ABSTRACT

UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST:
A STUDY OF THE RACIAL UNIFICATION
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IN VIRGINIA

by

Stephen Gene McMurray

Cultural unity in God’s church has always been deficient. In 1963, Martin Luther
King, Jr. famously declared, “11 o’clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of
the week. And the Sunday school is still the most segregated school” (Beima 11). Many
Christians would claim, based on personal experience, that cultural unity in the body of
Christ is unattainable. Unless the process of uniting culturally different churches or
church groups can continue, God’s desire for Christian unity can never be achieved.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the Church of God in the state of Virginia took
decisive steps to end cultural and racial division within its borders by joining together the
Black and White church groups to form one united church. The merger has not been
without its difficulties as no successful precedence existed that the two organizations
could follow.

This study explored the history of what happened within the state of Virginia in
the unification of the two governing bodies (Black and White) and traces how the
churches and pastors reacted to the unification event over the eight years following its
happening. It sought to understand how churches and most especially their pastors have
responded to unification. The complexity of the situation as it now stands must be studied
to know the impact it has had on the state churches or to predict what future unifications may expect.

The intercultural communication approach of William B. Gudykunst and You Kim Young is selected as a structured model for the evaluation of the semi-structured interviews. Within this model all communication is coded under cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental categories. The initial coding is accomplished using the grounded theory techniques of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin.

The study concludes with a series of barriers and facilitators to the process of unification of statewide governing bodies within the Church of God (Anderson). A study of these themes would be helpful to similar agencies’ unification efforts.
DISSEYATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST:
A STUDY OF THE RACIAL UNIFICATION
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IN VIRGINIA

presented by

Stephen Gene McMurray

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

__________________________________________          October 15, 2012
Mentor

__________________________________________          October 15, 2012
Internal Reader

__________________________________________          October 15, 2012
Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program

__________________________________________          October 15, 2012
Dean of the Beeson Center
UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST:
A STUDY OF THE RACIAL UNIFICATION
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IN VIRGINIA

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Stephen Gene McMurray
December 2012
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep gratitude I honor with this study God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for leading me down this path and to Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, where I encountered God many, many times in the faces of the faculty and cohort of students.

I owe a great amount of thanksgiving to Dr. Russell West, my faculty mentor, for his guidance, patience, and wisdom as I worked on this project. He trusted in me enough to give me freedom to explore for myself the harsh realities of embedded racism in America, and I will be forever changed because of him.

I thank Dr. Richard Gray for his loving spirit and willingness to assist me in any way he could. His statement to me that the true litmus test for racism was “inter-racial marriage” provided the impetus to inspect that area of culture.

To Dr. Milton Lowe I give thanks for advice, many clarifications, and assistance at times when I needed them. His mercy and grace are evident in the quiet and efficient manner he guides our study schedule. A shout-out also goes to Mindy Rose, Lacey Craig, and Judy Seitz, who I commend for scrutinizing the smallest details of writing and for the overtime she had to spend on my research paper.

I thank the Church of God in Virginia for letting me be involved almost to the point of being intrusive. I especially thank those who participated in the interviews, and I hope I have kept my promise to keep you anonymous. I reserve a special thanks to Doctor Richard Carter who is solely responsible for my continuing education at Asbury Theological Seminary.
I will always remember the kindness of my Research Reflection Team at Wytheville First Church of God and their great pastor, Donn Sunshine, without whom I would not have received the great ideas, the fun of dining with the meetings, the clowning and the seriousness with which you undertook your task of advising me. Thank you for believing in me, supporting me and cheering me on. I will never forget one of the first statements made by my brother in Christ, Tim: “We will get by the issue of cultural racism when we start calling each other by our name rather than ‘that Black/White guy.’”

I want to extend thanks to my friend Clifford Whitener and his family who taught me how to interact with a different culture with all of the kindness and gentleness that could be expected. He got me started on the road to recovery and reconciliation. I am blessed beyond words to have a brother who had the patience and love to see me through this portion of our lives together.

God has gifted me with my wife, Suzanne, who says that I have “more degrees than a thermometer.” She has patiently waited for me to settle down and relax somewhere on this planet as I struggled through this last test, and has loved me though it all. To my sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren, I hope I can live up to the example I have proclaimed throughout my ministry.

Finally, all praise, honor, and glory go to the most significant inspiration in my life—Jesus Christ, the unifier par excellence!

One Thursday in May 2012, I flew to Canton, Mississippi, to interview Rev. Simeon Green, III, pastor of Crossroads Church of God in Canton, Mississippi, who had served as the State Coordinator in Virginia during the unification process and had been instrumental in the merger that occurred there. Rev. Green was also the former pastor of
Doty Road Church of God in Ferriday, Louisiana, from February 2008 through 31 March 2012. There he was successful in the merger of a Black and a White church into one.

On arriving a day early, I decided to attend church with Rev. Green on Wednesday night. When I walked into the church building, the pastor introduced me and told the congregation why I was there. He then asked me to speak on the subject of unification. I spoke (or rather God spoke through me) for about forty minutes. When the service was over, a woman, Rev. Jerri Bomgardner, came up to me and said she was the Chairperson of the Ministerial Association for the Church of God in Mississippi. Rev. Bomgardner, Associate Minister of Crossroads Church of God and former pastor of Washington Court House in Ohio for thirty-nine years, has served the Church of God diligently in an era that did not lend itself to the calling of women into ministry. She then asked me to come back in July (meeting was rescheduled for February 2013) to address the statewide minister’s meeting on the subject of unification. Mississippi currently has two separate organizations—Black and White. She wanted me to assist her and Rev. Green begin the process of unification in their state.

Then a ninety-six year old Black woman, Rev. Ozie Wattleton, Associate Minister of Crossroads Church of God in Canton, Mississippi, and pioneer in the deep south who worked to break down racial barriers and who had been preaching for over seventy years in an area that favored neither Blacks nor women, prayed over me and the mission we were about to conceive. Wow! Maybe you have had those moments where you can really feel the presence of God. This was one of those moments. Sometimes in ministry, it is difficult to see the fruit of your labors, but this encounter was truly a confirming moment.
of my ministry. I am excited that this dissertation project is no longer just about obtaining a degree but is being used to give glory to God.

The Church of God Association in Mississippi voted in their state business meeting in July 2012 unanimously to begin the process of uniting the two groups in that state. The Assembly or White group also voted in the annual meeting in August 2012 to begin the process of unifying the two groups.
CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

This project was born out of a personal experience that motivated me to discover the necessary factors involved in creating racial unity in the Church of God within states with multiple organizations. The following autobiography should shed some light on the motivation.

I grew up in the mountains of Southwestern Virginia. In the mid 1900s, the Black population in the United States hovered around 15 percent nationally, but in our region, it was closer to 2 or 3. My first experience of noticing that people different from me existed was when I was watching a show on TV one day that featured a Black character (Buckwheat of the Little Rascals) who was depicted as unintelligent. He played with the White kids and obeyed their commands. As I grew older, I remember watching the news in the 1950s and seeing Martin Luther King, Jr. talking about peace and preaching about a peaceful demonstration while the next news piece was about Black violence in some other part of the country. In my early childhood, the juxtaposition of these two images was extremely confusing.

My preteen and teenage years occurred during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. I remember prior to going to high school, Black kids in Scott County near the Tennessee line, were bussed over to Kingsport, Tennessee. I had no interaction with anyone from another race until I went to high school at the age of thirteen. The first contact I had with Black people was in high school in 1963, the year the schools were first integrated in our area. My experience was that they took away our freedoms. We had
dancing in sixth period on Fridays; the school administration took that away from us. Additionally, they ended our sock hops and dissolved most of our social gatherings. We resisted the social changes as White people and as teenagers. I stayed clear of Black people.

One day I remember seeing a fight in the lunch line when a young Black man tried to chisel his way in line in front of some people. A fight ensued; it was extreme and quite frightening for me. In another instance, I remember playing football with these two Black brothers on the team who were very good athletes. Suddenly we had a competitive football team. One day somebody said something to them and they quit and went home. A short time later, their father brought them back to practice and told them they could not leave and afterward assured the head coach that they would behave or face the consequences. Something about this event just did not match up which what I had been told about Blacks.

