptural precedence); 4. Infant baptism was without direct Scriptural authority (however, according to Murch Alexander saw the practice "permissible, much like the early church saw circumcision as permissible, but of no religious significance (58); 5. If the Christian Association was to be rejected by the ecclesiastical structures of the day (namely the Presbyterian Churches), then the members of the Association would need to maintain their independence and follow the lead of the Scriptures in faith and practice; 6. "The principle of receiving or practicing nothing but what was expressly taught in the Scriptures was likely to result in the abandonment of many things deemed precious and

important by existing churches” (Murch 58). After this meeting in November of 1811 all parties, Thomas, Alexander and the members of the Christian Association of Washington, PA, would understand that their connection to the ecclesiastical establishment was in jeopardy, and it appears they were more than willing to be ostracized in order to stand on these principles.

The Campbells, specifically the younger (Alexander) saw themselves at the forefront of a new movement, not so much a movement that would be defined as restoring the church, but one perhaps bringing a new wave of reform to the struggling American Church. According to Leroy Garrett, Alexander Campbell spoke more about “new reformation” than he did about “restoration” (9-10). He saw himself as leading a newer version of Luther’s reformation for the church. “Sometimes he used the terms synonymously” (Rollmann and Lewis 265).

However, Campbell was not rigid in his theology. He would remain open to the study and practice of theology as he evolved in his convictions. At an early part of Campbell’s break from the Presbyterian church he wrote extensively opposing missionary societies as a source of potential division for the church. Gorman writes that he later “argued that missionary societies were expedient means to accomplish missions, and he appealed to New Testament examples of congregations’ cooperating” (2). John Mark Hicks would attribute this to Campbell’s approach to theology, writing, “Theology, in Campbell’s view, is a system of ‘facts’ rather than of theories” (Rollmann 287). These “facts” as he saw them would be open to debate and should be hashed out among those with a mind to do such work. They would remain nonsectarian in nature and did not embrace exclusion from other denominations, merely an appeal to the central tenants of

the Scriptures concerning the unity of faith (Gorman 19). This approach would lead many within their movement to develop statements similar to: “not the only Christians, but Christians only” (Campbell 412). Such slogans were a reminder that they wanted to be separate from denominational controls but recognized that they were not the exclusive followers of Christ.

The practices that emerge from the Campbell’s movement would be simple in form and independent in nature. The practices of the Brush Run church and those within the Christian Association of Washington would be to regard all churches around them as having the form of the Christian faith, although they had left the sound words as originally presented (Campbell, T. 37). “They would abandon every human system and return to the Bible and the Bible alone as the rule of faith and practice” (Murch 51). They would regard every church as independent. They would minister to the sick and needy, evangelize the lost, and practice teaching, preaching, praying, fellowship and the Lord’s Supper as a part of their weekly assemblies on the first day of the week (see Acts 2:42 & 20:11). They would consider “lay preaching” as authorized by the church (meaning each local church). Immersion was practiced by all of those accepting Christ upon their profession of faith (Sheldon 295), and they would reject the doctrinal and theological controversies that had plagued the church since the days of the apostles and chart a course to study the New Testament teachings and return the church to a primitive faith and practice. However, according to Sheldon it would be their opposition to creeds being the “fatal bar of unity” that would give them their primary “distinction and tenet” (Sheldon 295).

One other notable figure that would help the advancement of the Campbells would be an evangelist named Walter Scott (1791-1861). Scott would travel the region of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky spreading a simple message of New Testament Christianity. He would develop a humble message about the simplicity of salvation that would introduce people to Jesus through a scriptural message of salvation. His method would become known as the five-fingered exercise:

While working as an evangelist for the Mahoning Baptist Association between 1827 and 1830, Scott developed a simple mnemonic illustration for the gospel plan of salvation that has been used in the Restoration Movement ever since. Based on Acts 2:38, Scott believed that salvation requires faith, repentance and baptism. As an evangelist, he would first come into a community and find a group of children. He would ask them to hold up a hand, and then point to each finger and say "faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit." Once the children had learned the mnemonic, he would ask them to tell their parents that he would be preaching that same gospel that evening (Foster 338, 635).

His effectiveness allowed the message of restoring the simplicity of the Gospel and the purity of the first church to a region that was already ripe with revival.

c. Barton W. Stone

Another of the most notable and influential leaders within the early stages of the Restoration Movement was Barton Warren Stone (1772-1844). Stone's influence on the movement is broad but not without great controversy. Although many within the modern Restoration Movement view Stone's influence on par with that of the Campbells, it is his theological positions, specifically those concerning the deity of Christ and the doctrine of

atonement, that leave many within the movement ready to disown him (Murch 115, Foster 707).

Stone was an ordained Presbyterian minister. However, even on the day of his ordination in 1798 by the Presbytery of Transylvania, Central Kentucky, his desire for reform can be clearly seen. Murch writes:

On the day of his ordination, resolve to face examination frankly and honestly and leave the results with the Lord. Doctor James Blythe and Robert Marshall, whom he had first met in Virginia, Where his examiners. They asked him how far he was willing to go in receiving the Westminster confession. He told them, "As far as I see it consistent with the word of God." This seem to satisfy the examiners. When the question was proposed in. Presbytery, "Do you receive and adopt The Confession of faith, as containing the systematic doctrine top in the Bible?" Stone answered aloud so the entire congregation might here, "I do as far as I see it consistent with the word of God"(85)

In his response is his desire to maintain a level of independence or subjectivity to scripture. For the entirety of Stone's preaching ministry, his desire was constantly towards the authority of scripture.

Following his ordination Stone was assigned a Presbyterian Pastorate consisting of two congregations, one at Concord and one at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Over the next six years he maintained a faithful pastoral ministry in these two congregations. During these six years Stone became aware of revivals taking place in Western and Southern Kentucky, most notably the Revival at Cane Ridge in 1801(see below). These revivals

were having a tremendous impact for the westward moving country and converting hundreds of young people throughout the state of Kentucky.

In mid-July of 1800, James McGready, a former classmate of Stone, held a revival in Gasper River, KY in which hundreds, if not a thousand or more people came to hear the Word of God and camp with their families during the preaching that took place over a several day period. Bruce Shelley writes, “We now look back to Gasper River as the first ‘camp-meeting’ - that is, the first religious service of several days’ length held outdoors, for people who traveled a distance to attend. They camped on the spot- thus the name” (Shelley 404). These revival meetings were held on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays and sermons were delivered on “the character of conversion in the Christian life on Sunday members; of the participation of the church as it observed the Lord’s supper; on pattern of heightened religious interest and (they) reported conversions associated with sacramental meetings” (Foster 707). These meetings proved to be an effective means of spreading the Gospel.

Due in large part to the success of these revivals Stone began to preach the doctrine of personal responsibility for Salvation. This left him in sharp contrast to some of the Presbyterian statements of faith. As a result of these contrasts, Stone would make an announcement that his congregation would no longer be able to support the preaching in the Presbyterian Church (Murch 87).

Following his conscience and what he believed to be the leading of the Holy Spirit, Stone led several other preachers, not all Presbyterian, to found what would become known as the Springfield Presbytery. The independent Springfield presbytery survived only nine months following Presbyterian’s polity and operation and was not

recognized by established Presbyterianism. The member churches were all Presbyterian in background and consisted of fifteen congregations in Ohio and Kentucky (Murch 87-88). The doctrinal divisions that persisted between these congregations proved to be insurmountable and led to their official disbandment in June of 1804 at the same Cane Ridge congregation that had brought them together in revival four years earlier. At this meeting there was a reading of a document that became more publicized than the Springfield coalition, and its lasting impact remains to this day within the Restoration Movement.

The legacy of the Springfield Presbytery is found in its dissolving document entitled “Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery.” Stone and another presbyterian minister named Richard McNemar authored the document, and Stone delivered it before the congregation. The document contained eleven items of contention with the larger Presbyterian church, most of which revolved around the ideas of freedom from the hierarchy of the Presbyterian structure and the freedom for each congregation to govern itself, choose its own ministers and leaders, and allow the Bible to be their only guide. Within the document itself there was a strong push for the freedom of all believers to “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling” (Col. 2:12) and to limit the authority of a centralized church government.

At this same meeting in Cane Ridge it was decided by the group that they would all agree to adopt the name Christian (following the example of Acts 11:26), in an effort to “exclude all other sectarian names” (Murch 89) for the church. Six ministers signed the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery. These men found themselves broiled in controversy with Stone and others from the Christian movement and eventually

abandoned their commitment to a non-sectarian form of Church government. Two became involved with the Shaker movement, and two returned to the Presbyterian church. One of the signees, Robert Marshall, converted Stone to the Baptist position of baptism by immersion for believers, before returning to his former position on pedobaptism. Of the original six signees, only Stone remained faithful to the principles contained within the document and kept a strong position on independence for each church and the Bible as the sole source of doctrine for Christians.

Stone's impact on the Christian movement cannot be understated. By 1811 the Christian church movement had a membership that was as high as 16,000 in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Ohio, and Indiana (Foster 713). It was the appeal to Christian unity and the call to allow the Bible alone to govern the church and her people that united Baptist churches, Baptist Associations, and individual congregations all throughout the Southern part of the United States.

In the fall of 1824 Stone first met Alexander Campbell. While the two maintained some significant doctrinal disagreements, the idea of Christian unity and the restoration of the church drew the two together in a lifetime friendship. Each man maintained their own positions on matters essential to their faith. They had a mutual respect that was evident in their monthly publications. Chief among their differences was the doctrine of the Trinity Stone was a staunch non-trinitarian and held that Jesus was the "Son of God" but that He had a specific beginning, while Campbell maintained that "Jesus existed eternally as the Logos, but the Father/Son relationship" had a beginning (Cottrell 257). They also disagreed on the ordination of "elders" within the church. Stone maintained that elders should be ordained by other ordained men; Campbell argued that the

congregation should select their leaders by vote. Campbell also would restrict communion to only those who had been immersed, and Stone held that communion should be open to those who had not yet been convinced that baptism was by immersion (Foster 715).

A. Combined Efforts of Campbell and Stone

While differences between Campbell and Stone remained, their combined efforts had significant impact, first in the state of Kentucky, where Stone's allegiance with Campbell led to a split within the Baptist churches in Kentucky with more than 10,000 Baptist siding with Campbell and Stone and leaving the Baptist church (Foster 716). With their combined writing, Stone and Campbell impacted issues such as the abolition of slavery. In fact, Stone's opposition to slavery became so strong that he joined the American Colonization Society, a group devoted to helping resettle freed slaves to a colony in Africa. The society purchased a tract of land in West Africa that became Liberia. In order to allow a family of slaves who were bequeathed to his wife to be freed, Stone and his family moved to Jacksonville, IL and lived there 1830-1835. Finally, when the government failed to act to dissolve the institution of slavery, he wrote a series of articles between 1842-1844 in which he called for his fellow Christians to no longer participate in the government of the United States (Foster 717-720). The Campbells also sacrificed greatly for the cause of freeing slaves, with Thomas Campbell being forced to leave Kentucky and Alexander losing much of his support from Bethany College and many more readers of his publications during the outbreak of the Civil War.

As strange as their union was, the biggest contribution of their unity was the "genius of the appeal advocated by both men: Christians may differ on opinions and

marginal issues and be united on the essentials” (Foster 123). This plea was winnowed down to its more modern version of: “In essentials unity, in opinions liberty, but in all things love” (Garrett). However, differing doctrinal perspectives and subsequent personality conflicts eventually divided the movement into the present day Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and the Independent Christian Churches (Martin and Gring 3-4).

B. The Restoration Movement’s Legacy

In all, the Restoration Movement’s legacy is a matter of perspective that ranges as far apart as some believing it was an insignificant movement of heretical positions that simply divided many denominational churches in the United States (Sheldon), others believing it to be the work of God to return the church to its simplest forms (Foster), and some holding that the only true churches are Restoration Movement Churches (Martin and Gring 2-3).

What Campbell was looking for, as were many of the Restoration Movement founders, was a return to sola scriptura (scripture alone). This came from the ideas of Martin Luther and the Reformers of how to get everyone on the same page within the Christian faith. While this seems like a simple idea, “the problem is that they failed to reach meaningful unanimity. They failed to agree on what the Scripture said” (Simpson 29). While this is how Simpson described the Reformers of the 16th century, he could have easily applied it to the Restoration Movement founders almost two centuries later. The Campbell camp and the Stone camps could only seem to agree on the authority of Scripture and the need for churches to function independently of a national or international denomination. This agreement on the authority of Scripture would help to

forge “a pattern of convictions best described by David Bebbington as ‘biblicism’ (a reliance on the Bible as the ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on new birth), activism (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity)” (Gorman 5).

However, on other significant issues they could build no consensus.

Over the years the movement struggled over one primary question with two competing philosophical positions: was the movement to be about restoring the church back to a New Testament form or was the movement to be about unity of all believers? Campbell was a rationalist who believed in Christian unity based on the principles and examples described in the New Testament (more of a restoration approach), where Stone, a pietist, believed that returning to apostolic holiness would bring about Christian unity (Hughes 11). What emerged from these competing ideas were three sharply divided types of congregations, and each pursued their own agendas. There was an offshoot of the Stone movement that leaned heavily towards Christian unity. This portion of the movement formed the modern version of the Disciples of Christ. Another portion of the movement desired to restore the New Testament Church. From this position arose the Churches of Christ (mostly identified by their non-instrumental worship services) and the Independent Christian Churches.

There is a great difficulty in defining the ultimate legacy and final positions of the Restoration Movement. However, one can garner some overarching principles that are common among those churches within the movement. Nathan Hatch describes it as such:

The restorationers demanded equality of all church members, placing clergy on equal footing with the lay members of the congregation, and advocated for the rights of the people to interpret the New Testament for themselves rather than adhere to a creedal system, a denominational hermeneutic, or a particular systematic theology. The desire for religious freedom drove the leaders of the Restoration Movement to set forth themes of sin, grace, and conversion along with encouraging their fellowships to resist social distinctions and doctrines that gave the impression of being formally or hierarchically organized (23).

There are no definitive works that state exactly what the movement's churches believe. The very nature of their independent status, while leaving them open to heresy, also leaves each church free to develop their own doctrinal positions. Perhaps the most commonly accepted position statement for the majority of the Restoration Movement Churches was penned by the 20th President of the United States, James Garfield. In an effort to answer the many inquires into his religious beliefs, Garfield wrote a concise statement entitled "What We Stand For," a classically accepted doctrinal position for many Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian Churches. While the statement is not all inclusive of the beliefs of the movement, the statement lays the foundation for what many of the churches believe today.

"What We Stand For." James A. Garfield

1. We call ourselves Christians or Disciples of Christ.
2. We believe in God the Father.
3. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and our Savior. We regard the divinity of Christ as the fundamental truth of the Christian system.
4. We believe in the Holy Spirit, both as to his agency in

conversion and as indwelling in the heart of the Christian.⁵ We accept both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures as the inspired Word of God.⁶ We believe in the future punishment of the wicked and the future reward of the righteous.⁷ We believe that the Deity is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God. ⁸ We observe the institution of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day. To this table we neither invite nor debar; we say it is the Lord's Supper for all of the Lord's children. ⁹ We plead for the union of God's people on the Bible and the Bible alone. ¹⁰ The Christ is our only creed. ¹¹ We maintain that all the ordinances should be observed as they were in the days of the Apostles (Murch 198).

The first definitive heritage of the Restoration movement, as far as faith and practice is concerned, revolves around their identity as independent from all other forms of denominationalism. With a position of independence comes the freedom to read, interpret, and apply the Bible without the oversight of a hierarchical church structure. They are free to govern themselves and choose their own leaders, ordain their own ministers, and establish their own colleges and para-church organizations, including missionary societies, conventions, and social benevolence programs. From their birth out of the revivalism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Restoration Movement is a part of a transition within the American religious culture that is “not centered in ecclesial structure and where there is structure it is often anti-hierarchical” (Simpson 297). This anti-hierarchical structure was not only a driving force in the beginnings of the Restoration Movement but is also a lasting legacy within the modern movement as well.

The second definitive heritage of the Restoration Movement is the practice of Biblical hermeneutics within each congregation. With a strong push to deny a division

between clergy and laity, the churches within the Restoration Movement are challenged to raise up scholars from within each church. While the modern church has the luxury of Restoration Movement colleges and universities, there remains a need for Biblical scholarship within each congregation. Every congregation will have the freedom to interpret the Bible for itself, without the hindrance of creeds or councils to bind it to a specified position. Churches will have to study, discover, and apply Biblical teaching as they see fit. This has each church lean heavily on the motto mentioned earlier: In essentials unity, in opinions liberty, but in all things love.

Michael Casey writes:

Restorationist Christians view the Bible as central to their identity. They desire to ‘speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.’ They claim to ‘call Bible things by Bible names.’ We observe, here, that speech itself is to be determined by the very words of the printed Scriptures, and that what one has found in print has been taken to heart in a way that alters the content of what one teaches and preaches (Rollmann 314).

Finally, the third definitive heritage for the Restoration Movement is its strong reliance on the plea to return to the New Testament for the markers of their faith. This means simplicity and “restoration in the ordinances- baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s day, the Bible” all receive special attention within these churches (Foster 122). This heritage, and an interpretation of the New Testament is the driving force behind why these churches will baptize new believers, practice communion each week, and place a heavy emphasis on the sermon or Bible study in their worship gatherings.

David Vaughn Consulting (DVC)

Who is David Vaughn?

David has been serving Whitewater Crossing Christian Church in Cleves, OH (just west of Cincinnati) as senior minister since June, 2002. Under his leadership the congregation has changed names and built and relocated to a new facility where the congregation has more than quadrupled in size. He came to Whitewater after a 13-year ministry at the New Beginnings Christian Church in Chesapeake, VA. Prior to that, he served as Youth Minister at Northeast Christian Church in Lexington, KY from 1983 to 1988.

David was born in Ashland, Kentucky, and graduated from Cincinnati Christian University in 1983. He and his wife Donna have been married over 30 years and have two children Tyler and Amanda, a nurse, is married to Joe, and they have 2 children. David's spiritual gifts are preaching, evangelism, and leadership (Vaughn, David Vaughn Consulting).

Paul Snoddy is also a coach in the DVC process. Paul has been the Minister at Tri-Village since November 1990. Prior to coming to Tri-Village, he served in pulpit ministries in Kentucky, Virginia and Pennsylvania. Paul's primary roles at Tri-Village include preaching, teaching, and general church administration. He graduated with a B.A. in Communications and Bible and M.A. degree from Kentucky Christian University. Paul is married to Barb, and they have one son, Adam. Paul enjoys reading and traveling (Snoddy, Tri-Village Christian Church).

The Process

Churches seeking assistance will enter the DVC systems through initial contact with DVC. DVC will provide an overview of the process in an initial consultation with

the leadership of an Independent Christian Church, provide a copy of the contract outlining the responsibilities of DVC as well as the congregation (including fees, expectations, and termination stipulations). Once the contract has been signed by the leadership of the congregation, DVC will give the congregation's leadership access to their church health survey (see Appendix A). The survey is an anonymous survey conducted by the congregation in both paper or digital format. Both formats are available to the congregation, and the survey can be submitted either way depending on the preferences of the survey taker. The church health survey is used to ascertain the overall health of the church. The survey is sent to the church to be filled out by leaders, staff, volunteers, church members, and any person who may be attending the church. There are three sections of the survey. The first section contains eleven questions gauging the general demographics of the congregation, including the age and gender of the congregation, how often each respondent attends services, how often they volunteer, what percentage of their income they give, and what style of music they prefer.

The second section of the survey contains sixteen prompts in a Likert scale used to evaluate the competing values of the importance of a category versus how the respondent sees the performance of the congregation. The respondent is asked to evaluate each prompt on a 1-5 scale (1 being least and 5 being the greatest) based on how important that area is to them with a separate subsection asking the respondent to describe on a same scale how they perceive the performance of the church in that same area. These questions are evaluated by the consulting team and the mathematical data helps define strengths and weaknesses of the congregation. Those weaknesses are determined by the disparity between the ranking of importance and performance

tabulated from all respondents. This data helps DVC formulate an improvement plan to address those weaknesses.

The third part of the survey contains four short-answer questions. These questions target the perception of the respondent in areas of greatest strengths, greatest weakness, priorities of the church, and barriers for the congregation. This section allows the leadership team of the church to hear the congregation's own words to help them frame a better perspective on the overall mood within the church.

Completed surveys are recorded by DVC into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet has been set up to allow for specific calculations of the survey's competing values to be tabulated. Once the results have been evaluated by DVC, they are sent directly to the congregation in a PDF file for their review. DVC then schedules an onsite visit to share results with the congregation's leadership team. DVC works with the congregation to identify a "Leadership Core Team" (LCT) who will steer the path forward with DVC through whatever changes might be necessary to improve church health. Following the development of the LCT DVC will schedule the first weekly phone conversation with the Senior Minister of the congregation, eventually followed by the first phone conference call with the LCT. In those conversations a plan is developed to systematically begin the process of working through the seven systems used by DVC to promote overall church health. The contract between DVC and the congregation is designed to be a one-year contract with the options from DVC or the congregation to terminate the relationship at any time in that year or to continue the relationship beyond the first year as needed to complete the LCT's path forward.

The Seven Systems

- Area 1 – Church Health Systems: Signs/indicators of disease (unhealthiness) in the church; The role of prayer and scripture; confronting unhealthy people and programs; conflict management; the power of strategic organization; defining reality and creating trust.
- Area 2 – The Evangelism System: Evaluating current evangelistic temperature; developing outreach passion and zeal; changing a church’s evangelistic DNA (grace-based); relevant outreach strategies that work; executing evangelistic events; keeping “the main thing the main thing.”
- Area 3 – The Worship Service System: Evaluating the current weekend service experience (including pre-and post-service); multi- generational styles/approaches; worship language, technology, and culture; facilitating transformational services; developing a culture of expectation; celebrating victories and successes.
- Area 4 – The Connection System: Evaluating the current assimilation and retention system; connecting and retaining new members; role of Sunday School and small groups; discipling and deepening members; recovery ministries and their role; sponsoring connecting events.
- Area 5 – The Volunteer System: Evaluating the current ministry system of the church; gifts discovery; recruiting, training, and deploying; leadership development and multiplication; breaking the 80-20 standard; celebrating volunteers.
- Area 6 – The Giving (Stewardship) System: Evaluating current giving in the church; developing tithers; moving to radical generosity; transitioning people

through the five levels of giving; leveraging technology to increase giving; creating a yearly stewardship plan.

- Area 7 – Facility/Elder/Staff Support Systems: Evaluating “space and place,” assist Senior Minister with sermon series planning that enhances strategic agenda; coach Senior Minister on developing leadership style equal to the current (and future) church size; assist Elders in adjusting their roles to maximize church health and growth; bylaws, constitution, policy, and position Papers; technology and office systems.

Each of these seven systems have a deep Biblical, theological, and practical application within the context of the church and her effectiveness.

Area 1 – Church Health Systems. The concept of defining church health has been long studied and yet a clear definition is still elusive. Steven Macchia defines church health as “the ability to function naturally without the hindrance of any internal problems” (10). He believes this definition of church health to be the most Biblically accurate and most modernly applicable. Yet even with this definition there is a lack of clarity as to how to attain health for the church. Bob Russell gives ten characteristics for a church that is healthy; Kennon Callahan lists twelve, Macchia also mentions ten Ken Hemphill (*The Antioch Effect*, 1994) gives eight Leith Anderson (*A Church for the 21st Century*, 1992) lists seven, and Peter Wagner (*The Healthy Church*, 1996) gives nine. While all of these characteristics are Biblical in nature and share the common emphasis on becoming healthy, it is difficult to mesh them into one simple list of characteristics that lead to health because they are heavily influenced with each author’s opinion and preferences as to how to help a church become healthy.

In a more recent attempt to pare down and simplify attainable measurements of church health Bill Wilson's "What does a healthy church look like?" attempts to develop: four general predictors of church health that cut across theological, societal, and denominational boundaries. These markers are simple and attainable for churches that desire to pursue a healthier congregational life. The four characteristics are: (i) clarity of mission and vision, (ii) transformational conflict, (iii) authentic community, and (iv) transparent communication. When a church agrees to make these their highest priorities, the resulting congregational culture begins to exhibit signs of stability, renewal, and hope. Upon the foundation of such practices, the possibilities of future innovation, creativity, life transformation, and community engagement begin to emerge" (ii).

However, what might be a more effective means to developing health, and what DVC tries to accomplish, is following an illustration given by Joe Ellis in an article published by the Christian Standard (2003). His illustration concerns more of the atmosphere for health. He writes:

Growth and health are as normal for churches as for children. Parents do not make children grow. They allow them to grow by (1) providing the conditions that are necessary for growth (nourishment, shelter, clothing, and a healthy environment, for instance) and (2) making sure that hindrances (such as disease or negative circumstances) do not interfere with growth. Under those conditions, growth happens naturally (13).

The criteria for an atmosphere of growth are at the core of DVC's first of the seven systems, the "Church Health System." The key questions or markers that they look for within this system are signs/indicators of disease (unhealthiness) in the church; the

role of prayer and scripture; confronting unhealthy people and programs; conflict management; the power of strategic organization; and defining reality and creating trust. Each of these indicators are significant in their own way and can lead to or prevent an atmosphere for healthy churches.

The first indicator (signs/indicators of disease or unhealthiness in the church) directly deals with organizational awareness. In his brilliant fable, “Our Iceberg is Melting”, John Kotter (10-12) describes a penguin colony that needs to move due to a crack that has developed in their iceberg which shows indications of trouble for their continued existence in that location. The story weaves its way through leading change within the whole of the colony. It begins, as all significant organizational shifts begin, with one person or a group of people recognizing something is amiss.

This first indicator acts as a measuring tool for raising the awareness of what might be a barrier or constraint for the overall health of the church. Indicators that lay just below the surface, like a small crack in a large iceberg that shows problems on the horizon or someone who is observant (like Fred, the penguin in Kotter’s fable) and notices small things over a long period of time that are troubling and need to be addressed. These indicators may be hidden from the average member and even the average leader of the church. These indicators appear under the surface of the day-to-day functioning of the church and may lead to a false sense of health among church members and leaders. Robert Rietveld writes, “One reason that the church may believe it is healthy is that it probably compares its own health status to other churches within the county (local area) instead of comparing its health status to the guidelines outlined in the Bible”

(90). DVC uses Biblical markers for health, as well as other indicating factors of organizational health that apply within the local church.

The second indicator (the role of prayer and scripture) deals with the importance of spiritual awareness. Churches are spiritual organizations that derive their sense of power, direction, and servitude from the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Churches can be perfectly functioning organizations that bring people together around vision and mission and service, but if the Spirit of God is not active and alive within the body of believers, then the church is nothing more than a social gathering that uses God as a symbol of their gatherings and not as the driving force behind their existence. As Evangelist Charles Doughty notes concerning Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus (see Ephesians chapter 3), prayer is the means through which God's people might "know the infinity of God's power (verse 16), God's presence (verse 12) and that we might know the infinity of God's love (verse 18)" (125).

Speaking of prayer's influence on the Christian and the collective body of believers, Dallas Willard writes:

There is an experiential fact that has proven in the lives of many disciples, ancient and modern. God will meet us in love, and love will keep our minds directed toward him as the magnet pulls the needle of the compass. Habit will be confirmed in gracious interaction, and our whole lives will be bathed in the presence of god. Constant prayer will only "burden" us as wings burden the bird of flight (186).

The commitment to collective prayer, especially within the leadership team of a congregation, can be tremendously effective in developing health. When a group of

people, clergy and lay, commit to inviting God's Spirit to guide them along these paths, the result is a vibrant, alive, and engaging church. Such a church has a bright and promising future (Wilson 18). On the other hand, a church that is lacking in prayer might be tempted to focus on their programs and other efforts in producing growth and may quickly find themselves ineffective and unhealthy. Any lasting restoration to health can only take place in answer to deep, heartfelt prayer. Sermons, programs, lectures, socials, and a multitude of other things will have little effect if the church fails to acknowledge and plead for God's Spirit to change the hearts and minds of its congregants (Mills 81).

Similar to prayer, scripture within the congregation is a vital component to the spiritual life of the church. While this marker measures the value of the scriptures and the volume of consumption of scripture, it cannot measure the level of spiritual impact of the scriptures on the collective body. The Spirit of God must be actively involved deep within the reader, not on a surface level, in the reading of God's word. As the preacher of the church and her other key leaders try to communicate essential truth, it is vital for the effectiveness of their message that it be continually shaped by the truth that the Scriptures extol. If it is formed by disciplines such as reading and spiritual reading as defined throughout church history, it will allow for more than the shaping of one's mind but the shaping of the entire person.

The church, her leaders, and her members must be formed through the spiritual disciplines that they practice. While the Bible is certainly a book to be studied academically, it is meant to be a penetrating and soul shaping experience through the interaction with the word and the Spirit himself. As Peterson (Loc 185) puts it, "we are formed by the Holy Spirit in accordance with the text of holy Scripture. God does not put

us in charge of forming our personal spiritualities. We grow in accordance with the revealed word implanted in us by the Holy Spirit.” While reading of Scriptures is not the only means of forming the spirituality of the congregation, it must be considered as a primary discipline in the shaping of who the church is becoming. The word of God provides encouragement, chastisement, information, and an understanding of who the Savior is and how he lived. Other disciplines such as prayer or fasting, should be used in conjunction with the reading of God’s word for the proper formation of those who desire to communicate the gospel within the church and to the community in which they live.

These two disciplines (reading of Scriptures and prayer) are vital links to the overall health of the church. Donald Whitney, in his classic work *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (1991), notes the critical connection of prayer and Scripture: “The dynamic relationship of prayer and intake of God’s Word, and their prominence over all other Spiritual Disciplines... whatever varying religious exercises we may practice, without the two basic ones, prayer and Bible reading, the others are empty and powerless.” He concludes that “one of the main reasons for a lack of Godliness is prayerlessness” (69-10).

The connection of these two disciplines and the health of a congregation are evident within the most popular models for discipleship within the modern church. Greg Ogden in his work *Transforming Discipleship* (2016), Francis Chan’s *Multiply* (2012), Dan Spader’s *4 Chair Discipling* (2014), and the resource known as *Rooted* (2018), a discipleship material produced by Mariners Church, all show the need for bible study, prayer, worship, and accountability to one or more people in order to be vital in helping with the continual growth of individual members and the collective body.

While all of the indicators deal with leadership within the organization, the last of the four markers DVC defines under the church health system specifically addresses organizational leadership. In their book, *Exploring Leadership*, Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, and Taylor define leadership in a simple and yet profoundly insightful way: “a process of social influence to guide, structure and or facilitate behaviors, activities, and or relationships towards the achievement of shared aims” (39). These last four measurable indicators of health will offer a sense of how well the leadership within the church is dealing with the people entrusted to their care and moving them towards shared aims.

The next two indicators of health are connected to one another in that they have a strong influence over the unity within the church. Confronting unhealthy people and programs and conflict management are important to church health because each are essential to determining how the body of Christ communicates with one another, how the body of Christ provides service to and for one another and within the community it is located, and how well it maintains the scriptural integrity of the body of Christ. Jesus said in His “high priestly prayer,” “I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me” (John 17:21 New Living Translation).

This unity within the church is best described by the terms used to depict church members. Gene Getz captures the importance of these terms as they concern connection to one another:

In order to understand the scriptural meaning of local church, we must think in terms of people in relationship not structures not meeting places not buildings.

New Testament writers used three basic concepts most exclusively to describe the

church as God's people in the community. They were called disciples, brothers, saints (49).

Each of these terms show a connectedness to Jesus (disciples), to one another (brothers), and to the view that God has of them (saints). These terms speak to the commonality that must be on display within the church that allows for the community to see, understand, and desire what the Christian community has to offer. The book of Acts, specifically the case of the widows in Chapter 6, offers a great case study for how this organizational unity brings glory to God and can be a means of bringing sinners to the Christ.

The task of daily provisions for such a large group would have become overbearing at times. Gareth Reese places the number of disciples in and around the city of Jerusalem around 20,000 (247). That would put the number of widows (conservatively based on modern rates) somewhere around 600 women, which would mean in modern currency about a two million dollar a year undertaking. For the young church the administrative burden alone, not to mention the financial burden, would seem overwhelming by modern standards, but it was one the ancient church took on willfully.

However, this administrative responsibility placed a significant burden on the apostles, who had a great concern for preaching the word. Matthew Henry suggests that receiving and paying the money was “serving tables,” much like the tables of the money changers in the Temple (1173). This was foreign to the business which the apostles were called to do. They were called to preach the word, and they were not able to do this sufficiently with this administrative burden, yet this daily distribution of benevolence was a matter of great importance. Therefore, something had to give, not as a matter of lesser

importance but as a matter of area of giftedness. Frank Gaebelin writes, “It is significant that the apostles were not prepared simply to ignore the problem; they seem to have realized that spiritual and material concerns are so intimately related with the Christian experience that one always affects the other for better or worse” (438).

In short, it appears that the Apostles selected their area of giftedness and the church prospered. The text reveals the church experiencing a significant growth spurt immediately following this incident. Reese (255-256) believes that the growth of the church is attributed to the freeing of the Apostles to focus on the word and that this growth can be contributed to a combination of the witness to the world of how Christians cared for one another and the ministry of the word. This willingness to confront unhealthy conflict within the church was a catalyst for health and growth within the church of Jerusalem. Other examples throughout Acts indicates this was the normative behavior for the leaders of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 12 and 15).

This indicator of unity is important in that it brings the community towards their ultimate aim. Henri Nouwen writes:

The basis of the Christian community is not the family tie, or social or economic equality, or shared oppression or complaint, or mutual attraction...but the divine call. The Christian community is not a closed circle of people embracing each other, but a forward-moving group of companions bound together by the same voice asking for their attention (66).

It would be the role of the leaders within a healthy church to confront the conflicts that arise within the church with measured, reasonable, and prayerfully considered solutions. They would also be tasked with finding the right programs to address the

pressing needs as well as those that would assist in the accomplishment of the overall unity of the church and the movement forward concerning the vision of the congregation. Healthy churches preemptively find ways to engage differences of opinion and expectation, competing visions, and personal disagreements. When conflict does erupt, they have clear and established methods of managing and even transforming that conflict into opportunities for deeper relationships and growth (Wilson 22).