I grew up going to church with my neighbors because my parents did not attend church regularly. My dad never went to church although he claimed to be a Christian. My parents, particularly my dad, were extremely prejudiced. Such prejudice is ironic because his father’s name (my own grandfather) was Ulysses S. McMurray. He was actually named after the great Union Civil War general. Adding to the confusion, my dad seemed to be simply going along with some sort of cultural accommodation of the time. Growing up I was taught by my father and by my neighbors and people who comprised my circle of friends that Black people were less than human. I did not know anything about the Jim Crow laws that stated they were only half-human, but those around me spoke about Black people using this type of language. I was told that Black people came from apes; they
were called by the so-called *n* word; and, that they were not smart and could not learn. Furthermore, people I trusted degraded the Black people, so I thought I had to go along with them. Dramatic tension existed; we had this philosophy that led to practices of White supremacy, which I now know as ethnocentrism.

I went off to college in 1968, and not knowing any better, I avoided Blacks and other foreigners I suddenly encountered who attended the university. After a year and a half of college, I went into the Navy. I was overwhelmed at that time with people of color, and I still managed to stay clear of them. I went into the submarine field; there were not many Blacks who wanted to be in the submarine field. Oddly, very few Blacks I met in the Navy could swim. I was not sure why but only a few passed the initial submarine school in New London, Connecticut.

As we were going through school, I was at the head of the class. I was either first or second each and every week. The person with whom I was in competition was a young Black man named Cliff. For the first time in my life, a Black man was equal or more intelligent than I was. He would be at the head of the class one week and I would be at the head the next week. The prize for being first was to allow you to have your choice of duty, and you also received some time off. We sat near one another in class, and we began to talk; he was very easy to get to know. As the class progressed, we became the best of friends. As I recall, we effectively tied for first in the class and suddenly those old ideas that I had in my head were destroyed. Here is a man who was Black, intelligent, good looking, and nice, contrary to what I had heard or been taught. We became close friends; he would do almost anything for me and I would do the same for him. We were
transferred to Charleston, South Carolina. I am ashamed to say that we bought the Chief Petty Officer a fifth of liquor to transfer us to the same boat.

At that time, I had a car, and we decided to drive to South Carolina together. We stopped off in Washington, DC to see his parents, and then we went down to Scott County and saw my parents. I remember when we stopped in DC, his parents treated me like a king. They fed me, pampered me, and housed me. He had some beautiful cousins and aunts that I still remember to this day. I had never really seen anyone quite as beautiful as his relatives and awkwardly found myself being attracted to them. I was quite touched by the treatment I received. We spent the weekend there and then we left and had a few weeks to get to Charleston to our next assignment. We drove down to Scott County. As we reached my house, walking up the driveway, my dad came out on the porch and told me that we were not welcome. I had a choice to make right then. To a young man of nineteen, trying to decide between my family and a young Black friend was intense. I chose my young, Black friend, and we grew closer together after that. We went to family reunions, and I took him to his first NASCAR race. We still call each other today, some forty two years later. This young Black man changed my worldview in a few short months.

The choice I made that day was not easy for me. The good news is, my mom and dad both repented of this sin and died Christians, members of the United Methodist Church down in Hiltons, Virginia. They apologized for what went on that day as my dad came to have a better understanding of the situation that was going on in our country at the time. I even remember that the first church that I pastored, Thornspring United Methodist Church in Dublin, Virginia, had a wall down the center of the church with a
balcony where we had the sound system set up. I was told that the wall divided the men and the women and that the balcony was for the slaves. The church was built during the Civil War, and it was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in the very same manner. My life was forever surrounded by some type of overt racism.

Therefore, to undertake this paper and to dedicate my life to reconciliation between White and Black church members was something that I could not avoid. God has led me to this position and to this point in my life, and he will not allow me to ignore his voice. Paraphrasing Martin Luther, this is my calling, God help me.

Cultural unity in God’s church has always been deficient. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. famously declared, “11 o’clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week. And the Sunday school is still the most segregated school” (Beima 11). William Pannell concludes, “The bottom line is that the church is the most segregated community in America. We have not found each other except on the annual rent-a-choir day” (138). Many Christians would claim, based on personal experience, that cultural unity in the body of Christ is unattainable. Unless the process of uniting culturally different churches or church groups can continue, God’s desire for Christian unity can never be achieved.

The Church of God in the state of Virginia (COGVA) took decisive steps to end cultural and racial division within its borders during the last twelve years by joining together the Black and White church groups to form one united church. The merger has not been without its difficulties as no successful precedence could be found that the two organizations could follow. In a press release from the COGVA office, the editor gives us a glimpse of the genesis of unification within the state:
Standing in the shadow of the Civil War Chancellorsville Battlefield in Fredericksburg, Virginia, representatives and leaders of the Virginia Association of the Church of God and the Virginia Assembly of the Church of God met on September 11, 2004, the third anniversary of the World Trade Center bombings in New York City, and delivered an historic vote formally dissolving the two racially divided organizations and adopting by-laws creating the united Church of God in Virginia (COGVA).

For nearly eighty years, the Church of God in Virginia was divided by race. With twelve former Black Association congregations and thirty-nine former White Assembly congregations, the new organization brings together the gifts and leadership of all fifty-one congregations to fulfill the stated mission statement, “The mission of the Church of God in Virginia is to serve the congregations of the church by providing spiritual guidance and support to local churches and to promote the teachings, practices, beliefs and doctrines of the Church of God based on the Holy Bible.” The acceptance of the new by-laws creates the structure for new ministries, a greater witness for the cause of Christ in Virginia, and an opportunity to live out the truth of the doctrine of unity we believe. To God be the glory! (Neace 18)

The leaders in this church obviously wanted to set an example for the world to see by combining COGVA unification actions with a familiar narrative concerning the Civil War. The implications are that just as the battlefield at Chancellorsville represents a significant event in the unification of the country and the different people who make up its population, so do the actions taken by modern church leaders signify unity.

One of the main foci of ministry in the Church of God has always been unity. Studies have shown historically that the national organization has been racially integrated with Blacks comprising almost 20 percent of its membership (Stanley 1995; Telfer 1981). Today the Blacks and Whites maintain separate national assemblies and, in most states, separate state assemblies. Although the former Virginia Association (predominantly Black-attended churches) and the Virginia Assembly (predominantly White-attended churches) of the Church of God in Virginia formally united in 2004, the pathway toward true Christian unity has been a difficult transition at best.
Past research does not address the cultural differences between the Black and White church groups that may have hindered the transition. Past research also does not address the multiple factors that explain the cultural interaction of these two groups such as how each viewed leadership, the role of real estate in the process, and how each side would maintain its heritage. COGVA had no model that could forecast obstacles leadership would encounter in this paradigm shift. In addition, within the Church of God (Anderson), COGVA was the laboratory for how this unification would be accomplished nationwide. The audience for this research is the statewide church leaders and the national Church of God movement leaders.

This study explored the history of what happened within the state of Virginia in the unification of the two governing bodies (Black and White) and traced how the churches and pastors reacted to the unification event over the following seven years. I sought to understand how churches and especially their pastors have responded to unification. The complexity of the situation as it now stands must be studied to know the impact it has had on the state churches and to predict what future unifications may expect.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to provide a template for the Church of God Movement (Anderson, Indiana; CHOG) to use in other states by exploring the process that occurred in the unification of the Black and White organizations within the Churches of God in Virginia from the inception of the idea in the mid-1990s through 2012.
Research Questions

The following four research questions helped to explore and evaluate the research project.

Research Question #1

What were the elements (e.g., steps, decisions) involved in the process of unification as it occurred?

Research Question #2

What has been the impact of the unification process?

Research Question #3

What limitations were identified during and after the implementation process?

Research Question #4

What were the recommendations for how the process might be improved, and how should the results be used?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the term unification means the joining together of organizational entities such as the credentialing committees, leadership committees, and the leadership team, including the state ministers within the state. This term is not to be confused with church mergers or with Christian unity as a movement seeking to demonstrate itself through the life and witness of its people. The latter only comes from God.

Prejudice is “a strong feeling for or against something formed before one knows the facts; bias” (Harper 541).

Racism is “the belief that some races are better than others” (Harper 565).
The term *template* is intended to mean a pattern or model for what some future state unification process might look like.

The terms *Black* and *White* are used for identification purposes only and are in no way intended to be biased or culturally offensive. These descriptors are simply a personal preference for grammatical precision that preserves human dignity and includes a humanistic commitment to the essential wholeness of every created person. As poorly as these descriptors convey ontological, sociological, and cultural status, the uppercase versions are selected because they serve as designations for a people (i.e., Chinese, Latinos, Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites). These descriptors shall refer to ethnicity, race and culture of the main participants in the unification dialogue (West 1).

The inception of the idea occurred in the mid-1990s when the General Assembly of the Church of God Movement in Anderson, Indiana, issued an unofficial mandate calling for all credentialing committees to join together both Black and White organizational structures (see Appendix A). Because of the autonomy of the CHOG churches, no real mandate existed, just a strong encouragement to do something about the joining together of the credentialing process within the state. CHOG leadership suggested that if Virginia did not work on a unification of the process of credentialing, they would not recognize the state pastors’ credentials.

**Context**

The Church of God in Virginia is affiliated with the General Assembly of the Church of God, Church of God Ministries, Inc., Anderson, Indiana. With the CHOG, the *local congregation* is the basic organization of the church. The congregation contacts and calls its pastor. The congregation establishes its own organizational pattern with a set of
bylaws. The congregation is not strictly controlled by any person or organization outside its own membership. In fact, the state and national organizations derive their strength from local churches and the support they choose to give. With such autonomy, unification is extremely difficult. The churches individually seem to think that they do not answer to a higher administrative authority.

The context of this study involves the General Assembly of the Church of God Movement in North America (Anderson, Indiana) sending down a mandate to the individual states sometime in the mid-1990s that unification of the Black and White churches within each state must take place (see Appendix A). According to several prominent pastors in the movement who asked to remain anonymous, several states, including Alabama and Mississippi, had attempted the process, even going to the point of uniting organizationally only to revert back to their original status.

Virginia stood back and watched those states to see what was going to happen. After the attempt at organizational unity in other states, the leadership in the state of Virginia called Anderson to see how they might proceed and to get some help with the process. Anderson’s reply was that Virginia was to be the exemplar for the unification process, which was to begin with state credentialing committees. Nationwide the CHOG was going to be watching Virginia to see how the process of unification might be incorporated nationally.

Virginia then attempted the process beginning in 1999 and actually succeeded in the unification of the organizations on 11 September 2004. The effort has not been without its difficulties, but the united organization still stands some 7 ½ years later in early 2012. Virginia has been one of the few states that has any form of success in the
unification of Black and White congregational structure for the Church of God (Anderson). The current COGVA consists of fifty-one churches with twelve of those being from the Black group and thirty-nine from the White group.

The irony of the current situation is that the national organizations of the Black and White groups as yet still have two separate entities that have not totally united.

**Methodology**

This study was qualitative in nature, suggesting that it was exploratory and understanding oriented. The method used semi-structured interviews. In addition, an attempt was made to locate any records such as minutes of meetings. Selecting a research method means understanding that “research lies somewhere on the continuum from quantitative and qualitative research” (Creswell 46), and for the most part qualitative research was required for the unification study. The study relied on the views of the participants through the asking of broad, generalized questions. Collected data consisted of words or text from participants. The study focused on describing and analyzing these words for themes and concepts.

**Participants**

The participants in the study were selected by predetermined criteria and by seeking out individuals who might meet such criteria. The criteria for selecting volunteers were as follows:

- Participants were in the state before and after the official unification event in 2004.
- Participants were part of the transition or leadership team so as to have inside insight.
Participants were representative of both Black and White groups.

Participants were recommended by current leadership.

Participants were agreeable to participation.

This purposive type of sampling was used because it was appropriate to this study while random sampling would be neither appropriate nor feasible. The goal was to have a purposive sample of clergy and church leaders participate in the study with the number of participants determined based on the response to individual requests. Every recommended pastor in COGVA who fit the chosen criteria was asked to participate in a confidential, semi-structured interview.

Instrumentation

In order to respond to the goal of this research, only one instrument was required. The instrumentation of this study was a semi-structured interview protocol entitled Church of God Research Interview (COGRI). The interviews took place only after the acceptance of the dissertation proposal with an anticipated timeline of January through May 2012.

Data Collection

The data was collected over a five-month period from January until May 2012. The interviews took place in or near the interviewees’ hometown or church. The interviews were by appointment, and follow-ups to the interviews were made for validation. Data was collected in the form of recorded interviews (COGRI) that were later transcribed for use with word or theme searches. Additionally I made an effort to locate documents and records that might shed light on the unification process.
I obtained the required levels of permission to gain access to the participants. The state of Virginia’s Executive Committee and Executive Board had to approve this study. The study fully recognized the administrative and ethical considerations involved in collecting qualitative data.

**Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, I established data analysis by protocol. Because the instrument was a semi-structured interview, I expected that themes would evolve out of that interview. Analysis was accomplished by first organizing the data according to patterns, themes, and categories, each of which could be validated. Because a qualitative study requires the location and recognition of concepts and themes, and an effort to find theories grounded in data, I made use of the techniques and procedures for developing *grounded theory* to identify, retrieve, and collate concepts and themes used during the data collection (Strauss and Corbin 1-295).

Once the data was collected, I developed a table that summarized the cultural themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews (COGRI) with a possibility of returning to a focus group to see if the themes accurately identified their experiences. Next, I explored and coded the transcribed database to get a general sense of the data collected by examining what the participants discussed most frequently, what they said that was unique or surprising, and other themes found during such research.

I accomplished validation by triangulation, member checking, and through an external audit. I further validated the study by using a proven method of studying cultural, sociocultural, psychocutural, and environmental communication to analyze the interviews (Gudykunst and Kim 45-49).
Generalizability

The study was delimited in that the entire issue of Christian unity was not explored. The boundaries were limited to the COGVA and, within this entity, the organizational unification of leadership and executive committees, most particularly the credentialing committee. Limitations were that the historical meetings had few minutes taken, which caused a lack of validation on some data. The data collected was perceptive, meaning interviewees might have been somewhat biased, not wanting to be seen as failing in any manner. Another weakness was the confusion between spiritual unity and organizational unity.

This study was generalizable in three ways: (1) The Church of God in Virginia will be able to reflect on its current practices and improve on their implementation; (2) assuming that other state organizations are similar to that of Virginia, this research should be generalizable to any other state; and, (3) the Church of God (Anderson) will be able to provide a pattern whereby other states might begin the process of uniting their respective churches organizationally and culturally.

Theological Foundation

From the very beginning of Scripture, one can see the urgent desire of God to be in community. The Bible informs the reader that the Triune God was not alone in his endeavor to create. Christ was with him (John 1:2) as was the Spirit (Gen. 1:2). Indeed God’s desire in creating humankind was for fellowship (Gen. 1:26-27) so much so that God created humankind in his own image. Moreover, from the Fall of humanity (Gen. 3) to the very end of the Bible, God is reconciling his created beings back to himself, a ministry of reconciliation.
Throughout Scripture, however, the reader encounters a defiance or disobedience to God’s call for followers to be his people so that he may be their God (Lev. 26:12). The result was a divided church lacking any real unity and torn asunder with sin. One implication of this division is that sin involves more than just personal misdeeds. It can extend into family histories and become incorporated into public policy and cultural systems. The enmity between Haman and Mordecai (Esth. 3:2-6) in the Old Testament showed that principle at work. The story of how the Lord used Mordecai to frustrate the plan laid down by Haman is well-known. Perhaps neither Haman nor Mordecai knew about the long-standing enmity between their two peoples. Nevertheless, their conflict illustrates that personal sin can be passed on to one’s children and, in turn, to their children. Over the years, it can become imbedded in the very life of a culture. That legacy of sin may lie dormant for generations then suddenly flare up, as it did in Haman’s case, in institutionalized evil, or it may show its ugly head in less revealing posture.

Then in the New Testament, as a means of grace, God gave his people the Church. God intended for believers to be the “bride of Christ” (Eph. 5:25-27, NRSV) and “one flock, [with] one shepherd” (John 10:16) all for the purpose of unity, with God and with each other (Matt. 22). A notable biblical passage pertaining to prejudice is Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Unity in Christ in this verse transcends ethnic, social, and sexual distinctions and demands holy living that does not allow these distinctions to exist in the body of Christ. Paul champions the cause of unity in Christ throughout his writings. Jesus’ death as a means of salvation creates one
community, not many; thus, barriers no longer exist that separate otherwise disparate groups.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) is one of Jesus’ most popular and reduces the abstract theological question, “What shall we do to inherit eternal life,” to a simpler, more practical challenge: “Go and do likewise [i.e., show mercy].” What makes the story so poignant is the contrast between the Jewish priest and Levite who avoided the half-dead victim and the Samaritan who showed him compassion. Jesus played the deep-seated animosity that existed between the two groups. Prejudiced people find great difficulty in thinking that their ethnic enemies might be compassionate human beings. Jesus’ challenge to “go and do likewise” (Matt. 28:18-20) is a test for those who consider the many racial and ethnic divisions in the world today. God is interested in mercy, not maintaining prejudice.