The last two measurable indicators for health deal primarily with strategic leadership within a spiritual organization. The DVC process is an analysis of the church that provides the leaders of a congregation with data that will help them determine changes that might be needed within the congregation. This process allows for an examination of current state facts as a basis for determining a vision for the future of the church. These last two indicators (the power of strategic organization; defining reality and creating trust) are important to the church and her leaders in that the information garnered from the DVC examination will allow the leaders to look clearly at where they are in relation to where they may want or need to be moving as a congregation.

This process of evaluating the organization in comparison with what is needed to reach into the world for the cause of Christ will reveal needed changes. Some of these need to be made based on a variety of criteria which can either hold an organization captive or can set them free to lead out in a way that draws others towards Christ. There are multiple tools available to help maneuver through needed change. The simplest for evaluation and execution would be Warner Burke's definition of Porras and Robertsons (1992) framework for changes. This framework outlines planned change (a deliberate, conscious decision to improve the organization in some manner or perhaps to change the

system in a deeper, more fundamental way) versus unplanned change (a response to some unanticipated external change; these are often reactive and spontaneous) and first-order (evolutionary or continuous improvements) versus second-order change (revolutionary or more fundamental, radical changes that shift the paradigm) (134).

The understanding of what changes need to be made and where those changes must come from are the basic questions asked by leadership as they begin to evaluate their purpose and mission for the congregation. This level of evaluation reaches deep into the structure of the organization, examining every aspect of their principles, not so much every aspect of the organization. If the required change is discontinuous, then the focus needs to be on the organization's interface with its external environment and on the organization's mission, goals, and strategy (Burke 232). This is the difficult task that leaders face as they look intently at processes and principles that they have been either allowing to take place or perhaps even helped to create. While these practices may or may not be bad in and of themselves, they can be detrimental in accomplishing the care of people and drawing people closer to Christ. This is what leaders, especially in spiritual leadership, are required to do. Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio write:

Effective organizations require both tactical and strategic thinking as well as culture building by its leaders. Strategic thinking helps to create and build the vision of an agency's future. The vision can emerge and move forward as the leader constructs a culture that is dedicated to supporting that vision. The culture is the setting within which the vision takes hold. In turn, the vision may also determine the characteristics of the organization's culture (113).

It is this deep level of organizational examination and scrutiny that requires leaders to ask questions that can expose their bias and tendencies to lead from a position of strength instead of a position of faith. In order for congregations to increase their capacity for understanding and joining God's mission in the world, they must first have a sober and true accounting of their current reality, which requires honest conversations and communal discernment (Johnsrund 34). This examination and subsequent conversation concerning their own health is difficult, necessary, and potentially liberating. However, this examination cannot be undertaken lightly or without proper guidance. As Cory Johnsrund writes, "If a culture of collegiality and trust is to be fostered so that congregations can move forward in mission, that work must be undertaken by the congregation as a whole, under the guidance of a leader with these necessary gifts" (39).

Richard and Evelyn Hibbert, in a study of church health across cultures, examined markers of health within Turkish Roma (called Millet) churches in Bulgaria and discovered three important aspects of examining church health for the local congregation. First, the process of evaluating church health made the Millets highlight aspects of church life that had been neglected and which were leading to their decaying influence for the Gospel. Second, it led missionaries "to adapt their conceptions of church health to include local cultural emphases" (244). Third, Millet interviewees' formulation of their own church health assessment grid enabled them to assess their own churches' health in a way that takes their culturally and contextually generated concerns into account. Even the process of evaluating church health can have unintended healthy consequences, and all

church members may begin to ask questions or gain insights consistent with speaking about their own church's health.

The "Health System" as defined by DVC provides the foundational work for the following six systems. This first system allows for an openness and development of trust between DVC and the congregation and her leaders. It allows the church as a whole to see a systematic way of looking at how the church functions. This approach also allows the church to see how a systems approach to health can develop a more wholistic health within their congregation. A recent study of churches in Yaoundé, Cameroon concluded:

The efficiency and effectiveness of an organization lie in its ability to strike a balance between the right systems and the right people; that is, the organization is able to achieve its vision and mission through giving its employees the tools they need to be self-accomplished and to contribute to collective goals. With that in mind, the system approach for the church seems to be adequate for its good health. (Mbacham-Enow)

Area 2 – The Evangelism System. DVC considers the evangelism system to consist of evaluating the current evangelistic temperature within the church, developing outreach passion and zeal, changing a churches evangelistic DNA to a more grace-based philosophy, evaluating and developing relevant outreach strategies that work, developing and executing evangelistic events, and helping the church focus on keeping "the main thing the main thing" (Vaughn 13). This evangelism system is designed to help the church follow its Biblical mandate to be evangelistic and to reap the sweeping benefits that evangelism brings to the overall health of the church.

In the area of evangelism, the healthy church has a sense of the importance of reaching the lost by communicating the gospel to people in ways that are culturally relevant (Rietveld 60-61). This communication of the Gospel to the lost community by the church is in keeping with the clear commands of Jesus (see Luke 19:10; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8). It is also expressed in the teachings and examples from the life of the Apostles Paul (Acts 17:30), Peter (2 Peter 3:9; Acts 4:12), and John (Revelation 5:12-13) as well as unambiguously drawn from the Old Testament's connection to reconnecting lost man with a gracious God, as William McRaney points out:

When mankind's relationship with God was broken by the sinful, freewill choice of His creations, God expressed His desire to restore that relationship by providing them with a covering for their bodies that they might not be embarrassed before Him (see Genesis 3). This was God's first act of mission: to seek, cover and restore creation; but it would not be His last (18).

The concept of reaching the lost is primary to the concept of leading members to maturity. When a church loses its value for one over the other an imbalance occurs. Over the last several decades, many churches have veered more away from evangelism and more towards member care (Chan) (Rainer, *High Expectations*). So prominent is this shift that Cory Johnsrund's work is both enlightening and frightening:

Interestingly, another significant finding of my research was the lack of actual evangelism taking place in congregations studied. The high expressed value placed on evangelism did not correspond to an equally high level of practice or identifiable pathways for evangelism in the ministries of the congregation. Rather, the quantitative instrument showed only slight agreement that there were

identifiable pathways for evangelism in the congregations and that people were actively building relationships with those who did not yet know Christ. The pastors interviewed in the qualitative portion of the research strongly identified mission with evangelism, but the behaviors and systems in place in these congregations indicate that while evangelism is a stated value, the practice of evangelism lags behind (40).

Inherent within the outreach of the church is not just obedience to Jesus and the following of Biblical mandates; a healthy evangelism system within the local church also provides several tangible benefits to the overall health of the congregation. Bob Russell writes, “Every church needs to remember that the primary mission- the main thing- is evangelism” (252). He makes such an audacious statement based on the eternal benefits that those coming to know Jesus receive, as well as the benefits he believes flow from the evangelistic spirit within a local congregation, namely an increase in membership, resources, and openness to change. These three benefits to the church will help it to continue to fulfill its mission to the community it serves and the Master it worships.

Primarily, evangelism provides an increase in church membership. As people begin to experience the saving grace of Christ, they begin to share that news with others who in turn can share it with others. In describing this process as becoming “commissional as a church” Daniel Turner writes, “The premise is simple: the gospel is dynamic (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:17,24) and carriers of the gospel are carried by the gospel into places where people do not know the gospel. That is, union with Christ is the impetus for church evangelism” (99). Evangelism, specifically that accomplished through the process of discipleship, will increase the raw number of people impacted through the

Gospel. When Jesus gives the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-19; Mk. 16:16-17) the very essence of following this command would lead to the sharing of the Gospel with non-believers. Gregory Koukl suggests that the average Christian understands their need to share their faith but often feels intimidated about sharing their faith, or they have no goals in sharing their faith or feel they have not been trained in how to share their faith. “People who are not trained in evangelism are less likely to do evangelism” (Olson 75). What has become the reality throughout much of evangelicalism (Chan) (Ogden 2007) (Spader) is that for most churches and for the average Christian there is no real plan in place to become disciple-makers. DVC can help to establish the training and spur the enthusiasm towards developing a plan for evangelism, which includes the discipleship aspect.

Secondarily, an increase in membership will also increase the resources of the congregation. Those resources include financial, gift, and talent resources, as well as the resource of greater influence within the community. These resources might be seen in leadership within the congregation, as well as leadership development and multiplication (see Area 5 on the Volunteer System and Area 7 on the Elders and Staff System). However, the congregation might see its best increase in resources through the varying talents within the congregation used for the purpose of evangelism. David Dunaetz describes how the “mum” effect (the fear of sharing bad news with people) can develop hesitancy within the church to share the Gospel (good news) and states:

One approach that Christian leaders can take to counter the mum effect is to clearly distinguish between various aspects of sharing the Christian faith with others. If we generally define outreach as building relationships, witnessing as sharing stories of what one has experienced with God, and evangelism as

presenting all that a person needs to know to make a decision to follow Christ, then each of these aspects of sharing one's faith can be examined in light of the mum effect and the New Testament understanding of spiritual gifts. Some aspects of sharing one's faith can be done on the interpersonal level with less perceived risk of rejection and criticism, reducing the impact of the mum effect. In this way, non-Christians may also receive a more complete and comprehensive exposure to the gospel so that they can make informed (141).

His research showed that increasing the number of different talents used for outreach, witness, and evangelism utilized more and varying talents within the church. This would allow the overall participation within the church to rise and connect people to others through the gifts they are able to use.

Finally, with the increase in the number of people experiencing the life change of coming to know Jesus as Savior through the evangelism of the local church, there is developed within the church an openness to change. Brian LaMew, formerly of Sun Valley Community Church, says, "culture will always trump strategy"(5) and that evangelism and the news of changed lives as a result of the evangelistic efforts of the congregation will ultimately lead to a culture of change within the church. These changes allow the church to maintain a cultural relevance and develop leadership that brings fresh eyes to the congregation. It also allows the congregation to not maintain an inward focus. David Vaughn (2020) adds that without an evangelistic focus within the church "the natural gravitational pull of the church is always insider focused" and over time the church will either "embrace evangelism or it will die" (18-19). As this flood of new life comes into the church other areas become more alive. Whenever a local congregation is

effectively engaged in missional outreach, that congregation is a group living beyond their preoccupation with themselves (Callahan 56). As the church moves beyond their own needs, “it begins to seek out new ways to communicate the Gospel to non-believers” (Macchia 146). This reliance on newness of thought allows the church to maintain an outreach into the community and introduce new ideas and new methods to accomplishing its main task of winning the lost.

Area 3 – The Worship Service System. When evaluating the worship system within a congregation, DVC looks at the current weekend service experience, multi-generational styles/approaches, and worship language, technology, and culture as well as how the church facilitates transformational services, develops a culture of expectation, and celebrates victories and successes. These elements, when combined, give a holistic view of the worship system within a congregation. Given the independent nature of the Christian church movement and lack of uniformity of worship within the context of the New Testament, this system is not about the form of corporate worship as much as it is about the impact that a chosen form has upon the overall congregation.

There are several words translated “worship” in the New Testament, but the most frequent word literally means to “kiss towards” (Nash 53). This is true in both the personal sense of the word as well as in the collective body of the church. According to the Westminster Catechism, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever” (1647 Westminster Confession). Once again, this is true in the life of the individual as well as the collective group known as the church. Hence, a healthy church will educate, promote, and incorporate elements that lead to a worship experience geared towards personal and corporate worship.

In personal worship, the worshiper is engaging in a discipline that is “our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father” (Foster 158). This is not and should not be limited to the corporate gatherings of the church. Rather, it is “doing everything in our power to please God from whom all blessings flow” (Lawson 74) throughout daily life (see Romans 12:1-2). Therefore, from a personal, and corporate perspective, “to worship God is to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise, or better, to approach and address God as He is worthy” (Whitney 87). And one worships God in a personal way, the worshiper is changed by the radiant presence of God. Dallas Willard writes, “If in worship we are met by God Himself, our thoughts and our words turn to perception and experience of God, who is then really present to us in some degree of His greatness, beauty, and goodness. This will make for an immediate and dramatic change in our lives.”

In like manner, corporate worship should also engage the collective body in a posture suited for change. In fact, the very word “worship” “in common English usage is typically used to refer to the public gathering of people to perform religious activity; inclusive within the Christian context, the regular assembly of the church to engage God” (Vanhoozer 856-857) in the name of Jesus. From this point forward in the study, when referencing worship, this author will be referring to this corporate assembly of the church.

Darrell Johnson writes concerning the church, “fundamentally the church is a worshiping community” (Ogden, Essentials 57). Donald Whitney would add depth to the importance of corporate gathering by saying, “to express and experience Christianity almost always on the individual level (that is to the exclusion of the group level), means

you will needlessly and sinfully miss much of the blessing and power of God”(92). In fact, to needlessly and habitually miss out on the corporate gathering is not only sinful (see Hebrews 10:24-26), but it limits the experience of the Christian existence. To worship is to experience Reality, to touch life; it is to know, to feel, and to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community (Foster 163).

The Bible is outspoken in defining the purpose of worship to be less in what is done for the worshiper than what they do for God (Lawson 117). If they are to be aligned in worship with the Scriptures and Biblically based traditions (those going back even to the synagogue era of Jewish worship) then they must collectively accept that corporate worship is a staple of the church. Michael Lucas writes:

The chief purpose of church worship is to direct collective praise and adoration to God and to experience His presence in diverse Christian community. Worship is chiefly about God as audience and the nations as His praise team. Deeper than mere performance or consumer-based understanding and assessments, church worship is about the relational interplay between God and His people. This is greatly affected by the interplay of fellow worshipers with both God and one another (4).

That interplay can lead to a healthy worship system within a church, which has proven to be more helpful to the church than just providing a meaningful experience to the congregants. Kennon Callahan found that corporate, dynamic worship was a central characteristic found in effective churches. His research uncovered that corporate, dynamic worship would consist of five factors: warmth and winsomeness of the service and the congregation; the dynamic and inspiration of the music; the character and quality

of the preaching; the power and movement of the liturgy; and the seating range of the sanctuary (Callahan). While his research is certainly dated (1983) and precedes much of the long-term impact of the church growth movement, much of what he found still remains valid within the field of healthy church research when it pertains to the area of worship. In a study conducted by David Bond (2015) designed to examine the extent to which differences existed between growing, plateaued, and declining churches in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention he examined the areas of worship, community, mission, vibrant leadership, prayerful dependence, relational intentionality, and missionary mentality and discovered that “of the seven church health elements, worship had the strongest effect and the greatest ability to serve as a predictor of whether a participant attended a growing, plateaued, or declining church” (158).

Bob Russell also gives credence to the idea of effective worship having a dynamic impact on the church. He lists four “legitimate expectations” that a worshiper should have when experiencing a corporate worship event. They are a sense of God’s presence, a conviction of our sinfulness, a joyful reminder of God’s grace, and the inspiration to serve (Russell). These four elements when present in the corporate gathering of the church can lead to some remarkable results on the faithful worshipers (like changed lives and a desire to live out their faith) as well as the visiting sinner in need of salvation. When outsiders see Christians genuinely worshiping, they are attracted (Russell 51). Speaking to the timelessness of authentic worship and its impact on the church’s effective outreach, Callahan concludes, “Worship will continue in the foreseeable future to be one of the major places where unchurched persons and newcomers come to discover whether

a congregation will share with them help and hope in strong, warm and winsome ways” (63).

Outside of the impact on the evangelistic fever of the church, there are other tangible benefits to the church when corporate worship is dynamic and directed towards God as the object of worship, namely unity within the body of Christ and the introduction to and willingness to change as the congregation changes.

The Apostle Paul included corporate worship as part of a means leading to unity and like-mindedness towards one another to the churches of Colossae (see Colossians 3:12-17). Alexander Campbell viewed corporate worship as “a moment of unity for the visible church as a means for the present enjoyment of salvation” (Hicks 212). Corporate worship is a means through which people experience a “togetherness in a simple, profound way amidst the dynamic gospel that shares with them help and hope” (Callahan 82).

This sense of belonging was a contributing factor to the early church, observed through the writing of Luke in the book of Acts. A focus on preaching of the Word of God, a celebration of the Lord’s Supper, a commitment to prayer, and a desire to have things in common with one another through fellowship were the hallmarks of early worship according to Luke’s writings. The simplistic and participatory nature of synagogue worship was reflected in the dressed-down worship style of early Christian worship, especially in comparison to the formality and grandeur of Temple worship, but the more profound changes of Christian worship focused on the resurrected Christ, the gift-prompting presence of the Spirit, and the unity in diversity that the gospel created in these communities of faith (Lucas 110).

Perhaps from a more practical nature, dynamic worship welcomes change and newness to the church. The way the church approaches worship, if inviting the presence of God to be with them, inevitably brings change to the worshiper. Dallas Willard writes:

If in worship we are met by God Himself, our thoughts and words turn to perception and experience of God, Who is then really present to us in some degree of His greatness, beauty and goodness. This will make for an immediate, dramatic change in our lives (178).

Hence, as the worshiper changes, so will the congregation. As Ed Hindson notes, “I have observed over the years that our relationship to the house of God tends to run parallel to our relationship with God” (43). In the context of a healthy church worship system, as the church welcomes this change, the congregation is willing to become more like God and willing to reach more into the hurting communities in need of His saving grace.

Area 4 – The Connection System. In the connection system, DVC evaluates the current assimilation and retention system; how the church connects and retains new members; the role of Sunday school and small groups; the discipling and deepening of members; recovery Ministries and their role; and how it sponsors connecting events. DVC sees the connecting of people within the congregation as a vital part of the overall health of the church. By evaluating these systems, or lack thereof, DVC is able to help congregations build a better sense of community within the body of Christ.