The most notable prayer in the New Testament concerning unity is recorded in John 17 and is frequently referred to as the high priestly prayer because it intercedes for Jesus’ disciples, both present and future. Indeed, in this prayer could be where the word passion, concerning Christ’s last days, may have originated. Jesus prayed to God the Father for himself (vv. 1-5), for his disciples (vv. 6-19), and, finally, for all future believers (vv. 20-26). Jesus prayed “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, May they also be [one] in us; so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (v. 21). This prayer is for the unity of believers. This kind of unity is a gift from God. True unity can only come from God; obedience will urge God to allow it.

A follower of Christ, knowing that Jesus prayed for them long before they were even born, could insert their own names into this passage “that [Steve and Matthew or
Susan and Sean] may all be one…” (v. 21a). That reading, however, would not do this passage justice or render a proper interpretation. This passage nowhere indicates that Jesus was concerned with an individual believer’s unity with him or the Father. Instead, he was concerned with the disciples as a believing community.

According to Isaiah, God will someday bring together people from every nation to live together under his lordship (Isa. 66:20). Considering the tensions that exist today between people of different races, colors, customs, and cultures, one can only marvel at the fact that somehow everyone will get along. Perhaps the key to surmounting the differences will be the realization that ultimately all peoples have been brought into being by God and are called to live under God (Isa. 66:19). Isaiah’s vision of international blessing and worldwide unity echoes the promise made to Abraham and Sarah, that through them “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3). It also anticipates John’s vision of people from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” worshipping and serving the Lord (Rev. 5:9-10).

**Overview**

Chapter 2 of this dissertation reviews literature associated with the study of historical analysis, the historical analysis of organizational mergers, parallel historical studies on reconciliation and unification, the theology of unity in the body of Christ, and research methods. Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the research design, research methods, and the methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 details the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the conclusions derived from interpretation of the data, as well as practical applications of the conclusions and further study possibilities.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE

Introduction

History would have a person to believe that cross-cultural problems involving racial divisions in American society might have seen the beginning of their end with the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 and perhaps culminating in the 1960s with the Brown versus Board of Education and subsequent anti-segregation rulings by the courts of the land, especially the Supreme Court of the United States.¹ People who have lived through this latter era of change know better.

Racism still exists in today’s society, and the church is not exempt from its share of cultural divisiveness. Although the Church of God in Virginia took the necessary steps to begin the unification process, cultural differences between the two merging groups has caused continued confusion, much of which was overlooked or set aside until a later date that has never been established.

Past research does not address the cultural differences between the Black and White church groups that may have hindered the merger. Past research also does not address the multiple factors that explain the interaction of these two groups such as how each viewed leadership, the role of real estate in the process, and how each side would maintain its heritage. Unification of the Church of God congregations had been tried in several states, including Alabama and Mississippi, without much success. Mississippi, for instance, began the process by merging the organizations only to see them revert to their old status. Thus, no model existed that could give COGVA direction.

¹ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin in employment. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 ensured access to the ballot. The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 eliminated national quotas (Takaki 252).
As a result of these difficulties, the purpose of this research was to provide a template for the Church of God Ministries (Anderson, Indiana) to use in other states by exploring the process that occurred in the unification of the Black and White organizations within the Churches of God in Virginia from the inception of the idea in the mid-1990s through 2011.

In order to anchor the proposed study of the merger of the two church organizations within the ongoing flow of research pertaining to unity in the body of Christ, this chapter begins by exploring and identifying the biblical and theological foundation for unity in the body of Christ by examining the flow of the unity theme throughout Scripture (Old Testament, New Testament, Pauline epistles) as well as some notable cultural differences therein. This chapter also examines the dynamics of the various themes discovered during the semi-structured interviews and compares and contrasts some relevant literature pertaining to Christian unity thematically. Finally, the key ideas and variables emerging from the analysis of the literature and theology are summarized.

**Biblical Precedence**

A genuine and true unity is always perceived to be the hallmark of every individual in the church of Christ (Macquarrie 402). Everyone wants to live harmoniously and would not want to fall victim to circumstances that may cause a split with people who are important. Long-term friendships may be placed under perverse strain when one involves himself or herself with a competing or different organization in society. Family members and relatives may come to have different convictions and loyalties that will be unlikely to facilitate unity in the family (Allmen 132). Valuable to
the will of God is that his brothers and sisters undertake their activities in harmony. David, in Psalms, writes “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). David is talking about genuine and true unity in the life of God’s brotherhood. The foundation for success of development in any society is unity, and God’s people need to act upon this phenomenon.

**Modern Threats to Unity**

Scripture gives the reader a highlight of the threats to the hard-earned unity immediately before Christ returns to the world. The threats that hamper unity are cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental. Therefore, humanity needs to deal with them. According to the Bible, discord in modern society had been prophesized. For instance, because iniquity abounds, “the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12); “there will be perilous times of great selfishness” (2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:2-4); “there will be false teachers” (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet. 2:1-3); and, “many false teachings and attitudes will be prevalent” (1 John 2:18-22, 26; 4:1-3, 20; 2 John 7-11; 3 John 9-11). Disorder and sin have led to separation in society—families splitting up, interpersonal and church divisions, and neighboring national hostility. The governance of church and nation in modern circumstances has reiterated unity prevalence due to ongoing controversies. Collective and individual shortcomings in regard to leadership have been accused of fuelling these controversies (Bromiley 48).

**The Disunity at Corinth**

According to Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians, the church is provided with a clear view of the basis for disunity among church congregations, and the letter makes clear the role for church leaders in restoring unity to the church. The apostle Paul advocates for
greater unity at Corinth (Bathrellos 24). He was burdened by various problems for which he had to provide solutions: party spirits, marriage and by sexually related problems, godly wisdom versus wisdom of the world, pride and fornication in the Church, and carnality and divisions. In addition, he was subjected to envy, temple prostitution and idolatry, ministers who dwell off God’s gospel, the mixing of Christian and pagan worship, abuse of the Passover celebration, and speaking in tongues (Russell 331). By persuading them to speak the same language (unity), Paul was able to restore sanity in the church’s congregation: “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose” (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul made his thoughts clear that unity began in people coming to an agreement in mind and purpose.

**How to Be of One Mind**

According to the biblical setting, being in unity represents numerous challenges and takes great perseverance to maintain it. This search for unity subjects the church to a number of challenges such as uniting different people from various backgrounds and getting them to accept the same mind frame. Overcoming these challenges is not an easy task (Boers 112). God’s children should not focus on their own interests and opinions but should follow the ways of Jesus Christ so that they can unconsciously have unison in ideologies (Dunn 25). The focus should not be on the individual’s perceptions and views but entirely on the path of Jesus Christ. Without a doubt followers have to “put on [be clothed with] Christ” (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27), and embody Christ’s attitude, thoughts, and way of life.
In the days of Corinth, the church suffered greatly from the discrepancies in views and thoughts. Brethren were not striving to have a common ground for thoughts and were, therefore, full of envy and jealousy (1 Cor. 3:3). As such Paul declared Corinthians as “carnal.” They were considered “babes in Christ” and could only be fed with milk. When the church is embodied with such thoughts, whether in church leadership or within the congregation, divisiveness and an eventual breakdown of relationships will inevitably occur.

**Unity from God’s Spirit**

A vital characteristic of God’s mind is to love (Gal. 5:22; 1 John 4:4, 16). God’s unity is a gift given to his people during conversion as he passes on his nature to them by means of the Holy Spirit. Imminently this nature will grow when the spirit of God is renewed in their intuition (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16). That love “has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us” (Rom 5:5, NEB). The way of life and the Spirit of God should be an inspiration to humanity and the gifts that bind the church in unity. Paul pleads, “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). True unity will only result from abiding in the ways of Christ and the production of the beneficial fruits in God’s character. The vital factor is that unification can only be achieved when all have their opinions focused on Christ. Members of God’s congregation are called to be of one body and have a fundamental union as members of Christ’s body. However, differing opinions by various Bible teachers, Bible translations, and each person’s own experience suggests that most individuals have a distorted understanding of Christ (Cross 102).
Unity as a By-Product

The unity that each individual desires flows as the by-product from the cordial relationship and calling that one has from God (Shultz 207). In Colossians 2:2, Paul notes that people have to “be encouraged and united in love.” Through subsequent conversion people are ultimately joined with Christ both emotionally and spiritually. Everything that individuals undertake aims at fulfilling God’s will in their lives. The unity with which society is bestowed stems from the relationship that is imminent between the kindred of God and Christ. This unity is symbolized by baptismal death, the Christ-like life to which people become endeared, and the hope that they share among themselves of life after death. As such unity is depicted that “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5). In John 17, Christ’s prayer, when he was finalizing human life, focused on unity among all humanity especially those called by God: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (v. 11). The current generation was not left behind when Christ prayed for unity (vv. 20-23).

Existing Unity

The prayer that Christ the Son of God expressed to his Holy Father was ultimately answered. Many of the people in church settings experience immense unity as they possess a single nature with both Jesus Christ and God. This nature is considered a vertical unity as it focuses on articulation to God’s way of life. In the case of organizational and societal undertakings, unity is characterized to have the form of horizontal unity. This type of connection is seen in the cordial relationship that exists in the work environment. The extent to which people have to share effectively the same
thoughts as that of Christ would mean that they would want to work together, sharing Christ’s purposes and goals (Rosman 54). Sadly, in the case of the human condition, few are willing to embody their ways of thinking to that of Christ. Offenses and breaches are often caused by people’s differences, and they cannot remain in Christ’s unity that was made possible to all.

Unity restoration should not be left to church leaders alone, but the congregation as a whole should foster comprehension of unity among its members (Alfeyev 14). People need not have to wait for some doctrinal statement that is seen to be perfect or an organizational plan that is ideal for individuals to perform operations in unity. Unity prevails in society only when church members ask for the guidance of Christ and acquire wisdom and perseverance, so that persons can trust him to pose corrections to those people who reject the ways of the church in his own way and time.

In the book of Ephesians, unity has been taken as the vital theme (Talbert 17). A great church mystery is that by dwelling in Christ “all things might be gathered together in one” (Eph. 1:10). Indeed through the sacrifice made by Christ, Gentiles and Jews were unified. They were both reconciled by the will of God, thus “made both one,” in an attempt to create “that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross” (Eph 2:13-18). This remarkable passage effectively describes the source and grounds for the peace and unity people should be able to enjoy.

Through Jesus Christ, regardless of racial difference, color, education, background, and gender, all people “have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18). As such, followers have been bonded together by the blood of Christ as “members of the
household of God” (v. 19), having the same calling, spiritual goals, spiritual priorities, and glorious future. Members of a congregation in the church are often comparatively closer than blood relatives, exactly what Christ had promised (Mark 10:28-30). Mutual friendliness and love (John 13:35) among the believers is always quite undeniable and remarkable. Such love is usually noticeable and can often be seen when God’s people are rejoicing.

Ephesians 4 is regarded as the unity chapter in the New Testament. Much of it, unlike the other chapters, focuses on unity among brethren in Christ. For instance, verses 25-32 highlight the contrasting behavior that may ultimately lead to unity or disunity in society. The minister’s role (v. 11) is clearly depicted to show that the vital goal of unity triumphs. The goal is accomplished only after “all of us come to the unity of the faith … to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (v. 12). The goal of each believer depicts that the completeness in the character of Christ is the essential purpose of every individual and church in society. As believers conspire to dedicate their time to the “works of service,” the church will be automatically edified—the result of which is unity. The church is usually about being one whole: one spirit, one body, one faith, one God, one Father, one Lord, one baptism, and one hope (Eph 4:4-7). The church should be able to try “maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Clearly, believers are the ones to keep the unity. They are regarded as members of the same body of Christ. They are endowed, fully, to submit themselves to the success of one another in God’s fear (Eph. 5:21). The loving and intimate relationship between the couple who are married is bound up in Christ (Eph. 5:28-33, esp. v. 32).
In Christ’s body, diversified denominations and movements exist due to differences in views and opinions among the believers on certain doctrines. According to Jean-Jacques von Allmen, the origin of diversified denominations was vested upon the varying organizational governance, traditions of the church, and style of worshipping among other issues (132). Christians have focused on the developed misunderstanding among themselves without clearly understanding that they are similar in more ways than that in which they differ. Researchers have indicated that evangelical congregations make up the majority within many regions, often making up to 90 percent of the believers. More importantly, differences arise concerning the basic elements that comprise Christianity, such as Jesus’ teachings and life, his death, deity, and even resurrection.

The bond on which Christianity is based is Jesus Christ. As such, he is believed to be the foundation upon which every believer should base his or her trust in eternal things. Despite all the misunderstandings, Jesus is deemed to be the perfect object of reverence and worship in today’s church. He is the focus and purpose for undertaking the service and the reason why people exist in this world. At Calvary, at the foot of his cross, every believer and follower of Christ is humble and everyone is brought together in unity as God’s children. Jesus said that the suffering he endured on the cross represented a magnet to those who had lost their ways.

The picture implied in koinonia of what happens when the Corinthians “come together” is worth noting (Anderson 148). As well as eating together, with its Passover and Eucharistic elements and its eschatological (“until he comes”) ethos (1 Cor. 10: 14-21), the tradition of a plethora of charismatic gifts are present and, in many cases, are inspired by various kinds of speeches, faith that is manifested by miracles, and the gifts
of healing. This combination of gifts connotes at least two things: the strong sense of presence of the Spirit that energizes all the believers and distributes itself in ways neither predictable nor conventional and an eschatological self-understanding according to which life in heaven is anticipated in the Corinthians’ own common life, especially in the practice of inspiring speech. The working of miracles and healing are signs of unity in God’s kingdom as well.

While not without precedent and analogy at various points, the life and traditions of Israel, the temple cult in Jerusalem, the Qumran sectaries, the pharisaic conventicles, the Greco-Roman voluntary associations, the mystery cults, and the philosophical schools, among others, denote unity in the social novelty. Herein lies its creativity, vitality, but also its vulnerability to pressure from inside and outside. Therefore, Paul appeals, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, to a metaphor well-known in the political rhetoric of his day: the symbol of society as a body. Earlier he used this metaphor briefly to inform and regulate relations between unbelievers and believers. He develops it further to inform relations within the fellowship itself. As Anthony Dunnavant, Richard Hughes, and Paul M. Blowers show, the metaphor was used widely in antiquity in speeches calling for social harmony, and Paul also uses it to this end (235). The value of the metaphor lies in its potential for allowing the social imagination to envisage the adversity between individuals and classes. It is not a threat to political and social unity; it makes true unity possible through the contribution of the parts to the whole. Paul takes this well-known political metaphor and Christianizes it by applying it to the politics of church.

Paul’s elaboration of the body metaphor shows that the overall thrust is toward the recognition of the full diversity of members as both God given and essential to the
well-being of the whole. In line with Paul’s endeavors to persuade the strong to set the needs of the weak firmly on their moral horizon, he argues that the “members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensible” (1 Cor. 10:22) and worthy compared to those who seem to be stronger and of greater honor. Indeed, along with the acceptance of diversity goes the recognition of a necessity to interdependence. The goal of this divine order of things—into what, politically speaking, is a “mixed constitution”—is that no dissension in the body should exist and, as a corollary, that member’s care for one another is to be “the same” (v. 25b).

Finally, Paul applies the body metaphor back to the main issue: exercise of the gifts in the realization of unity. What comes through once again is the God-given necessity of diversity with mutual interdependence as its collar (1 Cor. 13:29-30). Worth noting is the fact that the charismatic polity Paul envisages here is inclusive and participatory but not straightforwardly democratic or egalitarian: “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 13:28). This text has a ranking with clear precedence accorded those who by their proclamation of the gospel, mediation of divine revelation, and passing on of the tradition bring new churches into being and sustain them in truth. Interesting also is the addition of rather mundane activities such as assistance and leadership alongside the more obviously charismatic activities such as miracle working and speaking in tongues.

**Theological Precedence**

Because of Christ’s humility and obedience to the will of God, the relationship between God and humanity, broken by Adam, is restored, and reconciliation takes place.
Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ enhances this understanding of unity’s horizontal and vertical axes in society. A divine initiative of baptism establishes unity, making a person a member of Christ’s body, and the continued reception and celebration of the Eucharist builds up the unity. Not surprisingly, Paul addressed baptism and Eucharist in his first letter to the Corinthians (chs. 10-12). He discusses this divide because the Corinthians’ divisiveness threatened their celebration of the Eucharist and contradicted their baptized status.

A similar law regarding human-human and human-divine dimensions of integrity applies for the individuals. In fact, broken from a real relationship with God, the person becomes disintegrated (Bartkowski 154). Separation from God affects a person’s adhesion to the group. Furthermore, considering attachment to God, the probability exists that Paul relies upon the principle of like knows like. If the vertical and horizontal within a person somehow split, the person must lack something of knowledge of divine because God is one (Deut. 6:4) and love (1 John 4:16). A radical contrast exists.