From its inception, the church was designed to be a deeply-rooted community of faith designed to bring believers to a maturity capable of being reproduced. The church is the perfect environment in which people can be nourished and grow in a community that

builds meaningful connections. Ingrained in the very nature of mankind is the desire for community. Beginning with Adam and Eve, the initial community was designed to be between mankind and the Creator (Heading 43). These relationships, when fostered within the church, can allow the Christian to become spiritually healthy as well as the church itself. These relationships are significant to the overall health of the congregation “because at its core Christianity is a relationship” (Rhodes 95). Shawn Barr writes, “Christianity is primarily ontological. God is relational, and trying to use methods and formulas can only take one so far in knowing God. The church and small groups must go beyond the formulas and methods and enter into a relationship” (59).

However, as a church, Christians can serve and study and even worship without ever being involved in the depth of relationship that Jesus desires within the church. God wants his followers to live, serve, and process in the context of community (Chan 10), and without deep relationship building the community will always be less than what God desires it to be. It is within this authentic community that accountability can thrive, the rich, meaningful, corrective, collaborative struggle of spiritual growth. Greg Ogden speaks of this kind of community as reaching the fifth level of conversation, the “peak communication” that is marked by “openness, transparency and self-disclosure” and where “we are known for who we truly are”(Transforming 146-147). Once the disciple arrives at this point, they can fully grasp the meaning of what Chan encourages for spiritual development that is focused on “shared responsibility” for the “spiritual well-being of others” (12). At this level there is an equal comfort in the encouragement and correction of the saints and Jesus calls Peter “blessed” and then immediately calls him to “get behind me Satan” (Mt. 16). It is this level of communication that allows for the

genuine building up of the Body of Christ in a way that reflects the nature of Jesus. As John Heading notes:

Biblical community is the body of Christ living to reflect the nature of God through Biblical directive. We were created to live in a community. Jesus made it possible for us to reflect the relational nature of God through life in the community. and a common call to bear witness to God's salvation-creating power in the world. In the context of the local church, Biblical faith forms a community of those who worship God, who share with one another a common experience of God's salvation (7).

Too often churches have departed from this directive and allowed the main gathering for worship to become the focal point of the church itself. Oftentimes churches build a sense of community that revolves around worship, learning, and service. While these three are certainly key components in the church community there is a lack of building authenticity within this community. When churches become primarily focused on the main event (the church gathering) a church member could often experience "crowded loneliness" a term coined by community specialists describing when there are a great number of people around an individual, yet that person still feels lonely or isolated due to a lack of relational connection (Harless 11). If mankind is truly created with a desire to fulfill community, then community fulfillment cannot be accomplished in a neatly packaged, one-hour time slot on Sunday morning (Heading 56).

Bill Wilson captures the essence of this need for community within the local church that extends beyond the one-hour worship and into a variety of community groups:

The prevailing practice in many congregations is to concentrate primary attention upon public worship. Many participants consider attending a worship service to be the extent of their involvement in a local church. They come, gain insights or inspiration, and quickly move on to the next event on their calendars. Such patterns often produce a consumer mentality that focuses primarily upon the degree to which one feels “fed” or engaged by the worship event. Healthy churches know that engagement in small groups of multiple sizes and foci is an essential building block to congregational health. Knowing others and being known by others is at the heart of a healthy church. Such connectivity is not easy or quick but attempting to “do church” without it has repeatedly proven to be futile. Healthy churches seek to engage their members in small groups of some kind on a weekly basis. These may be groups that meet in traditional settings on Sundays, or they may be evening gatherings during the week. Some may be devoted to study, but others may be task oriented. Some may run on an open-ended schedule, whereas others gather for a limited duration (23-24).

This is the reason DVC has a focus, not just on the health of the public gatherings of the church, but on their connections systems as well. Most notable among those connection systems would be the development and practice of effective small-group ministries (which could include a traditional Sunday School setting, or some sort of planned discipleship groups). These settings can help the congregation develop a sense of belonging to the overall spiritual community. Paul Clever aptly describes the importance of connection within the Body of Christ, as he writes, “I do know, however, that the spiritual need to connect with something real and transformative is overwhelming, at

times desperate” (31). Effective small group ministries within the local church can help the congregation become more of a Biblical model church (a restoration to Biblical examples, which is a focus within the Independent Christian Church movement), as well as create a community setting with the church that can lead to greater health and effectiveness to its mission.

From a Biblical perspective, small group ministries help churches accomplish a model reflected in the Scriptures as well as the connections necessary to fulfill both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. To a very divided Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul writes, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (12:26). By using the analogy of the church representing a functioning body, Brian Jones adds:

Paul clearly points out that when we as followers of Jesus become spiritually intimate with one another, it is as if our souls grow together and we begin to share spiritual nerve endings. In a healthy-functioning community of Jesus followers, people are deeply connected to one another, and when something happens, good or bad, the instinctive response is to rally around one another (168).

This helps to create the sense of family that is another element of a Biblically healthy church. Dr. Leroy Lawson writes:

We are right, then, to call our local congregation a family, the family of God. We are born into the family by water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:5), we eat our family meals (breaking of bread), we wear and try to bring honor to our family name (Christian), we are obedient to the Head of the family and carry out His wishes.

We did not somehow earn the right to belong to the family, but we were selected and adopted by the Father Who wanted us to be His children (45).

This sense of family allowed the first church to reach an effectiveness that would transform communities and impact the world for more than two millennia. As Elton Trueblood notes, “The early Christians were not people of standing, but they had a secret power among them, and the secret power resulted from the way in which they were members of one another” (25-26).

For the modern church, Acts 2:42-47 has become the primary Biblical focus for small group ministry. Throughout history there have been many interpretations of this pivotal passage. Looking at the basics of the passage there are five objectives of small groups: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, and mutual care (Elwell and Beitzel 258). These Biblical foundations would appeal to the Independent Christian church given its appeal to the Scriptures and its functionality within the modern setting.

From a modern church health perspective, many experts in the field of church health agree that small group ministries are vital to the health of the church and her sense of community in helping individuals towards maturity. The capability of a church to create intentional opportunities for meaningful community is vital to any size church. People visiting a church may be looking for many different things, but all of them have a need to belong. A church that cannot make that connection for people will die (Blackmon 36). David Rhodes adds, “small groups are not optional for a healthy church; they are essential (83). Small groups allow churches to be intentional about building safe, open environments for new people to enter their community (Blackmon 37). According to David Bond, creating community, particularly through the use of a small group or

Sunday School system, appeared to be a primary factor in church health and growth.

Small-group systems enabled churches to create effective places for deep relationships to be developed (60).

These small groups can vary in form and function depending on the purpose of the groups or the needs of the congregations. For instance, some churches still meet the small group needs of people through their Sunday school program. While that model does not seem to be a growing edge in churches today, a number of churches are still doing it successfully (Rhodes 83-84). The key is to build the connections within the larger church body. People who connect through small groups have a sense of being part of the church. They also tend to own the vision and ministries of the church more fully and give more of themselves for the kingdom of God (Blackmon 37).

These connections fit within broad categories listed by Rhodes as:

Care groups- This type of group forms around the need of every Christian to have a place they can be known, loved, and shepherded. These groups can be formed on the basis of locality (all those living in a certain area), life status (i.e., parents with young children), or affinity (people who want to be together).

Task groups- These groups provide most of the care of a care group, but they are unified around a service area or a specific mission.

Support group- addressing specific needs, generally related to the need for encouragement through difficulty, whether addiction, grief or the like.

Evangelism group- are seeker friendly and are focused on reaching those who are in a pre-Christian state(85).

While each of these groups may have a different focus, the byproduct of the commitment to one another in these smaller groups is a contribution to the needs of the individual as well as the ministry of the church at large. Small group participants gain a sense of security as they sense a system, whether explicit or implicit, in which they can interact (Heading 52). A small group develops into a community of friends, a family, and a safe place to live life together. The relationships formed there are genuine and often lifelong. Further, the intimate nature of the smaller gathering allows for much deeper sharing and accountability as well as mutual caring (Blackmon 38). This deeper level of connection mentioned by Blackmon has a residual effect that goes beyond the connection of the group itself, or even the mission of the church. These small groups can help act as an incubator for teachers, disciples, and pastoral development. Small group ministries can play a large, if not primary, role in discipling group members, and as Bill Wilson concludes, “The wise church seeks to cultivate a culture of spiritual formation that makes discipleship more than an intellectual pursuit. Rather than simply gathering to study, healthy congregations create ways for disciples to act out their faith and engage in the primary mission of the church: making disciples” (34-35).

One of the largest problems in the local church today is the number of undercommitted church members who remain undercommitted year after year (Blackmon 41). Focusing on the level of development that a small group ministry can bring to the church is one of signs of health within the DVC and one of the focal points of the consultation process.

Area 5 – Volunteers. The fifth area of measuring health within a congregation through the DVC is the system used for volunteers within the church. In this system DVC

evaluates the current ministry system of the church in terms of: gifts discovery for church members; recruiting, training, and deploying church members into active service within the congregation; leadership development and multiplication; how the church is able to break the 20-80 standard; and how the church is celebrating volunteers. Each of these areas are measured by responses given during the congregational survey.

Cultivating volunteers helps the church in numerous ways; this research has found three that are primary to the mission of the church. First, cultivating a system of volunteers fulfills a Biblical mandate for leaders within the church. Second, it allows for every member of the church to explore their gifts and use them to move the church forward. Third, a volunteer system helps to develop leadership within the congregation.

Churches that are training and empowering volunteers to do the work of ministry are actively and intentionally fulfilling a Biblical mandate for the leadership of the church. As Bob Russell succinctly states it, “It’s the task of the leaders to train God’s people for ministry”(175). The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12,ESV). Thus, church leadership is meant to be actively engaged in the ministry of preparing others.

However, in many churches there is a reluctance, fear, or inability to actively engage volunteers and deploy them within the overall work and mission of the church. There may be many contributing factors to these failures to engage and train, but the end results of such failure will lead to an unhealthy church overall that is ineffective in reaching its full potential. Arno Wiebe makes this observation:

The church is a charismatic body, therefore the health of the church depends upon the ministry of all of the members. Often only some of the members are involved in joyful service in and through the church. This may be because spiritual leaders have failed to consistently teach and to train believers for the ministries God has intended for them. It may also be because believers have been unwilling to commit themselves to the Lord and to the life and work of the church (27).

DVC works to help leadership within the church evaluate their system for training and using volunteers in order to help them more successfully fulfill their Biblical mandate for training others for the work of ministry. Churches that can develop this system create a mentality that every member of the body of Christ is a member of the ministry of Christ, thus fulfilling a Biblical call for all to be actively engaged in the work of ministry (see 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4).

In the process of developing every member into a minister, the church's volunteer system should be designed to allow every member to explore their spiritual gifts. In theological circles, and especially within Independent Christian Churches, the term "spiritual gifts" can be interpreted to mean one of two things. One is the charismatic gifts that are displayed in the New Testament that point to the miraculous, namely speaking in tongues or healing or prophecy. The second way this term is interpreted within Independent Christian Churches is to mean gifts that each believer has been equipped with to fulfill their role within the church. Examples of these gifts are found primarily in four passages within the New Testament (see Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4). For DVC it is these types of gifts that will be examined in this study.

From the previously mentioned four texts, one can compile a lengthy list, varying from eighteen to as many as twenty-one gifts depending on how many you combine as, for example, prophets with prophecy, helps with ministry, and administration with ruling (Small 28). DVC has discovered that helping members find these talents or gifts and then put them into use for the good of the body is one indicator of a healthy church. Arno Wiebe describes the benefits as such:

Believers need to know how to discover the gifts they have. This discovery does not usually begin with some special insight or experience. The believer who is willing to use the opportunities for service that are available will be directed to specific gifts and ministries in the course of willing service. Further, the body of believers has the responsibility of helping individuals in the discovery and exercise of their gifts. This would include encouragement for a person to serve where fellow believers think one might be effective. It would also include openness on the part of the body to allow a person to function in an area of service he or she would desire to try. In such mutual care, respect, and encouragement the atmosphere is created for the discovery and exercise of one's gift (30-31).

Wiebe's observations demonstrate that there is a vital role to be played between the congregation helping new members discover those gifts and the leadership of the church creating an environment in which those gifts are put to their best use with the volunteer system of the church. According to Bob Russell growing churches must create an environment in which volunteers are seen as a vital part of that growth. He writes, "As a church begins to grow, there's a temptation to hire more staff to do the work of ministry. But this practice runs the risk of reducing the congregation to an audience"(177). What

he discovered over his years in ministry and what DVC counsels churches to do is to challenge their members to greater levels of commitment. This is what Thomas Rainer discovered in his research concerning expectations of members within highly effective churches. In his book *High Expectations*, he writes, “Effective assimilation churches have one primary characteristic that sets them apart from churches that do not keep their members in active involvement. Effective assimilation churches had high expectations of all their members” (23).

In fact, a study conducted in the early 1970s by Gary Skinner was aimed at helping a specific church create a deeper sense of community and relieve a deep reliance on professional staff within the congregation. The two-year program he developed from this study yielded two critical findings. First, participants indicated growth in their capacity to articulate their faith and in their positive identification with the Christian community; second, ministry by the laity can be experienced as a gain without undercutting the ministry of the professional staff (Skinner 31). What these findings have shown is that a healthy church can grow its volunteer base, increase its ministry capacity, and continue to add staff as the need warrants. A congregation can become healthier by enlisting more volunteers to do the work of ministry. Russell adds, “Nothing helps you grow as a Christian like service and if your church is not providing opportunities for your members to serve, you are stifling their spiritual growth” (178).

Healthy churches will develop a system for volunteer recruitment, training, and deployment in areas that fits the giftedness of the individual members. Bob Russell lists six ways Southeast Christian Church involved as many members as possible: by offering a spiritual gifts class; having an annual volunteer recruitment event; offering different

levels of responsibility; recruiting qualified people for leadership; releasing the responsibility, and encouraging the workers (179-193). These steps helped to ensure that as many members as possible were being involved in the areas that would fit their gifts and would keep them willing to serve and less likely to get frustrated in their service.

Finally, service based on their gifts allows church members the ability to discover the difference between doing service and being a servant. Richard Foster distinguishes between those two ideas in his classic book, *Celebration of Discipline*: “it is one thing to act like a servant; it is quite another to be a servant. It is possible to master the mechanics of service without experiencing the discipline of service” (128). When the church aligns service with giftedness it can lead its members to a greater sense of accomplishing the ministry of Christ. As Russell concludes, “If your church is going to reach its maximum potential and be an unstoppable force for Jesus Christ, then all its members must begin to see themselves as ministers and priests, doing their part to see that the work of ministry is done” (193).

Another direct benefit to developing a volunteer system within the church that leads to health is that this system grows future leaders within the congregation. While not all followers of Jesus are called into special roles of leadership within the church (i.e. evangelists, pastors, teachers, and deacons), every member of the body of Christ should be leading others in some capacity, primarily in a disciple-making capacity. As these followers of Christ continue to develop the inner qualities needed to be effective as a disciple-maker, they will find themselves in an ever-increasing position of influence. If in fact the primary definition of leadership is influence, then the continual development of the inner person will help each to be more effective than any leadership talent or training

that they might already possess (Lui 24-25; Faulhaber 19; Nelson 19). This continual character development will allow church members to reach out in influence towards those that they are working closer with, giving them a broader and deeper base for further influence.

Once the culture of character development is established as a norm within the church, and the leaders of that church release the individual followers with the power to influence others for the cause of Christ with more than a slogan or program, there will be a continual pool from which to draw the next generation of leaders. The more one leads others towards Christ the more influence they will gain with those they have led, which propels them to even of a leadership role. Therefore, what should come as a natural progression from disciple-makers will be the call of the Spirit into the more specialized roles of leadership within the church.

As a church begins reproducing itself in a discipleship fashion, the right people and the right motives will arise to accomplish this vision. The power to accomplish the vision of a particular church will come from the team of individuals within the church that are forming the relationships necessary to be effective. As Lovett Weems states, “the power of leaders is never a generic power, but always a power related to interrelationships with others” (21). These relationships can be formed through the disciple-making process, or whatever training mechanism the congregation is employing to train volunteers, and will not only form the bonds necessary to carry out such a vision for the church but also positively impact the overall growth of the congregation.

This type of development of future leaders takes the direct and intentional involvement of current leadership within the church. Specifically, for Independent

Christian Churches, this leadership development must flow from those leaders tasked with oversight for the church, namely the elders and evangelist of the local congregation. Thus, in reference to the overseer, the spiritual gift is God's provision of enablement to him for fulfilling his functions and stewardship to the flock in a way that is most spiritually effective. For the elder who is in proper relationship to God there is the assurance of a gifted ministry to God's flock that can accomplish all that God intends for its edification (cf. Eph. 4:11-13) (Small 22). This edification must include the development of those that would follow him in the role of leadership which is best accomplished through a system that helps in the cultivation and deployment of volunteers in the local church. As they grow in their ministry, they will develop ministry teams to help them accomplish their ministry. And as Patricia Hayes notes, "Excellent leadership teams do not just happen, but with intention, coaching, support, and gratitude they can soar (44)."

For DVC, the volunteer system within the church is another way in which they can better predict health within the church. When this system is visible to its members, celebrated by its entire congregation, and purposefully cultivated by its leadership then healthy volunteers can help the church to prosper in its mission.