Individual spiritual gifts build up the body’s unity. John H. Bodley speaks of people’s weaknesses as gifts for others in the community. He clearly denotes how much an individual’s knowledge of God can become a gift to the body and a fundamental part of the mutual knowledge of God in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:21, both the individual and the corporate intersect. The text implies that all of humanity did not know God; therefore he chose to save believers (202). A person hears the kerygma and judges it, as the kerygma judges the potential believer. The dynamic seems quite individual, but in fact the social aspect of faith surrounds the phenomenon in the text. People who know God must preach the kerygma (Draper and Keathley 164). Furthermore, witnessing people in
right relationship with God makes more sense that one will believe the message intended to cause knowledge of the divine. Paul mentions his own preaching of the word and of the cross to a body of people who seek this tangible phenomenon.

The awareness of the positive group dynamic, which strengthens the knowledge of God, makes apparent the negative ramifications of corporate vice. The central text groups all of humanity together as having failed in achieving knowledge of the divine. In addition, in the case of the story of the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden, the text denotes the beginning of failure and disunity among brethren (Gangel 46). In the light of holy fellowship, the darkness of the way humans can influence each other for evil becomes more apparent. A negative fellowship surrounded the grasping of the fruit, which was the first act of not knowing God. Adam confessed that he shared in eating the fruit, although he was the person to receive the command prohibiting the action (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:2-12). Eve knew the rule, perhaps having heard it from Adam himself, yet she offered the forbidden fruit to him. Scripture talks about the Edenic characteristics of the knowledge God intended: obedience, trust, unity, and belief in God’s goodness. Adam and Eve influenced each other in pulling away from God. Together they plunged humanity into a search for wisdom that is independent of the Creator. The church of Corinth, before whom Paul held up knowledge of God and salvation, also corporately tore down their relationship with God as they strove for vain wisdom and power over one another (Bromiley 59).

**Leadership**

Leadership at best is a difficult task involving any number of constructs that help to build the body of Christ. Many think the worst problem facing the body of Christ today
is the lack of effective leadership that can discourage people from unity (Ikpatt 136). Some leaders address the issue of unity and harmony among the various denominations/movements in the body of Christ and the many problems associated with leadership. Christ-centeredness is the fundamental idea that one should consider regarding leadership, and such centeredness must be modeled by the leaders while being reflexive as well. So often leadership insight is lost or gets tucked away nicely in the back of the leaders’ minds as they strive to make changes and implement new polices while building their own little fiefdoms and kingdoms.

The ministerial staff, with the congregation or in widely held leadership positions, has to focus on what God has provided as an example for leaders and instructions for sound leadership principles. According to David R. Penley and Louis M. Ao, leadership approaches available to the ministerial staff pose challenges of fully appreciating how to remain gentle yet command and articulate Christ in leading the apostles and those becoming Christ’s disciples (96). Other approaches are Paul’s and Peter’s examples as well as James’ and John’s concerns over great leadership for the flock. Leadership, from this vantage point, focuses on unity, communication, and a sense of the leading of God in one’s life.

In Genesis 11:6, the Bible shows a mental picture of unity and leadership of a man, Nimrod, in the building of the Tower of Babel. God noticed what was going on and had some very interesting insights into Nimrod’s work. The problem of the building program of Nimrod was that he was arrogant, self-willed, misdirected in his thinking, and lacked God’s will. Inevitably, the tower had to be destroyed as is any ministry that does not place God first (Gangel 107).
Unity in leadership is very important. COGVA has a vested trust in its leaders: Dr. Robert Neace (COGVA chair), Rev. Gertrude Goode (COGVA vice-chair), and Dr. James W. Bradley (state minister). These leaders contribute to seeing a project through to its completion. The demand placed on one person is greatly diluted and disbursed so that others can share in the load. Unity is a formidable force in leadership. The leader must be able to excite and invite camaraderie among the people in the group towards more effective working relations (Burnley 76). Leaders do more than simply lead; leaders follow the vision that God supplies. They also place appropriate workers in ministry to help realize the vision. In his book, Timothy Tenney writes that both a positive and a negative unity exists in the world today. As such, when people have a negative type of unity they do not succeed. Ministerial staff members need to consider their focus and monitor their motives continually. Tenney goes on to speak about the issue of servanthood in unity. Every leader should recognize the value of servanthood.

COGVA’s leaders are embodied with an ethical standard to uphold. The ethical standard for the minister is the Holy Bible and will automatically conform to the unity among the congregations. The prescriptive measures and principles outlined in the Bible provide insight into the life and growth of any ministry that focuses its heart on the cause of Christ. According to Kenneth O. Gangel, the ethical position of the minister should be above criticism. Everyone makes mistakes; human errors are expected. Ministers should endeavor to be as close to what God wants for them to be and have their sight firmly fixed on the direction and leading of the Lord. Leaders have no time to be slumberous (96).
The Importance of Place (Human Ethology)

Academically the term ethology is defined as the study of animal behavior with emphasis on the behavioral patterns that occur in natural environments (Harper). Lyle E. Schaller quotes a pioneer in the field of ethology, British businessman and birdwatcher Henry Eliot Howard who, in his book entitled *Territory in Bird Life*, argues based on his observation of birds that male birds do not compete so much for females as they do for territory (69).

The first serious attempt to place the word *human* in front of the term ethology and thus begin an entirely new science was not made until a graduate student writing a book review on social policy planning published his work in 1969 (Griffith 54-60). Human ethology narrows the definition of this study to relationships of people or, more specifically, small groups to specific places. Anthropologists such as Edward T. Hall, Robert Ardrey, and Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox soon picked up the mantle for this new science, applying territory to behavioral attributes such as feelings and attitudes. Schaller quotes a study by Roger C. Brooks that identifies the various factors influencing people’s behavior patterns (87). The behavior setting is the independent variable in Brook’s experiment while the behavior of the people is the dependent variable. His conclusion is that different settings induce different behavioral patterns, and attachment to place increases with age. For example, long-time members of a church go to the same pew on entering a sanctuary while first-time guests look for empty spaces.

At the onset of the merger discussions, both the Black and the White organizations owned properties that were referred to as *campgrounds*. Any discussion of the sale of either of the properties caused great frustration, often stalling all other merger
talks and issues. Leaders decided at one of the earliest meetings to take the selling of either property off the table in the merger talks, and eventually a statement to that effect made its way into the COGVA bylaws.

Most who gathered in the preliminary meetings would describe how they had come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and such descriptions were often linked to a specific physical place at a specific time. Biblically, the great stories of God in the New and Old Testaments were also tied to specific places: Adam in the Garden of Eden, Moses on Mount Sinai, Isaiah in the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus in Bethlehem and on Calvary, and Paul on the road to Damascus.

The importance of place is a defining factor in the process of merger. Place is not only naturally important to people but the importance is amplified with increased familiarity. People’s behavior is often influenced by the physical design of their habitat (Schaller 67). When the proposal to merge the two organizations involved talk about the meeting places, members of both groups felt threatened and naturally opposed any plan of action that might involve the selling of any previously owned properties. Goals of selling off one or both of the properties and reducing statewide expenditures clashed with the attachment to place or territory. The unifying factor of the attachment to a familiar place was compromised when one property was selected over the other for any particular meeting. Not only was the unity within the merged group compromised but the unity within each merged faction began to see signs of division.

Unity Fostered by Human Ethnology

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, first ethnology and later anthropology provided the theory that presupposed the bulk of the observation statements
made about the human action in the prehistoric past that endeared the disunity among these species. In doing so, they provided the examples of practice, standards of proof, and objectives of prehistoric archaeology. Ethnology itself was changed through the discovery of human antiquity as well as the resurgence of interest in physical anthropology that was, in part, caused by fossil human skeletal material (Hering 126).

Human ethnology provided the core aspects of a complex interdisciplinary matrix when fostering unity among the human species. Practitioners simultaneously claimed that they were entirely opposed to the metaphysics parlayed through the rhetoric of positivism and empiricism.

**Mission**

In the life of the church, a passionate concern for mission has led to an enhanced concern for unity. However, when the imperative of unity is taken seriously, it is usually bound up with a commitment to mission. This logic makes sense. When the church stands out from the world in a heightened concern for mission, the differences between the churches sink into the background and what they have in common becomes more prominent (Crow 48).

For nearly a century, mission and unity have been intimately linked in ecumenism. When the modern missionary movement was at its peak, at the turn of the nineteenth century, John R. Mott’s slogan, “The evangelization of the world in this generation,” was just coming into vogue. At the same time, the minds of the Christians involved in mission began to be troubled deeply by the divisions within the church (qtd. in Bodley 79). Christian leaders began to think that, while the churches were competing with one another and sometimes in a state of outright opposition, the credibility of the
gospel was undermined, on the mission field and also at home, and Christ was dishonored.