Area 6 – Stewardship. In the sixth system DVC helps congregations in evaluating their current giving in the church, helps them in developing tithers, challenges them in moving to radical generosity, exposes them to plans for transitioning people through the five levels of giving, helps churches in leveraging technology to increase giving, and gives them the tools to help in creating a yearly Stewardship Plan. This sixth system goes beyond the normal stewardship concepts of making sure the church is using

its money well and helps create an overall asset picture to help the church view its stewarding health from a more complete picture of total asset management and planning, as opposed to a normal financial plan that shows simply the revenue and expenditures stewardship.

This study defines stewardship as oversight and protection of an asset or assets, generally on behalf of another or of an organization (Brown, L. xii). Limited in this definition is what might be future outcomes from wise stewardship such as producing greater return on the use of the asset. Therefore, those future assets and the vision for the future is also considered when discussing stewardship within the setting of the church. However, for this section of the analysis of DVC, stewardship will focus on the financial assets overseen by the leaders and given by members.

The primary method for evaluating current giving levels from members of the congregation is through the survey in which the congregation anonymously submits information giving details of their regularity and percentage of giving. Using the data from the survey as the starting point, DVC can form a plan with the leadership team to begin developing tithers and then moving them towards a more increased giving pattern described as radical generosity. This will begin with the leadership of the congregation and then include the rest of the members. When generosity abounds the Kingdom can flourish. As Bob Russell notes, “Biblical stewardship and generous giving can transform lives and significantly advance the Kingdom of God” (230).

DVC evaluates the giving patterns in the church to help with the increase in giving; however, they see this increase, not simply as a means of increasing revenue, but allowing the congregation to experience a fuller relationship with God. The

personification of a thriving relationship with God could be defined as stewardship. When one's relationship with God grows, stewardship plays a key role (Bruce 1). From a theological perspective, giving of one's financial resources is seen in the life of the patriarchs, under the Law of Moses, under the teachings of grace in Jesus Christ, through the teaching of the apostle Paul, and in the example of the early church. Financial giving to the Kingdom of God is not only a means through which one ensures the ministry continues, it is a means of worship that enhances the life of the believer.

Once the evaluating process is over, DVC will help the leadership begin to create a plan to developing tithers within the church. Often in Independent Christian Churches (New Testament Churches) there can be a reluctance to accept tithing as a New Testament principle to be followed in the modern church. In a study focused specifically on increasing tithing in a specific branch of the ICC (non-instrumental churches of Christ), Ben Bruce writes the following:

It is important to note that Jesus did not do away with the tithe that was established before the law or the tithe that was practiced under the law. Instead, He expanded upon the grace of giving. Jesus attaches one's gift directly to his/her heart. One's gift to God is a reflection of one's love for God. According to the teachings of Christ, giving at least a tithe is a Biblical place to start in one's giving to God. Paul continues to teach that being a good steward is not about money, but it is about giving one's heart to the Lord. Giving is a reflection of one's love for the Lord and of the value one places on the Great Commission (40).

So for DVC, specifically when reaching out to ICC, the challenges to developing regular giving begins on the theological front. They speak with church leadership

concerning the need to provide for the congregation's education concerning Biblical stewards, challenge them to meet specific goals, and give them an example of giving from within their own leadership team. This is a process they designate as "moving to radical generosity" and "transitioning people through the five levels of giving."

As a Biblical principle, the people of God are challenged to be generous with their resources. Whether it is was the sacrificial giving of the church in Acts (see chapters 2, 4, & 5) or the Apostle Paul's challenge to the church at Corinth to live and give liberally (see 2 Cor. 8:1-7), "the early church was known for its generosity" (Bruce 41). What DVC hopes to accomplish is to lead the church towards a Biblical understanding and establishment of a radically generous spirit.

One of the keys to getting people within the church to radical generosity is to move members along a scale that they define as the "five levels of giving." There are other popular categories for the five levels, but most often they are articulated as takers (those that give nothing), tippers (more sporadic and give out of a compulsion), trusting (they set a specific amount and give on a regular basis), threshold givers (people who will give 10% of their income), and transformational givers (people who go beyond a regular tithe and give in an ever increasing manner (Daffern). DVC lists categories in a more measurable way, based on their survey results. Their five levels are: non-giver; first-time giver (\$1-500); regular giver (\$501-5,000); tither (\$5,001-10,000), and above and beyond giver (greater than \$10,000). Once a person can be labeled by one of the five categories there is a strategy put in place to move them to the next category. While each category has a specific target in mind and a particular champion from within the leadership to target the giver, there are some common threads that appear in each level of movement.

These include encouragement to read the Bible more or with a focus on stewardship, encouragement of commitments each fall for a general fund initiative in the following year, frequent contact with each giver, and testimonies provided of generosity and a challenge to move up a level each year. The continual challenge to increase in generosity is consistent with what the Apostle would teach. Paul did not teach that one did not have to give or that one should give less than a tithe; rather, he followed in the steps of Jesus and expanded on giving by not limiting one's giving to tithing only (Bruce 7).

The final aspect to the church's stewardship is specifically addressed at the leadership of the congregation. DVC teaches the church strategies for leveraging technology to increase giving and for creating a yearly Stewardship Plan. Wise stewardship of God's resources is an important part of a healthy church (Russell 231), and as such, the leaders of the church need to maximize their ability to increase giving opportunities for the church members, increase their own management of the tools they've been given, and discover new ways to reach financial health within the church. Larry Brown suggests the following to help churches maximize their effective stewardship, including the oversight of their assets:

Finance is an integral part of a ministry's operations that can be used to model Biblical standards to its staff and constituents. Given the concept of stewardship (discussed more fully below) that everything a Christian or ministry has belongs to the Lord, financial controls help ensure optimal use of the assets entrusted to a ministry... The common threads in financial controls are the protection of assets, good stewardship, Kingdom advancement (by discipleship and by evangelism, growth in both depth and breadth), and transparent compliance with both internal and external requirements (37).

Much of this stewardship happens intentionally. One cannot simply expect wise stewardship and financial health to happen without some level of planning to take place. The last step in the process of stewardship that DVC addresses with its client churches is helping them create an annual stewardship plan. Financial strategic planning will not happen without careful planning, although according to the survey this is the present situation for the Church of Christ in general (Bruce 105). Churches need to be strategic in planning out their financial expectations and their means to accomplish their financial goals throughout the year. According to Bruce's study:

Each congregation needs to evaluate the planning process and effectively address these seven recommendations in order to increase stewardship: (1) encourage stronger prayer lives, (2) create a vision, (3) leadership needs to listen, (4) effective communication, (5) money accountability, (6) stewardship teaching, preaching, and counseling, and (7) financing the members' suggestions. Strategic planning allows the church to take necessary steps to become more effective in all regards; therefore, each member will be impacted by a solid plan that is implemented using relevant strategies that address concerns as well as offer opportunity to grow in Christ.

As such, every level of leadership is involved in the process of financial stewardship within the church. Small-group leaders, elders and deacons, and pre-school and children's ministry staff are all enlisted in the process. This includes the primary spokesman for the congregation, the preacher. Many preachers do not like to preach on the topic of money, but Bob Russell lists five reasons why the preacher should be actively engaged in regular preaching concerning money. These reasons to preach on stewardship are: God's word speaks often about stewardship; generosity transforms people; money is

often necessary to advance the kingdom; generous giving is a positive testimony; people need stewardship advice (233-240).

Kennon Callahan's research showed that financial stewardship within the congregation was one of the keys to a healthy and effective church. He summarizes his findings on financial responsibility within a healthy and effective church:

A responsible theology of stewardship encourages the local congregation to invests money in such a way as to (1) increase missional services in the community, (2) maximizes the effectiveness of the local church, and (3) add to the number of households that contribute financially to the life and mission of the congregation. It is not the task of the church to save money. Nor is it the task of the church to spend money. Rather, it is vitally important that the church invests its funds wisely so that mission, effectiveness, and increased giving are the substantive results of its sound investments (123).

Area 7 – Elders and Staff. DVC's seventh area for church health is one that encompasses much of what the church thinks of when it comes to the church: its facilities, elders, staff, and the support systems for those things. In this area DVC spends time helping the church to evaluate "space and place" (how much space is needed for their ministry capacity and where things are happening, including building locations). They also assist the Senior Minister with sermon series planning that enhances strategic agenda, coach the Senior Minister on developing leadership style equal to the current (and future) church size, assist Elders in adjusting their roles to maximize church health and growth, evaluate bylaws, constitution, policy, and position papers to help with alignment and movement towards growth, and evaluate the technology and office

systems as they function within the current setting. Each of these points of evaluation are geared towards the more practical side of church effectiveness.

When evaluating “space and place” DVC considers several factors that contribute to the overall ability of the church. While facilities are not the primary factor in growth and health, they can be a deterrent to growth, which might impact health. Issues ranging from building size, traffic flow in and out of the facility, seating arrangement and availability, and parking all play a role in the way in which a church facility can impact its influence on its community. DVC evaluates current space and place factors and makes recommendations to maximize current space, future space, and the flow of people to maximize ministry capacity.

A full third of Kennon Callahan’s study revolved around some sort of “space and place” issues including, “open accessibility of the facilities, high visibility for the community, adequate parking, land and landscaping, and adequate space and facilities” (54). Again, these issues do not determine the health of the church, and it would be an error to believe these issues alone can determine health or growth. They must, however, be viewed with the understanding that they can impact ministry expansion. Bob Russell explains it this way concerning the expanding buildings, “Our church building is not a monument for people to see; it is a vehicle through which we minister to people and evangelize the lost”(263). It is an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to the overall functioning of the church.

In any communal atmosphere in which the public is invited to come to a place, whether for worship or a concert, consideration must be given to the movement and comfort of people. An example from a secular study conducted by a city to evaluate

parking lot sizes for a city park found that even parking can be directly related to the use of the park. Igor Lazov writes, “The parking lots are demanding environments for planning and design, since e.g. a lack of local parking spaces can contribute to traffic congestion. Congestion and parking are also interrelated since looking for a parking space (called ‘cruising’) creates additional delays” (39). This flow of people must also be considered in the layout of the building as people move from children’s ministry areas to fellowship areas and into worship space. Each area of flow should be evaluated to see where and how to move people with the least amount of restriction. Much like automobiles, people need to keep from being stuck in the flow of movement in and out of areas throughout their worship gathering experience.

In a 2011 study conducted on Christian church architecture, Trestae Jones found that the architecture of the church can communicate certain theological convictions to its attendees. He writes, “The structure, the furnishings, the ornamentation, and even the layout... are lessons for the eyes” (132). While his conclusions seem to come from a theological framework that believes that modern church buildings communicate more of a humanistic center to religious worship, the findings cannot be ignored; buildings, furniture, art, landscaping, and parking all communicate something of the church’s vision, philosophy, and focus toward the audience. With this in mind, DVC evaluates every aspect of the church’s facilities, usage, flow, and locations with an eye towards maximizing their ministry potential and optimizing their outreach capabilities.

Another aspect of DVC work with the church focuses on assisting the Senior Minister with sermon series planning that enhances strategic agenda. As the primary face of the leadership within the Independent Christian Church, the voice of the preacher

carries with it the primary voice of the leadership. With such a powerful voice for the congregation it is important to the overall vision of the church that the preacher can effectively communicate that vision through the sermons and sermon series being preached. This continual sowing of vision needs to be done strategically, allowing the Gospel to ring through. DVC can help in bring synergy between pulpit, small groups, and action within the congregation. Sermon planning can play a vital role in connection to the congregation (see connections and small group synergy). In the case of vision casting and ministry development, the DVC approach to create synergy is defined by Jon Harless, “the combined action of two or more processes that is greater than the sum of each acting separately”(15). In the case of the church and sermon series for vision casting and mission explanation, the synergy that is created by “combing the knowledge based impact of the sermon with the relational impact of the small group upon the believer’s life” can lead to the church being saturated with the vision of the congregation and create the energy needed to bring it to fruition (Harless 15).

There is a commonality commonality that develops around roles and function in the next two areas in which DVC focuses on helping the church reach a greater level of maturity and growth. First, DVC coaches the Senior Minister (typically the role that is the most visible leader and preacher within the Independent Christian Church) on developing a leadership style equal to the current (and future) church size. Second, DVC assists the elders of the church in adjusting their roles to maximize church health and growth.

As for the leadership of Senior Ministers, they are the most visible and out-front leaders for the church and the staff. Most church members will see them as the individuals most responsible for the growth and overall health of the church. The way in

which they lead will be a tone-setter for the rest of the staff, volunteers, and congregation members. While from a Biblical perspective, especially within the Independent Christian Church movement, the elders are commonly understood as the leaders of the congregation, in a very practical way it is the person in the pulpit on the most regular basis that will influence the most amount of people within the church. Therefore, DVC makes specific attempts to counsel Senior Ministers in a way that helps them employ varying leadership tactics based on the current size of the congregation, with an eye towards moving the congregation to a larger size. While there are not a specific set of skills for a specific size congregation, there are tactics of leadership that Senior Ministers can adjust to help the congregation move from one level of growth to another (Nauss 121).

Likewise, the roles of the elders in the church would need to adjust based on the size of the congregation. DVC spends time with the elders of a congregation to help them adjust their functions within a congregation to help mature the church as it grows. The Independent Christian Church often functions in one of two broad structures. Some congregations function under a model known as “elder rule;” a model that has the role of the elders in the church functioning as a board to set the priorities and day-to-day ministry of the church. The other model is called “staff led” in which the paid staff of the congregation run the day-to-day operations for the church, and the elders appear to be more of the board of directors. While there is merit in both structures, for the purpose of this section of this study, it will be sufficient to say that DVC comes alongside the elders in the church to help them define their role as shepherds to the flock and to adjust their functions accordingly.

In both the role of the Senior Minister and the role of the elders, DVC tries to bring the leadership to a place to recognize the talents present in both groups and help them function together using their talents and roles accordingly. They would ideally work together to maximize everyone's energy, recruit the right people to the process, use measures of Biblical accountability with one another, and bring unity to the group (Rainer, Simple Church 94).

Another key function in this system is the role that a church's bylaws, constitution, policies, and position papers play in the overall health and growth of the congregation. As a means of review, Independent Christian Churches are void of any denominational control. Therefore, each church is congregational in nature, meaning they are self-governed. In being so governed it is important for them to be incorporated as a church for the benefits and protection provided under the laws of each state. As churches become incorporated, they must submit by-laws as a means of how the church will function. These by-laws and policies are typically devised in the earliest days of the church and are designed to help the church get started. However, as the church grows, often the by-laws can become a means through which the church can be stifled in its decision-making process. For example, some churches are structured as a member-led church. In a member-led church, all of the members in the congregation generally elect the board or deacon members. The ultimate decision-making power is at the congregational level (Busby 63). This means that church votes might be required to make decisions that often might be left up to the elders or staff in other instances. Given the potential for hamstringing the church in the decision-making process, DVC will help the

church to evaluate its current by-laws, constitution, policies, or position papers to help free the church to become more effective in its day-to-day functioning.

The final aspect of system seven to be addressed by DVC is the use of technology for outreach, in-person services, communication and connection with the congregation, and systems used within the office during normal operations. This aspect has a focus on how the use of technology is impacting the congregation throughout the week and in weekend services. This is a very technical aspect that allows the office personnel to use the programs they are most comfortable with to be the most effective in staying connecting to the congregation as well as keeping the congregation informed. DVC does not push a particular brand or program but allows the leadership, along with the staff, to evaluate this critical area of ministry.

About the Study

This was a post-intervention dissertation. The researcher used two research tools, the Congregational Survey as developed by Len Moisan and administered through DVC as well as the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey, developed and administered by the researcher.

The David Vaughn Survey tool was designed, researched, modified by, and effectively used for over 30 years by Len Moisan (PhD, University of Virginia). Len is the former Vice President of Institutional Development at Bellarmine University (Louisville, KY) as well as the founder and president of the Covenant Group (Louisville, KY). While leading the Covenant Group, Len has overseen successful consultations of hundreds of churches, businesses, and non-profit organizations in leadership transitions, strategic planning, and capital campaigns.

The Congregational Survey was administered in two different settings to congregations willing to participate. The first setting was prior to intervention and consultation with DVC. The second setting was administered after completing the contracted agreement with DVC. The researcher then made a comparison between the results of the pre-intervention survey and the post intervention survey to look for areas in which DVC was able to help improve the scores for the congregation. To glean further results concerning the effectiveness of the DVC process, the researcher contacted Lead Minister/Senior Pastors of the congregations who contracted DVC for consultation. The researcher administered the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey through an online format that allowed respondents to remain anonymous.

The Congregational Survey tool consists of three sections designed to collect quantitative data covering a wide range of questions aimed at measuring the effectiveness of the congregation in each of the seven areas. Section 1 uses eleven questions to gauge the general demographics of the congregation. Section 2 of the survey uses sixteen questions in a Likert scale to evaluate the competing values of the importance of a category versus how the respondent sees the performance of the congregation. The respondent is asked to evaluate each question in a 1-5 scale (1 being least and 5 being the greatest) based on how important that area is to them with a separate subsection asking the respondent to describe on a same scale how they perceive the performance of the church in that same area. Section 3 of the survey consists of four short-answer questions targeting the perception of the respondent in areas of greatest strengths, greatest weakness, priorities of the church, and the barriers for the congregation.

The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey also consists of three sections. Section 1 consists of six questions designed to garner information concerning the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor of the congregation at the time they contracted with DVC. These questions are designed to gauge the leader's connection to the congregation at the time of the survey as well as his tenure as it relates to the pre- and post- intervention of DVC. Section 2 covers three questions designed to gain the perspective of the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor concerning the DVC impact on the congregation. The first two questions are specifically related to direct, quantitative results based on attendance and finances. Question 3 is divided into 16 sub-sections using Likert-scale questions designed to gauge the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor perspective on the improvements brought to the congregation as the result of the relationship with DVC. Section 3 contains four questions concerning the recommendation of DVC. Question 1 is a Likert-scale question concerning the likelihood of recommending DVC. Questions 2 and 3 are short answer questions concerning strength and weaknesses of the DVC from the perspective of the respondent. Question 4 is a direct question concerning the perspective of church health as impacted by DVC.

The data from these two applications of the same instrumentation was gathered by DVC and analyzed by the researcher. The data collected from the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey was collected directly by and analyzed by the researcher. The researcher then compared the data collected from each tool for greater insight into areas of greater impact and effectiveness that DVC had on participating congregations. According to Sensing, using a mixed-method approach similar to this allows the researcher to cross-

check data and provides a breadth and depth of analysis and an increase in the trustworthiness of the outcomes of the research (251).

Summary of Literature

DVC's work with the ICC can be a vital tool in the continuing of healthy, growing, and autonomous bodies of Christ. What this literature has presented is the unique structure, behaviors, and strategies that help to define churches within the Restoration Movement and a way to give them a resource to independently evaluate and coach them towards health without being consumed or overtaken by a mindset that would lead them away from their historical structures and independence.

This literature review has laid the foundation for why the ICC is a natural environment for the seven-systems model to evaluate health and help lead the churches that go through this process towards a greater sense of health. Because ICC are independent in nature and do not desire structural oversight from outside the autonomous church itself, a process that allows for the church to maintain independence and still receive outside help might be preferable to many churches seeking to become more of what Christ has called them to be. This outside help, which allows autonomy, might be the key to helping these churches feel a sense of connectivity to their roots while at the same time receiving help towards accomplishing their mission. Leroy Lawson writes, concerning the church of the New Testament, "It is apparent that congregational autonomy did not mean independence so much as interdependence" (138).

The seven systems evaluated within each church do not mean that a church needs to be structured according to those systems. Part of the beauty of the ICC is that they tend to be constantly pushing themselves to grow and nurture their own systems and structures

patterned after the New Testament and are not hindered by a hierarchy that could be cumbersome. They see themselves more like the “envisaged messianic community” of Matthew 16, only with a structure that resembles the loosely organized church of Acts (Carson and Moo 154). Lawson depicts the early church, and the ambition of the modern ICC:

In the apostolic church, first a group of believers in Christ assembled and then an organization developed to meet their needs and purposes. Matters of administration were not allowed to dominate the activities of the group; only minimal organization was adopted, just enough to get the job done. New Testament churches seemed to function well with their simple procedures (145).

Finally, this system seems to fit the structure of ICC because of the freedom it allows while providing the oversight to help the church develop a more Jesus-centered approach to leadership development. Otto Lui, in writing concerning Chinese church leadership development, notes something about the style of Jesus that transcends culture and denominations. He writes, “Instead of developing the disciples functionally to become skillful leaders, Jesus adopted varieties of approaches so as to develop them as well-rounded influential persons”(25). This too is the aim of DVC, to develop churches, not so much in a functional way, but in a way that allows them to become “well-rounded and influential” within their communities of service for the longest possible time.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology used for this project. The nature of the project and the research questions are discussed along with the instruments used to address each of the research questions. Next, the ministry context in which this research took place is explained, including the choice of participants. The chapter concludes by describing the instrumentation used to gather the data and the collection and analysis of the data.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Seven Systems Church Health approach as applied by David Vaughn Consulting within the unique structure of the Independent Christian Church. The process used to achieve this purpose was to compare pre-consultation and post-consultation “Congregational Survey” results.

DVC was established to help churches bring about positive change within their congregation. DVC provides research-based methods of finding areas of concern or unhealthy trends within a congregation and provides “a ‘hands on’ approach by an unbiased consultant to effect real change” (Vaughn, D. Vaughn Consulting Model 2). Their goals, while not limited to Restoration Movement churches, are targeted to help those churches reach their full potential for the Kingdom of God.

Research Questions

RQ #1. What are the earmarks of a healthy church using the DVC metrics?

The D. Vaughn Consulting Congregational Survey is used to ascertain congregational demographics (Section 1), to evaluate expectations versus performance (Section 2), and to hear from the congregation in short answers how they perceive the strengths, weaknesses, vision, and hindrances to their future (Section 3).

In Section 1 eleven questions are used to gauge the general demographics of the congregation. These questions look for the general age and gender of the congregation, how often each respondent attends services, how often they volunteer, what percentage of their income they give, and what style of music they prefer. This section is being used to examine the overall makeup of the congregation and see if the demographics within the congregation are similar to the demographics within their community. The greater the congregation mimics its community from a demographic perspective, the greater appearance of health can be determined.

Section 2 of the survey uses sixteen questions in a Likert scale to evaluate the importance of a category to the respondent versus how the respondent sees the performance of the congregation. The respondent is asked to evaluate each question in a 1-5 scale (1 being least and 5 being the greatest) based on how important that area is to them with a separate subsection asking the respondent to describe on a same scale how they perceive the performance of the church in that same area. These questions are then evaluated by the consulting team with the mathematical data to help match expectations and performance within the seven systems. Areas showing a higher rate of matching between the expectations and performance are considered areas of strength, whereas areas that show a greater margin between expectations and performance are determined

to be weaknesses. DVC will use the areas with the closest margins between expectations and performance to discover areas of health.

Section 3 of the survey consists of four short-answer questions. These questions target the perception of the respondent in areas of greatest strengths, greatest weakness, priorities of the church, and the barriers for the congregation. This section allows the leadership team of the church to hear the congregation's own words to help them frame a better perspective on the overall mood within the church. This section is compared to the data collected in Sections 1 and 2 to evaluate the areas that most align with one another concerning health and strengths within the congregation. The greater alignment between these sections concerning strengths are an indicator of health within the church.

RQ #2. What are the earmarks of an unhealthy church using the DVC metrics?

The D. Vaughn Consulting Congregational Survey is used to ascertain congregational demographics (Section 1), to evaluate expectations versus performance (Section 2), and to hear from the congregation in short answers how they perceive the strengths, weaknesses, vision, and hindrances to their future (Section 3).

In Section 1 eleven questions are used to gauge the general demographics of the congregation. These questions look for the general age and gender of the congregation, how often each respondent attends services, how often they volunteer, what percentage of their income they give, and what style of music they prefer. This section is used to examine the overall makeup of the congregation and see if the demographics within the congregation are similar to the demographics within their community. The greater the disparity between congregational demographics and the community's demographics, the greater a sign of being an unhealthy church.

Section 2 of the survey uses sixteen questions in a Likert scale to evaluate the competing values of the importance of a category versus how the respondent sees the performance of the congregation. The respondent is asked to evaluate each question in a 1-5 scale (1 being least and 5 being the greatest) based on how important that area is to them with a separate subsection asking the respondent to describe on a same scale how they perceive the performance of the church in that same area. These questions will be evaluated by the consulting team with the mathematical data to help match expectations and performance within the seven systems. Areas showing a higher rate of matching between the expectations and performance are considered areas of strength, whereas areas that show a greater margin between expectations and performance are determined to weaknesses. DVC will use the areas with the widest margins between expectations and performance to discover areas of concern that would lead to an unhealthy church. This section provides the bulk of the data for DVC to begin a plan of action to move closer to health within the church.

Section 3 of the survey consists of four short-answer questions. These questions target the perception of the respondent in areas of greatest strengths, greatest weakness, priorities of the church, and barriers for the congregation. This section allows the leadership team of the church to hear the congregation's own words to help them frame a better perspective on the overall mood within the church. This section will be compared to the data collected in Sections 1 and 2 to evaluate the areas that most align with one another concerning health and strengths within the congregation. Areas that show a consistency of negative issues are addressed as unhealthy tendencies.

RQ #3. What are the areas being most and least affected by the D. Vaughn Consulting team?

The DVC Congregational Survey was administered to congregations participating in this study to ascertain if demographic data had changed within the congregation from pre-intervention levels to post-intervention levels, to see what areas had changed between expectations versus performance in the pre-consultation survey in comparison with the post-consultation survey, and to see if there was any change in the short-answer portion of the survey in determining strengths, weakness, greatest concerns, and greatest priorities.

In Section 1 eleven questions are used to gauge the general demographics of the congregation. These questions are looking for the general age and gender of the congregation, how often each respondent attends services, how often they volunteer, what percentage of their income they give, and what style of music they prefer. This section is being used to examine the overall makeup of the congregation and see if the demographics within the congregation are similar to the demographics within their community. The greater the disparity between congregational demographics and the community's demographics, the greater the likelihood of being an unhealthy church.

Section 2 of the survey uses sixteen questions in a Likert scale to evaluate the competing values of the importance of a category versus how the respondent sees the performance of the congregation. The respondent is asked to evaluate each question in a 1-5 scale (1 being least and 5 being the greatest) based on how important that area is to them with a separate subsection asking the respondent to describe on a same scale how they perceive the performance of the church in that same area. These questions are then

evaluated by the consulting team with the mathematical data to help match expectations and performance within the seven systems. Areas showing a higher rate of matching between the expectations and performance are considered areas of strength, whereas areas that show a greater margin between expectations and performance are determined to be weaknesses. DVC will use the areas with the widest margins between expectations and performance to discover areas of concern that could lead to an unhealthy church. This section provides the bulk of the data for DVC to begin a plan of action to move closer to health within the church.

Section 3 of the survey consists of four short-answer questions. These questions target the perception of the respondent in areas of greatest strengths, greatest weakness, priorities of the church, and barriers for the congregation. This section allows the leadership team of the church to hear the congregation's own words to help them frame a better perspective on the overall mood within the church. This section is compared to the data collected in Sections 1 and 2 to evaluate the areas that most align with one another concerning health and strengths within the congregation. Areas that show a consistency of negative issues are addressed as unhealthy tendencies.

Ministry Context

The context in which this research took place was in churches within the Independent Christian Church Movement (also known as the Restoration Movement). These churches are non-denominational and loosely held together by certain doctrinal beliefs (see Chapter 2) that can vary from congregation to congregation. Each church participating within this study has its own statement of beliefs that it would not consider to be a creed; they would have their own congregationally developed leadership (minus the preaching

minister role), and each congregation would not consider itself to be related to, reliant on, or subject to any form of control other than that which is found in the Scriptures (which will vary depending on the interpretation of issues affecting church health, such as church polity).

The researcher, as well as DVC, are both members of the Restoration Movement and therefore would have some level of compatibility with each church participating in the study. Years of work within the movement, including the educational background on the part of David Vaughn, Paul Snoddy, and the researcher, would allow for a level of trust to administer the congregational survey, as well as review the results. David Vaughn's background (his father was a preacher within this movement), education (graduating from Cincinnati Christian University, a school within this movement) and his experience of helping churches within this movement grow towards a greater sense of health, all lends to the credibility of DVC concerning the seven-systems model.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

Participation in this project was limited to Independent Christian Churches that had entered into a consulting contract through the DVC consultation program. The participating churches were selected based on their willingness to participate in a follow-up survey from the DVC coaching program or a Lead Minister/Senior Pastor who was willing to participate in this study. Each congregation or Lead Minister/Senior Pastor that participated in this study had completed their minimum one-year consultation program through DVC.

Description of Participants

All participants in this study are congregations that would claim affiliation with the Restoration Movement. All participants in this study were 18 years of age or older and consisted of both male and female church members from within the participating congregations. All participating churches must have completed the coaching process with DVC and completed the follow-up survey or have the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor complete the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher attained informed consent from David Vaughn Consulting for his work on this project. DVC attained informed consent from the congregational leadership or staff from each participating congregation. The confidentiality of participants for this project is protected for the individuals who participated as well as for the churches who participated. DVC owns the data and was willing to share the data and will maintain control of contact information, data collected, and results of all survey material (for each group of churches as well as the grouping of ministers responding to the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey). Anonymity for respondents was accomplished by protecting the identity of each congregation, individuals in the leadership and the staff of participating churches or the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor. Material accumulated by the researcher for this project was shared with DVC as well as with students and faculty as a part of the D.Min. presentation at Asbury Theological Seminary.

All material for this project was kept in a password-protected digital format with timed access for the researcher. All researcher access to material received from DVC was terminated after the approval of this dissertation by Asbury Theological Seminary.

Instrumentation

For this study, there are two forms of instrumentation used: The Congregational Survey as designed by DVC and The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey as designed by the researcher and approved by DVC. The congregational survey consists of three sections. Section 1 uses eleven questions to measure congregational demographics. Section 2 uses sixteen questions in Likert scale 1-5 to evaluate the competing values of expectations versus performance of the congregation, and Section 3's four short-answer questions allow the respondents to give their perception of the strengths, weaknesses, vision, and hindrances to their future.

The survey is administered by DVC through paper copies and Google Forms and is sent to the church leadership through email or paper copies for the purpose of being distributed to the congregation for anonymous completion. The purpose for using the Congregational Survey for this project is that DVC uses it as its primary basis for evaluating the congregation and for developing a plan to help correct unhealthy conditions within the congregation. The researcher used this survey as pre-intervention for the purpose of ascertaining the baseline for starting a consultation relationship with DVC as well as the post-intervention survey to see areas of improvement following the contracted consultation with DVC.

The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey is a supplemental tool used and administered by the researcher to supplement the lack of respondents to the congregational survey. This tool was designed by the researcher, approved by DVC, and administered privately by the researcher using a password-protected Google Survey. The researcher was given contact information for Lead Minister/Senior Pastors who had contracted with DVC for consulting work. The researcher contacted the Lead Minister/Senior Pastors for their

consent to be a part of the research project and to give them access to the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey tool. The results of the surveys were shared with DVC, while maintaining the privacy of the respondents. The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey consists of three sections. Section 1 uses six questions to garner information concerning the Lead Minister/Senior Pastors of the congregations that received consultation work through DVC. This section uses brief questions to ascertain the respondents' current role with the congregation that had contractual relationships with DVC and completed the consultation process. Section 2 uses three questions to measure DVC's impact on the congregation. Questions 1 and 2 use a Likert Scale to measure the percentage of improvement on attendance and financial giving; question 3 is made up of 16 sub-categories that are directly measured by DVC's congregational survey. These 16 sub-categories are used to measure the impact of DVC in those areas to see if the congregation was improved or not improved by the consultation in those specific areas. Section 3 of the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey consists of four questions concerning recommendations of the DVC process for other congregations. Question 1 is a Likert scale measuring the likelihood of recommendation of DVC to other congregations; Questions 2, 3, and 4 are short-answer questions allowing the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor to give feedback concerning the DVC process and their perception of its impact on the congregation.

Reliability and Validity of Project Design

The David Vaughn Survey tool (called the Congregational Survey in this study) was designed, researched, modified by, and effectively used for over 30 years by Len Moisan (PhD, University of Virginia). Len is the former Vice President of Institutional Development at Bellarmine University (Louisville, KY) as well as the founder and

president of the Covenant Group (Louisville, KY). While leading the Covenant Group, Len has overseen the successful consultations of hundreds of churches, businesses, and non-profit organizations in leadership transitions, strategic planning, and capital campaigns.

The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey tool was designed by the researcher and was reviewed and approved by DVC and Dr. Moisan. The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey mirrored the sections of the Congregational Survey tool and was administered to the person in the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor role at the time of consultation. Multiple congregations responded with the Congregational survey tool, while the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey was used to supplement the lack of respondents in order to increase the validity of this study.

The process that was used for this study can be duplicated by DVC in order to continue to evaluate the effectiveness of their consultation work within the ICC movement.

Data Collection

The researcher contacted DVC concerning their consultation work with Independent Christian Churches. The researcher asked for permission to evaluate pre-intervention congregational surveys in comparison to post-intervention congregational surveys for the purpose of measuring areas of effectiveness for DVC as it pertains to their work with Independent Christian Churches. The researcher exchanged a number of emails with DVC for the purpose of clarifying the focus of the study.

DVC made contact with their Independent Christian Church clients who had completed consultation work with DVC from 2013-2020. Those congregations who were

willing to participate in a follow-up survey were contacted by DVC with the understanding that their data would be shared with the researcher. DVC explained the purpose of sharing the data with the researcher and the potential benefits for the DVC process for future congregations. DVC did not allow the researcher to access any client files or data until after permission to share information was given by individual congregations. All data was received and is owned by DVC with access to the researcher terminated following the completion of this study.

All data for this survey is garnered through the DVC Congregational Survey. This survey is the best tool for this research given that the designer (DVC) uses it as its primary tool in the evaluation process. According to Tim Sensing, “Surveys are the best option when trying to reach a desired sample size that is too large”(86). In the case of this survey’s effectiveness, the congregational size is not the primary factor as to why the survey is the most useful tool. The effectiveness of the survey lies in its ability to reach the maximum number of people within the congregation, with the minimal risk of exposing identities of respondents and establishing the likelihood of freedom to respond in an honest, not threatening manner (Sensing 232).