The Church of God in Virginia has always strategized to provide support and spiritual guidance to the residents of various local churches by ministering to them the Word of God. Any semblance of unity has been achieved through COGVA’s practices, teachings, doctrines, and beliefs, which are entirely based on God’s Holy Bible. The initiative has ensured that some unity exists among the congregations and that articulating it will contribute to the overall prosperity among God’s people.

**Holiness**

Many in the Church of God follow the teachings and experience of the founder of the movement, D. S. Warner, who believed with all of his being that “there could be no possibility of Christian unity and a church conformed to the teaching of the New Testament” without holiness (Strege 13). In practice and in reality, the church doctrines of holiness and Christian unity hold equal commitment within the movement (9).

COGVA is holy in that the church is summoned to a life of fidelity to the holy, triune God. The ordained leaders, such as Neace and Goode, carry specific responsibility to promote the holiness of the church in all aspects of its worship and mission, by pointing to and enabling the church to share in God’s holiness (McGrath). Furthermore, while the holiness of the church must never be entirely dependent on the holiness of its ordained ministers, a responsibility of the ordained to be a wholesome example to others is clear. Therefore, the ordained ministers can be both a means of renewing holiness and a sign of it, which is clearly portrayed by COGVA’s leaders.
Multiculturism

Cultural comparisons are not restricted to contemporary ethnographic data. Indeed, anthropologists frequently turn to the archaeological or historical data to test these hypotheses on the culture change (Cenkner 115). Although most of the anthropologists agree with a perspective of culture as holistic and integrative, they have very different takes on the relative significance of different elements comprising the whole and exactly how they relate to one another. When analyzing the culture, some anthropologists argue that humans act primarily based on their ideas, concepts, or symbolic representations. Anthropologists Dunnavant, Hughes, and Blowers usually emphasize that to understand or explain why humans behave as they do, one must first get into other people’s heads and try to understand how they imagine, feel, think, and speak about the world because of the primacy of the superstructure, idealistic perspective. In layperson’s terms, they suggest that people need to experience the behavior (136).

Major psychological and cognitive behavior that embodies human culture includes ethno-science, structuralism and postmodernism, as well as symbolic and interpretive anthropology. In cultural ecology, anthropologists focus primarily on the subsistence mechanism in a culture that enables a group to adapt to its natural environment (Bender 37). Building on cultural ecology, some anthropologists include considerations of political economy such as industrial production, capitalists markets, wage labor, and finance capital. Political economy perspective is closely associated with Marxist theory, which essentially explains the major change in society of growing conflicts between opposing social classes, namely those who possess property and those who do not (Bromiley 95).
Multiculturalism was conceived in COGVA and was the sure way of enhancing unity among the congregations. With the re-launching of ministering across cultural borders, the theme of diversity became more prominent (Crow 98). In addition, its scope was extended to encompass local, regional, and national cultural identities. The unity of the COGVA’s culture as revealed in history of the national and regional cultural diversity was the keystone for the ambitious delivery of the Word of God without apparent discrimination.

The Church of God in Virginia has strived to ensure that multiculturalism exists in its practices. This practice has been seen through the style of worship, which is not rigid and is relatively emotional and has diversified services that incorporate various cultural differences during worship. The images, symbols, rituals, practices, and artistic expression that are imminent in COGVA reflect the non-dominance of a single culture in its religious cultural expressions. In contrary, the power to define, decide, set, or change the cultural beliefs, norms, and practices in the church settings are placed in the hands of the various leaders. However, achieving the multiculturalism in COGVA has been faced with major challenges. Clearly, the different cultures of COGVA are part of its essential identity and belief system rather than a context that is able to adapt and change.

A cultural understanding conception that William Cenkner notes is the typology classifications of the additive and the contributions approaches to the need for multicultural knowledge in society. To meet the cultural understanding in society, contributions of culturally relevant events and role models should be thematically incorporated into society’s activities. Foster LeCron and Robert A. Rubinstein vividly categorize cultural understanding from the perspective of an undisturbed Eurocentric
monoculturalism as “conservative multiculturalism” (106). Alistair E. McGrath labels the fostering of a sense of sameness rather than cultural differences by cultural understanding “liberal multiculturalism” (128). Cenkner observes that both conservative and liberal commentaries on multiculturalism support cultural understanding if perceived as stabilizing national identity and unity based on a common culture.

Racial Reconciliation

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called in his lifetime “for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, and nation,… an all-embracing and unconditional love” for all people of the world. King continued, “When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life” (190). Racial reconciliation aims at unifying both the cultures and races in society. Although purportedly promoting cultural understanding, racial reconciliation provides significant aspects of different cultural perspectives and how they can be effectively minimized. Furthermore, when differences are presented, they are cast as if unequal power relationships do not exist. Tacitly assumed as normal in today’s culture is the necessity of stable White-dominated social institutions that foster asymmetrical distributions of wealth and power (Colver 79).

When advocates of racial reconciliation truncate James A. Banks’ dimension of prejudice reduction, they imagine that with understanding alone racial discrimination will be eliminated (4-8). For the reason that conception of cultural understanding constructs multicultural education as a means to correct problems of racial differences, assimilation to a dominant cultural ideology is inherent in its approach (Fudge 125). Although cultural
understanding can serve as a fundamental prerequisite for the creation of an equitable society, alone it works primarily to preserve the status quo.

Historically the dual society in Virginia, as in the other southern states, was codified by the Jim Crow laws mandating the separation of Blacks and Whites in most public facilities. In the early twentieth century, COGVA was faced with the division of congregations that would have ultimately led to downsizing of the church. Mirroring the larger society in the South, COGVA members resisted social change (Strege 317). Even the northern churches were divided along racial lines after 1910. Spokespersons on the side of massive resistance defended the tradition of segregation and suggested that both races lived contentedly in a segregated society. Thomas A. Fudge bemoaned the call for desegregation and expressed his fear that “bitter animosities have been engendered in areas where heretofore peace and harmony have characterized racial relations” (79). Presumably, the issue of desegregation would have arisen if the Supreme Court had not ordered it.

A final component in regard to racial transcendence of the resister’s pragmatic arguments is the assertion that White Southerners demonstrated wisdom in their pragmatic acceptance of the differences among the various races. According to Catherine K. R. Larsen, White Virginians knew and appreciated “the gulf that divides the mores of two disparate races” (48). The willingness to accept this fact demonstrated that the South had a distinct history of race relations and that the South could pride itself on its honesty regarding this issue. The resisters contended that their honesty, as represented in their discourse, was something that distinguished them from Americans who were either less honest, less perceptive, or both.
The immutable law was that Blacks and Whites could not come together as equals. The massive resisters used the idea of an immutable racial law to contrast themselves with the Northerners, in general, and as champions for desegregation, in particular. Resisters argued that the South was not morally wrong in enforcing their claims (Haviland et al. 256). The resisters’ reliance on such blatant racial arguments may have signaled a fear that this last stand was more wishful than legitimate.

Even in such hostile environments, the Church of God’s ministerial leaders strived purposefully to ensure that unity among the various races in the congregations was attained. James Marshall summed up the problem concerning the practice of Christian unity:

> The Church of God manifests a glaring contradiction between the practice and the doctrine of Christian unity. Distinctions along the lines of creed, culture, and color continue to divide her membership. Any distinction between members contradicts the concept of Christian unity taught and practiced in the first-century church. (qtd. in Strege 319)

In regard to COGVA, racial reconciliation was aimed at enhancing unity among its members. Clearly the church had waited too long for an exegetical excavation and application of the Bible’s teaching about ethnicity, Christ, the cross, and humanity (RuBlack 144).

**Merger**

While various social issues regarding segregation remained unresolved, complications prevailed. Therefore, a merger was needed in order to necessitate peaceful coexistence and unity among the congregations in COGVA (Curtis 207). Black disciples’ determination to achieve justice, and what that meant for them regarding their peaceful coexistence, leadership, and access to and equal participation in the whole church, was
informed by their conviction to maintain unity within the church at all costs (Burgess and Gros 72).

The overarching goal of the merger agreement was a movement toward racial inclusiveness and unity within the whole church. Most Christians believed the church to be a community that binds all humanity through the sacrificial action of God’s love and grace. The model of COGVA’s unity is built on the common agreement that the church is striving towards a unity that is already given in Jesus Christ as well as the awareness that their interdependence is rooted in the body of Christ, which transcends and permeates the reality of this world. The Church of God is called both in and out of the world to a unifying fellowship in their responsibility for the unity of all humankind, achieved by merging with other churches (Curtis 207). In a world determined by pluralism, COGVA manifests a reconciled diversity that is not indifferent toward others but regards the difference in another tradition as complementary, an aid to understanding more deeply God’s will for the whole of creation.