In committing to the DVC survey to garner the pre-intervention and post-intervention results, the researcher has limited the collection of data to a “small number of individuals, and sites” lending the researcher to generalize the results of the survey, if these generalizations are applied to other congregations, the results would “rarely” lend itself to “explicit claims” (Maxwell128). However, the use of a singular tool does not minimize the effectiveness of the tool given it is the sole tool of DVC, whose effectiveness with Independent Christian Churches is the primary focus of this research,

and it was the only tool used by DVC in both pre-intervention research as well as post-intervention follow-up.

Data Analysis

The researcher used both inferential and descriptive statistics to analyze the data collected from the congregational survey. In Section 3 of the survey, where qualitative comments were made to describe the strengths, weaknesses, future potential of, and barriers for the congregation, the researcher used “inferential statistics to try to infer from the sample data what the population might think” (Trochim 23). The researcher read each of the comments made in Section 3 several times to gain themes or patterns that might appear in the pre-intervention congregational survey and analyzed those next to the comments made in the post-intervention surveys to note differences in those themes or patterns.

The researcher also analyzed the descriptive data collected in Sections 1 and 2 of both the pre-intervention and post-intervention congregational surveys. The data was analyzed in Excel to determine the mean and standard deviation of both Section 1 and Section 2 in both the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys. In Section 1 a comparison was made between the two surveys to see what impact, if any, DVC’s consultation program had on the demographics of the congregation. The same method was used to analyze the information gained in Section 2 of the surveys to see what, if any, statistical improvements were made in the seven areas evaluated by DVC concerning expectations versus performance of the congregation following the intervention of DVC.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Church health is hard to measure and even harder to achieve. D. Vaughn Consulting is a consulting firm that aims to improve church health with the churches that employ their services. To achieve this goal, DVC enters into a one-year consulting contract with those churches. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the performance of the D. Vaughn Consulting firm as they apply their Seven Systems Church Health approach within the unique structure of their Independent Christian Church clientele.

This chapter describes the participants who participated in the study. It shares the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the initial congregational survey and the follow-up congregational survey as well as the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey. Both surveys include open-ended questions concerning the vision of the congregation and limitations to accomplishing that vision, as well as further open-ended questions concerning the leadership's relationship with DVC. Finally, this chapter identifies three major findings gathered from the data.

Participants

This study focused on churches that identified as Independent Christian Churches, generally accept their association with the Restoration Movement, and had been in and completed a contracted relationship with DVC for consulting services. There were twelve such qualifying churches that completed their contractual relationship with DVC. These twelve churches were contacted by DVC about doing a post-consultation follow-up

survey. Of those contacted churches, only one congregation completed the follow-up survey provide for them by DVC.

The responding congregation entered their relationship with DVC by taking the initial Congregational Survey. In that initial survey, seventy-two congregation members participated. The congregation was then asked to participate in the follow-up survey provided for them by DVC. Thirty-two congregation members responded to the follow-up survey.

The Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey was administered to qualifying Senior Pastors or Lead Ministers for congregations that fit the criteria for the study. With the help of DVC, the researcher was given access to nine leaders who fit this criterion. Of the nine qualifying Lead Ministers or Senior Pastors, seven responded by completing the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

RQ #1. What are the earmarks of a healthy church using the DVC metrics?

DVC uses 16 areas of comparative data contrasting expectations and performance from the congregation. By contrasting the initial congregational survey's expectations and performance responses, DVC can identify areas of strengths and weaknesses within the congregation. Using a circular formula that computes and rates responses within each category of the 16 areas, DVC calculates a number identifying margins for concern. Every category that scores outside of their margins for health is identified as an area of concern. Those calculations within their margins are considered to be areas of health. Using the same formula with the post-intervention congregational survey, DVC can determine if they achieved movement in the results for the areas identified as potential concerns.

For this study there was one congregation that responded to the follow-up congregational survey. The one responding congregation had 14 out of the 16 categories fall inside acceptable margins of difference within the DVC plan. This data would indicate a level of acceptable health within the DVC metrics for 14 out of the 15 categories, raising only 2 areas of concern with 5 additional areas to consider signs trending towards concern.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

RQ #2. What are the earmarks of an unhealthy church using the DVC metrics?

Using those same 16 areas of comparative data and contrasting expectations with performance from the congregation, DVC identified 2 areas of concern within the responding congregation. They were also able to identify 5 additional areas within the responding congregation that they deemed to be areas that show signs that they would consider trending towards concern.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

RQ #3. What are the areas being most and least affected by the D. Vaughn Consulting team?

The areas appearing to be most affected by the DVC consulting process were areas directly related to the leadership within the congregation. These trends were identified within the performance section of the follow-up congregational survey by comparing the performance data with the initial congregational survey and was further corroborated by the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey. The performance levels for the “Leadership of the Elders” category saw a 10% increase; the “Leadership of the Senior Minister” saw an increase of 18%, and the “Responsiveness to the congregation” saw a 13% increase.

In the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey, when answering the question concerning what level of impact they believe the DVC process had on the leadership of the elders, four out of the seven respondents believed the impact to be above average, and when asked how the process impacted their leadership, all seven respondents answered “above average” or “outstanding.”

According to the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor Survey the DVC consulting process appeared to have little to no effect on the weekly attendance or increase in financial contributions to the congregation. Also of note, when comparing responses of the initial

congregational survey with the follow-up congregational survey, no responses showed any significant drop in performance.

Summary of Major Findings

The data from this research project has yielded significant findings for the responding congregation regarding the effectiveness of the DVC process within this one Independent Christian Church. This project is also yielding data that would indicate significant findings for the effectiveness of the DVC process for Lead Ministers/Senior Pastors within those Independent Christian Churches. These findings may have relevance for any Independent Christian Church or Lead Ministers/Senior Pastors within those congregations that choose to contract with DVC for at least one year. These are the major findings which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

1. The DVC process increases awareness of church health among Lead Minister/Senior Pastors.
2. The DVC process shows slight signs of increasing performance for areas DVC labels as areas of concern following the initial evaluation of the congregation.
3. The DVC process shows notable increases in performance of leadership within the congregation.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will cover the three major findings of this study from the personal perspective of the researcher, from a Biblical/Theological framework, and from the perspective of the literature covering church health. This chapter will also detail the ministry implications of this research within the ICC movement, how this research can be used to further church health and consulting work, what the limitations were for this study, and recommendations for future research based on the results of this study.

This chapter will also cover how this research can be used to further the future of ministry within the ICC movement, how this research project has impacted the researcher, reflections from the researcher on how it has impacted his journey in ministry, how it can impact the future of ministry within other churches, and how it will continue to impact the researchers future ministry work.

Major Findings

First Finding: DVC Process Increases Understanding of Church Health Among Senior Church Leadership

Every participant in the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey indicated an increased awareness concerning church health after completing the DVC process. This would indicate two essentials for the DVC process and its connection to the leadership of the church. First, that the DVC process increases awareness of church health among Lead Minister/Senior Pastors by giving them encouragement, education, and the process through which they can see the functioning of the whole church. Second, that this

awareness of church health leads to an increased understanding of the concept of church health. Through the DVC consulting process the church is broken down into a series of systems that appear to be helpful to the leadership of the church in understanding how each system is critical to the function of the other systems within the same church body. Allowing church leaders to see the church through the lens of a series of systems helps them to frame areas of an organization that are otherwise not seen as dependent on each other. With this perspective the leadership is better equipped to understand that each functioning part of the body relates to other functioning parts of the body, even if those parts are or have been previously seen as more insignificant than others. This process allows the leadership to see how interconnected each system is to the other systems.

The review of relevant literature on church leadership and systems would seem to bear this truth. Martinez and Branson speak of “interpretive leadership” that gains the “ability to observe and interpret the current life of the church- its activities, its relationships, even its imaginations” (55). The DVC process provides relevant data or trends to help church leaders make interpretations as to the life of the church. This process makes leaders aware of how to filter, understand, and interpret the systems of their church within the context of their church. Seeing the church through this lens allows the leaders to see the functioning of the church body in a way that uses its talents within each system as those talents fit. Wayne Cordeiro captures this imagery when he described an event at his church one night where everyone was being used by God to present the Gospel through their own talents. He writes, “I saw this event not merely as one presentation of the gospel but several hundred presentations of the gospel- all at the same

time in one evening”(19). These systems are similar to what the Apostle Paul describes as the church “body” some 34 times in the book of 1st Corinthians.

From a Biblical/theological framework, this finding reveals a truth to be considered relevant for church leaders, potential church leaders, and those engaged in active ministry within the local church. As the DVC process plays out in the local church, the leadership of that church can begin to see a plan for health and how each system is linked to the other, much like a house is connected by all of its parts. The Apostle Paul uses a similar idea when describing the framework of spiritual growth and development, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6-7). The phrase “built up” implies a continual action or that the process is always being worked out. According to the data collected by Thomas Rainer and Eric Geiger for their book *Simple Church*, “there is a highly significant relationship between church vitality and the clarity of the process (referring to a ministry process)” (Rainer, *Simple church* 111). What the DVC process attempts to do with church leaders is to make them aware of the systems their church needs to bring clarity to, to reach its optimal health, with an understanding that the process will continue beyond their leadership years. Apostle Paul delivers the point that the church’s continual pursuit of health will yield good fruit as he writes to the church at Ephesus, “when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:16). The results of this pursuit seem to be a healthy body working together. Francis Chan writes, “We have a responsibility to challenge one another, to love one another, and to serve one another in a variety of ways. When every member takes this seriously, it makes for a healthy church”

(65). That is the purpose of the DVC process, to challenge the leadership to continually evaluate their performance and the church's health through a Biblical and practical lens.

Second Finding: DVC Process Increases the Perception of Performance Within the Systems the Process Targets for Improvement

The DVC process shows slight signs of increasing at least the perception of performance, if not the actual performance, for the areas DVC labels as areas of concern following the initial evaluation of the congregation. The process DVC uses to evaluate the initial congregational survey will yield systems that DVC deem to be areas of concern for the congregation. This study shows an indication that within areas that DVC identified as "areas of concern" the process will produce marginal improvement.

Based on the initial congregational survey, DVC identified the "evangelism system" and the "new member engagement system" as areas of concern for the responding congregation. Initially 80% of the congregation had expectations of evangelism being "extremely important" or "above average" with only 50% of the congregation selecting "outstanding" or "above average" when it came to the congregation's performance in evangelism. Following the congregation's involvement with DVC, the congregation improved their expectations for the evangelism system, with 91% selecting their expectation for evangelism being "extremely important" or "above average," an increase of 11%, while 56.25% said performance of evangelism in the congregation was "outstanding" or "above average," an increase of 6.25%. Also, in the initial survey, 18.2% of respondents believed the congregation was "below average" or "failing" in the area of evangelism. By comparison, in the follow-up survey, only 9.3% of respondents believed the congregation was "failing" or performing "below average" in

the area of evangelism. Not only was this a decrease in the perception of failing at evangelism, but it also marked an increase in the perception that the congregation was taking a more active role in evangelism. The decreasing of the negativity towards the congregation's performance in this area is notable for the overall health of the congregation.

Similarly, there was a positive impact on another area labeled as an area of concern by DVC. According to the initial congregational survey, the "new member engagement" system had an expectation from 75% of respondents to be "extremely important" or "above average" with a mere 35.4% believing the congregation was performing "above average" or "outstanding" in this area. Also of note is that in the initial survey, 36% believed the congregation was "below average" or "failing" in their new member engagement. In the follow-up survey, there was a slight increase in both expectations and performance for the congregation following their time in the DVC process. The follow-up survey revealed that 78.1% (an increase of 3%) selected their expectations for new member engagement to be "extremely important" or "above average," while 40.6% of respondents believed the congregation was "above average" or "outstanding" in their performance of new member engagement, and only 18.6% believed the congregation to be "failing" in their new member engagement. This is an increase of about 5% in performance and a decrease of 18% in the belief that the congregation was failing in their new member engagement following the DVC process.

The DVC process can bring, at the very least, marginal increases to the areas that are chosen to be addressed through their consultation process. Therefore, if a

congregation would like to increase their performance and decrease their areas of negativity, the DVC process can help them accomplish this improvement.

The literature on intentionally targeting specific areas for improvement within the church setting would support this finding. Once the DVC process has identified areas of concern and begins the process of improving those areas, they can bring success to those areas. As an example, the responding church identified the category of “new members engagement” as an area of concern. After completing the process with DVC, the responding congregation showed an improvement in performance of nearly 15%. A congregation that can improve in this area is moving in a direction towards a healthier body. Lynn Anderson refers to this area of health as “assimilation,” of which he writes, “Often the villain is ineffective assimilation- failure to usher new members into the heart of the church and make them feel at home and failure to help them use their gifts” (80). According to the research, DVC can show signs of improvement for churches in the process of engaging new members in the life of the church.

This process is a simple matter of identifying an area of weakness before designing a plan to strengthen the church in that area. The beginning point is to define your process (Rainer, *Simple church* 113). Once DVC has a defined problem and starting point, they can then begin the process of effecting change. Bob Russell in his book, *When God Builds a Church*, writes “John Wilson suggested that when a church has problems, the leaders have to determine if it’s measles or cancer. If it is measles, the problem will go away on its own; it is cancer, it has to be eradicated” (82). What DVC does effectively is take problems that are potential cancers to the church and help the church improve their performance in those areas.

A Biblical model for the polity of the ICC would be that the “elders are to lead the church” (Cowan 165). In the case of this study, the eldership of those churches contracting with DVC have, along with the staff of those churches, been responsible for working with DVC on the plan to make improvements to the health of the church. This partnership reflects a theological interpretation of Heb. 13:17, placing these leaders as the responsible parties for the church’s health, while in their stewardship. A. L. Deveny states, “It is very evident that God holds the elders responsible for the souls that are entrusted to their care” (Winkler 30). As such, these elders and local church leaders that work with DVC feel the weight of correcting those areas identified as areas of concern. It would appear that an effective way to bring greater health to specific areas of the church is to allow the DVC process to identify areas of concern and then partner with them to increase performance in those areas.

Third Finding: DVC Process Increases Performance of Leadership

The DVC process shows notable increases in performance of leadership within the congregation. According to both the Follow-up Congregational Survey and the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey, the DVC process had an overall positive impact on the performance of the elders and senior minister, increased their responsiveness to the congregation, prolonged their ministry with that particular congregation, and improved their understanding of, or appreciation for, the leadership within the congregation.

According to the Lead Minister/Senior Pastor survey, 5 out of the 7 respondents said that DVC contributed to their staying with the congregation; 5 out of 6 mentioned the overall positive impact the DVC process had on the leadership of the congregation within their short answer portions of the survey, and 57% rated the impact of the process

on the elders of the church as “above average” or “outstanding” while 70% said that the process had “above average” or “outstanding” impact on their own leadership.

A comparison of the original congregational survey and the follow-up congregational survey shows a decrease in congregational expectations of the leadership of the church (both lead minister and the elders). Also of note in this comparison is that while the expectations of these leaders show a slight decrease, the performance for these categories show an increase, some significantly increased. For example, in the follow-up survey the performance of the elders increased by 10%, while the performance of the senior minister’s increased by 18%, and the performance category for the responsiveness of the leadership (a category that includes the senior minister and elders) showed an increase of 13%. This process has been beneficial to the leadership component of the church.

According to the literature, it appears that as the DVC process builds relationships with those in leadership positions within their contracted churches, those leaders become better at performing their tasks as leaders. Otto Lui writes, “Behavioral changes happen as a result of relationships” (41). What DVC is targeting with the leaders of the local church is building a relationship that allows them to improve on their leadership confidence and communication with the local church. This is accomplished, in part, by DVC’s regular communication with the church leaders. They speak weekly with the Senior Pastors/Lead Ministers and monthly with the eldership of the church. This regular communication allows the leadership to see itself as a part of the congregation as well as leading from within the congregation. This reminder for the church leaders seems to bring an effectiveness to their leadership. According to William Willimon:

Leadership is a shared process; leaders not only influence their constituency but are under its influence as well. This aspect of leadership is very true of pastors in congregations, leaders whose leadership is, in great part, a gift of the congregation. Leaders are servants of the organization that is appropriate at that time and place. Particularly in the church, where the pastor often leads by convening empowering lay congregational leaders, leadership is something that is done in concert with others, rather than as expression of the traits of the lone leader (278-279).

DVC seems to capitalize on the unique role within the ICC that brings the senior leaders alongside the lay leaders in the church and helps them to work more effectively with one another and within the congregation itself.

From a Biblical perspective, the partnership between the body of the church and her leaders should be one of mutual admiration. The Apostle Paul writes, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). While ICC functions without ecclesiastical oversight, local elders and leaders are chosen from among the congregation and are answerable to God and the local church. What the DVC process does is give a voice to congregants and brings awareness and apparent appreciation for those that labor in leadership. This relationship of mutual respect and admiration is just one of the reasons the performance of the leadership is improved through this process.

While the DVC process is not designed to be purely instructive to the congregation, the process itself brings Biblical truths to light that allows the leaders of the local church to improve their performance. They can begin to grasp that they are “the

household stewards, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the local church” (Strauch 16). While this truth is reliant heavily on the pen of the Apostle Paul (see Titus 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:12; Titus 1:9) the mutual admiration of leaders towards congregants and congregants towards leaders is an unmistakable New Testament teaching (see 1 Peter 5:5; Heb. 13:17). As the DVC process runs its course throughout the church, that mutual admiration and respect appears to lead towards improved performance from those respected leaders.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The use of the DVC process can promote an understanding of church health to congregational leadership and membership. This process allows for the congregation to have a voice and perceived impact on the direction of the congregation which will help with the development of a “healthy church” mindset. In understanding the various components of health or unhealth within a congregation, the membership can begin to see the church body as a multifaceted, living organism that has continual needs for improvement and development. Oftentimes within congregations the status-quo becomes an idea of health that may actually be unhealthy. The DVC process could help to keep a congregation from growing into an unhealthy state simply by taking the congregation through their process and bringing awareness to the need for continual evaluation and avoidance of apathy.

Another implication of this study is that the DVC process allows congregations and their leadership to promote a healthy body that will contribute to the longevity of the leadership within the congregation (both paid and volunteer). This can happen by using the data collected from this study to help educate the overall congregation concerning

their role in the health of the church. This could alleviate pressure on church leaders by educating the congregation on the concepts of church health and member participation in the overall health of the congregation. This could allow more pastors, elders, and preachers to focus more on the spiritual health of the congregation and less on the business health and member comfort that is often associated with church leadership and provides additional stress to those leaders. By allowing for a more spiritually-focused leadership, churches will be able to find ministers, pastors, and elders that enjoy their calling and training to bring the congregation into a healthier body.

Finally, this research can be used to promote follow-up congregational and leadership surveys becoming a part of the standard practice for DVC. This study has indicated that DVC is effective in helping congregations become healthier in the areas of concerns (as identified by the congregation). This study also shows that DVC can promote longevity within the leadership of the congregation. With an increased awareness of how DVC is performing, they can continue to evaluate and improve their own process that will lead them to be more effective for the congregations they partner with to develop a healthier body.

Limitations of the Study

The first significant limitation for this study is found in its scope, in that it focused only on Independent Christian Churches. According to *The Directory of the Ministry*, (a guide to congregations, agencies, and personnel choosing to be identified with a fellowship presently known as *Christian Churches and Churches of Christ* published annually since 1963) there are approximately 8,000 ICC in the United State (Directory of the Ministry) that fit the initial limitation for this study. The researcher understood this

would be a significant limitation from the outset of the study. However, had this study been expanded to churches outside of this narrow group, it may have been proven to be more effective or produced different findings.

The second significant limitation was the choice to focus the study on churches within the ICC group that chose DVC group as a consulting partner. There are countless other groups that do church consulting work and many within the ICC. Once again, this limitation was a part of the designed scope of the study. Had this study been focused on other church consulting groups the outcomes may have been different or could have been proven more definitely.

Another limitation to this study is the DVC group had been contracted with twelve ICC over the course of the last several years. This provided a limited pool of congregations for the researcher to perform this study. Of those twelve possible congregations, only one congregation that had completed their contract with DVC chose to complete the follow-up survey. This study could have proven to be more effective in its findings with a greater number of respondents to the follow-up survey. As a result of having only one congregation to choose from there are certain limitations that are to be expected. This congregation represents limited responses to critical aspects of the study that could determine the findings. This limitation provides inadequate demographic, geographic, historic, theologic, and traditional influences that could significantly alter the findings of the study. Based on this limitation, one cannot adequately predict the same outcomes or similar outcomes in another congregation.

Another significant limitation to this study is that only seven leaders responded to the Lead Pastor/Senior Minister survey. There are two important deficiencies within this

limitation. First, the lack of respondents provides a limited scope of raw feedback and data. Second, the survey itself provided limitations in that it focused only on the Lead Pastor/Lead Minister position, and ICC have other significant contributions to the leadership of the congregation. There were no elders, deacons, board members, ministry leadership, or other staff voices in the responses to the way the DVC process impacted the overall leadership of the congregation.

The last significant limitation to this study is the timing of the study, which limited the availability of respondents. Pre-intervention surveys were filled out without the interruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, while post-intervention surveys were beginning as the pandemic struck. This brought difficulty to the delivery system. While the original delivery format for the pre-intervention survey was a mixture of digital responses as well as paper responses filled out by the congregation and then processed by the DVC staff, the follow-up survey was restricted to digital responses only, which could have brought limitations to respondents to only those with digital access, digital acumen, or the willingness to fill out the digital form.

Unexpected Observations

This researcher anticipated DVC being able to improve areas that they chose to target. However, as the data began to come in, the impact that DVC process had on the Lead Minister/Senior Pastors for those congregations was surprising. Researcher expectations were focused on the overall health of the congregation, and so the significant impact DVC had for these senior leadership positions was unexpected. The overall positive impact DVC had on these leaders seems to recommend that this process

is worth repeating for congregations of all sizes and for leaders with all levels of experience and tenure within a congregation.

Recommendations

Future Areas of Research

This study or a similar study could be expanded to include other ICC. While this study was originally designed to reach out to all ICC that contracted with DVC, this study could be repeated and expanded to other churches that use DVC. In this study, only one congregation responded; however, the possibility to expand to as many churches as DVC contracts with remains a possibility.

This study or a similar study could also expand to other consulting groups within ICC and from other denominations. This study focused specifically on DVC; however, there are many church-consulting groups that could be employed to repeat this study. These consultation groups can come from within or from without the ICC movement and could provide much more fruitful data.

There are many factors that can be included in studies regarding church health. Each of these factors can be found to impact Independent Christian Churches similarly to how they impact churches from various denominational backgrounds. Therefore, a study to focus on specific demographics (location, economic, or educational environment) for churches would prove helpful for congregations throughout the country that fit those specific demographics.

This research and any future research that continues to focus in this area can drastically improve the awareness and understanding of church health as it applies within the ICC setting. As future studies expand beyond the consulting work of DVC, the ICC

will be able to prosper and develop into healthy communities that practice the truth and the grace of God with the love of our Savior.

Postscript

The journey of this study has been both challenging and enlightening for me as a leader. As I have studied the process of church health and the leadership components that can lead to health, I am challenged concerning my own leadership within the local congregation. I can see the importance of and the weight of healthy leadership on the local church. As a leader of a local church, I have learned that the health of the congregation does not lay entirely within my control, but that my voice and my example with the lay leaders of my church carries significant weight.

This journey has also taught me a great deal concerning the original intent of the ICC. While I did not grow up with a mindset of the “Restoration Movement” I have come to value their principles and their desires. However, I am also concerned that for all of her striving to maintain independence, the ICC may be willing to make independence the sole purpose of their existence. While I am still a firm believer in the concepts and principles of the ICC and Restoration Movement churches, this process has broadened my understanding of the Kingdom of God as a whole.

Finally, throughout this process I have learned that the primary concern for church leadership should be on the health of the congregation. Healthy churches produce healthy disciples who will in turn produce healthy churches. This process is Biblical and repeatable, and DVC can help bring a healthier model of this to churches that are humble enough to give it a try. My prayer is that I will stay humble enough to strive for further health in the church I help to lead.

APPENDIXES

A. Congregational Survey

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

Church Health Survey

Your answers to this survey are completely anonymous.

1. Age:

Mark only one oval.

- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70 and older

2. Gender:

Mark only one oval.

- Male
- Female

3. Marital Status:

Mark only one oval.

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

4. I attend worship services:

Mark only one oval.

- Weekly
- 3 times/month
- 2 times/month
- Once/month or less

5. I have been attending this church:

Mark only one oval.

- 1-6 months
- 7-12 months
- 1-3 years
- Over 3 years

6. My involvement at this church:

(Check all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- Non-member attendee
- Immersed Member
- Minister / Staff
- Elder / Deacon
- Serve as a volunteer at the church

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

7. I volunteer at this church:

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never

8. I read my Bible:

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a week
- Weekly
- Rarely
- Never

9. My level of financial giving to this church as a percentage of my gross income:

Mark only one oval.

- 10% or more
- 6% to 9%
- 2% to 5%
- 1% or less

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

10. The primary reason I first came to this church:

Mark only one oval.

- A. Someone invited me.
- B. I was looking for a church home.
- C. My family attends here.
- D. I came for an event or activity.
- E. Website.
- F. Other

11. The primary reason I stay at this church:

(Check all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- A. The preaching and teaching
- B. The fellowship among the people
- C. Variety of programs/ministry offerings
- D. Children's/Youth programs
- E. The Sunday worship experience
- F. Other

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

12. Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Jesus tells us in The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 that a church should be out-reach oriented. My church highly values evangelism.	<input type="radio"/>				
My church provides excellent facilities.	<input type="radio"/>				
New members are encouraged to be involved.	<input type="radio"/>				
My church offers structured mentoring for new believers so they don't walk away or fade away.	<input type="radio"/>				
I believe I have opportunity to grow spiritually at my church through Bible study and a vigorous prayer life.	<input type="radio"/>				
My church values serving our community and are known for that.	<input type="radio"/>				
My church's elders provide excellent leadership per the guidelines found in 1st Timothy chapter 3.	<input type="radio"/>				
My church's senior minister displays excellent leadership.	<input type="radio"/>				
The preaching at my church is biblical and applicable.	<input type="radio"/>				
The music/worship experience at my church is excellent and helps me connect with God.	<input type="radio"/>				
	<input type="radio"/>				

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

The children's programming is excellent and feeds and encourages children.

Our youth programming is excellent and helps prepare our students for adult life with Jesus.

The New Testament states that Christians are to be transformed into Christ's character. My church provides a clear process for this and an expectation for all of us to participate.

My church displays excellent stewardship of its finances and I trust the way our leaders allocate money.

The New Testament commands church members to use their spiritual gifts in 1st Corinthians 12. My church encourages me to serve and volunteer according to my giftedness.

Expectations for church members are clearly communicated.

The people at my church are friendly and welcoming to new people when they visit.

Staff and elders are responsive to member's questions and willing to listen.

General communication to the congregation is excellent.

My church's culture is healthy and free from gossip, church controllers, and division.

My church equips us how to reach our neighbors and share our faith in Jesus where we live and work.

3/7/22, 2:12 PM

Church Health Survey

My church has a succession plan for our top leaders.

The New Testament commands Christians to give and my church teaches me how to be a biblical steward of his money.

My church makes it easy for me to be in a small group.

My church leaders have equipped me to be the church per Ephesians chapter 4 and deployed me as his church.

Jesus said the church is to be the Ecclesia ('called out ones'). I understand this concept and I'm willing to support our leaders in making this a reality in our church.

13. Without looking, what is the church's Vision Statement?

14. Without looking, what is the church's Mission Statement?

15. My church's greatest strengths are (name 2 or 3):

16. My church's greatest weaknesses are (name 2 or 3):

Appendix B

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/ Sr. Pastor Survey

Lead Minister/ Sr. Pastor Survey

This survey is for partial completion of the Doctorate of Ministry degree for Jason Lykins at Asbury Theological Seminary.

* Required

Informed Consent

By clicking yes I am acknowledging that I have read the informed consent form provided by the researcher and am agreeing to participate in this study.

1. Informed Consent *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes *Skip to question 2*
- No *Skip to section 5 (Opting out of the survey)*

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor information

2. Age: 20-35 35-50 50-65 65 or older

Mark only one oval.

- 20-35
- 35-50
- 50-65
- 65 or older

3. Currently with Congregation that participated in David Vaughn Consulting

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

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1/9

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

4. How long was your tenure with congregation that participated with David Vaughn Consulting

Mark only one oval

- Less than 2 years
 3-6 years
 7-10 years
 Greater than 10 years

5. Do you believe DVC was a contributing factor to your leaving the congregation?

Mark only one oval

- Yes
 No

6. Do you believe DVC was a contributing factor in your staying with the congregation?

Mark only one oval

- Yes
 No

7. How long did your congregation participate in the DVC contract?

Mark only one oval

- Less than 1 year
 1 year
 More than 1 year

D. Vaughn Consulting Congregational Impact

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

8. How did the DVC consultation process impact attendance at weekend worship services?

Mark only one oval.

- Somewhat decreased
- Not at all
- Somewhat increased
- Greatly increased

9. How did the DVC consultation process impact overall financial contributions to the church?

Mark only one oval.

- Somewhat decreased
- Not at all
- Somewhat increased
- Greatly increased

10. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on Evangelism

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

11. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on Facilities
N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding				

12. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on New Member
Engagement

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding				

13. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on meeting spiritual needs
of people in the church

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding				

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

14. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on service/outreach to the community

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

15. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on the Leadership of the Elders

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

16. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on your leadership as the Senior Minister

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

17. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on your quality of preaching
N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding				

18. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on the quality music/worship experience
N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding				

19. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on the quality of youth/ children's ministry
N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding				

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/Sr. Pastor Survey

20. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on stewardship of financial resources

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

21. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on ministry involvement

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

22. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on the friendliness of the congregation

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister/ Sr. Pastor Survey

23. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on the responsiveness of the leadership

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

24. What level of impact do you feel the DVC process had on general communication to the congregation

N/A Poor Below Average Average Above Average Outstanding

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Outstanding					

D. Vaughn Consulting Recommendation

25. Considering your experience with DVC, how likely would you be to recommend them to other congregations

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Absolutely	<input type="radio"/>	Not at all likely				

26. What was the greatest overall impact of the DVC group on the congregation?

3/7/22, 12:19 PM

Lead Minister Sr. Pastor Survey

27. What areas of your congregation do you believe DVC could have provided more help with in the consultation process?

28. After finishing your time with David Vaughn Consulting would you say that your understanding of overall church health:

Mark only one oval.

- Increased
- Decreased
- Unchanged

Opting out of the survey

I do not wish to be a part of this study.

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C. SAMPLE CONGREGATIONAL LETTER

Where Do We Grow From Here?

**He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom,
so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.**

-Colossians 1:28

This past October we asked you to participate in a Survey that would help us move forward as a congregation in 20__ and beyond. A number of questions were asked that we felt would give us insight into our own strengths and weaknesses. About 125 individuals responded to that survey, for which we are most grateful.

From that survey a few key questions rose to the top that we believe demand our attention if we are to be faithful to our calling as a congregation.

Question: What is the greatest need in our community?

40 % of you indicated that our community's greatest need is for people to know God and come to faith in Jesus Christ (have a relationship with Him). The next highest response was our community's increasing problem with drug issues and addictions.

Question: What is the greatest strength of HCC?

You indicated that our greatest strength was strong church life (61%). Conversely, only 4% believe that outreach (evangelism) was our greatest strength. There clearly seems to be an imbalance here. The conclusion that we drew from these two questions is that our community's greatest need (to know Christ as Lord) is not our greatest strength. A quick look at our history supports this conclusion. In looking at the past 50 years of membership here at HCC, the majority of our growth has come from people transferring in . . . not from winning people to Christ. A look at our ministry teams validates this conclusion as well with 70% of our ministry teams being inwardly focused on the care and service of our church family. This doesn't mean that these ministries are wrong or unneeded. It simply means we need to birth more ministries that are externally focused and find ways of encouraging all ministries to have some form of outreach component. In other words, **we need to shift our culture from an inward focus to an outward focus.**

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the
Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have
commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Mathew 28:19-20)*

Based on this conclusion, we thought it wise to reach out to someone who has experienced what we are experiencing and who would assist us in our understanding and transformation. We believe that we have found this person in David Vaughn. David

is the Lead Minister of the *Whitewater Crossing Christian Church* (formerly *Westwood-Cheviot Church of Christ*). The history of their congregation parallels or mirrors ours in uncanny ways. They, like HCC, are a congregation over 100 years old. They grew to an attendance of 750 in the 1950's, as did we. They then experienced a significant decline (around 300) in the 80's. This mirrors our own situation currently. They too were inwardly focused, but shifted that focus intentionally in 2000. The attendance of *Whitewater Crossing* is now about 2000 on a weekend.

With input from David Vaughn and their leadership team, in conjunction with our own understanding, we are undertaking three initiatives in the coming months.

Priority 1 – OUTREACH

It is clear that outreach must be a top priority for us. If we are to fulfill the commission of Christ we must be focused on people not yet reached. That is why Jesus came—to redeem lost souls. We also believe, which many of you indicated as well, that we need to place intentional focus on young families. We must pass the baton of faith successfully to the next generation. To aid us in this, we are looking to create outreach engines, to identify those within our church family who are currently inviting others, and to continually analyze and assess from a biblical perspective what we do and how we are doing it.

Priority 2 - OVERALL CHURCH HEALTH

Hand in hand with outreach, we need to assess our overall spiritual health as a congregation. How is HCC governed? Is it effective? Is it biblical? Are the ministry systems of the church healthy? This demands that we identify and address unhealthy hearts or habits, beginning first of all with an examination of our own. As we identify those habits we will then build a plan to address them in the most God honoring way possible.

Priority 3 - OVERALL DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY OF HCC

It is clear that we have been called to make disciples, not simply converts. What does that mean? Do we have a clearly defined process that will lead a person from the first contact, through conversion and into full maturity as a Christian? In other words, what is HCC's discipleship pathway? Is it effective? Can it be made simpler? Better?

In addition, we are also looking to address some of the physical needs of our building to make it more "Friendly".

In order do that we are seeking help from architectural firms that specialize in church building reformation (2 firms: 1 in Cincinnati & 1 in Columbus) in this assessment. We have determined that our two most pressing needs are: 1) and elevator for the purpose of aiding those with physical challenges, and 2) adequate common area to encourage meaningful conversation and fellowship in an environment and atmosphere of love and hospitality.

We are currently in the discovery phase on all of these initiatives and we will do our best to keep you updated. If you have any questions please see one of the elders. The only way that any of this will make an eternal difference is if you will **join us in bathing everything we dream, ask or do in prayer!**

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