Identity

COGVA’s cultural identity should not be thought of, then, as higher in some hierarchy of identities, the way many think of national identities as higher than the regional resort (RuBlack 144). While its territorial referent is larger than the region or nation, the Church of God in Virginia’s identity should not be conceived as the outer ring of a series of concentric circles comprising regional, local, national, and overall church’s identities. For instance, in regard to European Union identity, an examination of the rhetoric of its cultural policy demonstrates how the Europeans have created and promoted
various conceptions that enhance European unity and European diversity. Each conception reinforces the other (Sakharov 98).

Some educators believe that the rhetoric of unity must remain before the general population at all times. Such talk must be before people in the morning, afternoon, evenings, and, indeed, at all times for it to be effective. Although I agree with such a theory, I am most aligned with Samuel George Hines and Curtis Paul DeYoung who believe that one must move beyond rhetoric to practice. Referring to Paul in his book to the church at Ephesus, when he was preaching about being worthy of calling, Hines and DeYoung state that unity is manifested when a person “demonstrates a willingness to make specific commitments” (51). According to Victor Ikpatt, unity-in-diversity is rhetoric or an effort to post the church’s cohesion where it does not exist. Support from cultural exchanges and the promotion of the visible societal symbols has aimed to foster a sense of cultural unity, while support of regional and local cultures has aimed to sustain an awareness of cultural diversity (28).

**Christian Ethics**

Communities are by their nature dynamic, even the most moribund Christian communities change over time (Cunningham and Cunningham 68). As change is ongoing, nothing static or deterministic about stressing the communal nature of morality in this changing world can be perceived (Haviland et al. 58). Once this sociological step is taken, the moral function of churches becomes evident. Of course, churches are not the only moral communities in society. A long line of French functionalism, including Comte, Voltaire, Durkheim, and Sartre, holds, in effect, that the religious phenomenon in some ways is vital to the stability of society, while at the same time remaining highly
skeptical of the theological claims of religion. In reality the modern world abounds with the moral communities that owe little to religion, from delinquent gangs to the strong communities fostered by wars (Kohn 68).

According to Agnes Brazal and Andrea Lizares religious institutions in advanced capitalist societies may foster not some overall moral unity, as depicted by the communal view, but on highly diverse moral perspectives, ranging from conservative to the most radical ones (56). The moral force of the recent radical Islam in a context of acquiescent forms of Christianity should be sufficient to convince the world of the extremism encountered today in society. In the case where the religious communities differ from their secular counterparts, morality is not seen in communities’ ability to generate and nurture specific values but in their grounding in worship. They are thus communities—Jewish, Islamic, or Christian—responding in worship to one another, not communities manufacturing and then maintaining values.

From a theological perspective, moral values are not the reason for being of Christianity. As such, they might be Christianity’s most visible connection with Western society. They do not in themselves constitute the kingdom of God. Theologically, worship is far more central. However, in the new climate, in so far as it really does exist, the possibility remains that Christian ethicists could become somewhat more courageous (Roembke 78). If communities really are essential to ethics, then churches have been in the business of fostering communities for a long time. The possibility exists that worship offers a firmer foundation for communities than anything else. Becoming ethical cannot be offered as the reason for worshiping, but it might be a sufficient reason for treating communities with a new moral seriousness even in apparently secular worlds.
Theoretically Christians affirm that only one body of Christ exists although they often live as though the wall of hostility that divides the church culturally is still standing (Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett 75). One issue that is deeply disturbing to many people is the use of hyphenated words to describe an individual’s ethnicity: African-American, Hispanic-American, and Native-American. Use of such terms gives voice to those in society who attempt to segment churches on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, or gender (94). Without authentic dialogue and the formation of mutual relationships the church will forever be lacking in unity.

**Research Design**

The descriptive research design used historical analysis. Historical analysis is an effective way of obtaining information when devising a hypothesis and proposing for the social well-being in society—unity. Because no testing or verification exists, historical analysis cordially fits to the research undertaken. Descriptive research design aims at illustrating the relevant but non-quantifiable topics in social sciences. A trial or pilot study is essential in improving the quality of the study design and methodology. Testing instruments and making adjustments before instigating the major study enhances the probability that data collection is efficient and successful. All data collections should be justified. Data and experience gained from the pilot study can make or break support and funding for this project (Poggemeyer 87).

This qualitative study investigated the racial unification of the Church of God in Virginia. This study utilized the grounded theory approach and constant comparative analysis while triangulating the data obtained from the personal interviews, documentation analysis, and participant observation. The primary sources for this data
were the general experience of the trend of unity in the church and overall society. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to probe inadvertently for a detailed explanation on the racial unification in the church. The data analysis was completed in order to determine the main themes for prevalence of unity in the church, setting both in biblical precedence and theological precedence. The results included unity’s inherent importance towards society as the consolidating factor and subsequent realization of harmony and peaceful coexistence. The recommendations for the study help in providing a framework of how to achieve unity in current society.

The critical model established by Gudykunst and Kim was selected as a means of encoding and decoding the communication messages established in the semi-structured interviews. Through this model, the interactive process of using conceptual filters categorized the messages into cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental themes. These filters delimited the number of alternatives from which a decoder can choose to interpret the messages of the interviews (44).

**Summary**

Current society is faced with great upheaval in terms of its spiritual stand; the Church of God in Virginia is no exception. The designation of the church as the body of Christ does not intend to qualify its mutual unity and diversity but to denote its unity in and with Christ. This unity of the church with Christ thus qualified is grounded neither in the spiritual indwelling of Christ in the church nor in the thought that the Spirit constitutes the communion between Christ and the church, but in the church belonging to Christ in the redemptive-historical sense. In virtue of this common belonging to and
inclusion of *the many* in Christ, individual believers are qualified as members of the church as Christ’s body.

As such, the church should be identified with the historical and glorified body of Christ. Insofar as the church as a body is related to the communion with the blood and body of Christ exercised in the Lord’s supper, this identity rests on its common share in the sacrifice made for it by Christ and in no way on such a communion with the historical and glorified body of Christ. The qualification of the church as the body of Christ, therefore, clearly has a figurative, metaphorical significance, however real and literal the unity and communion with Christ is expressed.

In addition, the Church in being appropriated by Christ and included in Christ, is not restricted to the redemptive-historical aspect but also works itself out sacramentally and pneumatically, so the believers’ incorporation into and belonging to the body of Christ is represented by baptism and the Lord’s supper. The Church can only reveal itself as the one body of Christ in virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit given by him to his body.

Ideally, both theological and biblical precedence provide a clear outline of the importance and diversification of unity among the people of God. When individuals rely on Scripture for their daily undertakings, they can passionately realize peaceful coexistence and harmony in society. Human ethnology, mergers, and mission work have also been seen to enhance the unity in the church, particularly among Virginia’s brothers and sisters of Christ. Clearly racial discrimination has been, over the years, the major cause of disunity in the church setting and society as a whole. Mitigating racism by enhancing racial reconciliation will be a superb example for realization of unity in the church.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this research was to provide a template for the Church of God Movement (Anderson) to use in other states by exploring the process that occurred in the unification of the Black and White organizations within the Churches of God in Virginia from the inception of the idea in the mid-1990s through 2011.

The study of the integration of the Black and White Churches of God in Virginia was undertaken under the spotlight that such understanding of the unification process would be applicable elsewhere. The analysis of literature duly gathered from managerial documents that were in the possession of various leaders and semi-structured interviews yielded sufficient information on the mechanisms that were employed to foster unity and racial reconciliation among the communities in Virginia.

Segregation occurs at all levels within society and cannot be totally eliminated on all fronts. Even among very cohesive groupings such as the Church universal, a given degree of segregation often persists, which has the tendency to hinder the process of peace and progress. The issue of interracial marriage is evidence of the yet existing divisiveness within the church. Moreover, various approaches through which the study was oriented took strict cognizance of the fact that social dynamics are often characterized by racial segregation. In like manner, the transferability of the findings could equally be applicable in the other regions of the church as a principal objective. The suitability of the methods of the study thus finds justification of a higher degree since it yields accounts of the mechanisms for toning down segregate progression.
In assessing the nature of segregation, historical causes of segregation, and environmental aspects that tended to sustain or foster it, the aforementioned mechanisms of disunity could only be explored through the analysis of sentiments from both sides of the racial divide. Moreover, studying the implication of the leadership processes on segregation informed the inquiry with more valid clues about the nature of such events on institutional predicaments that fostered segregation.

This study explored cultural aspects of the social and historical dynamics within the church that underplay religiosity while also entrenching notions of segregation or unification of factions. Scriptural foundations for the religiosity that name genealogies as a vital element of identity and of religious posturing were followed as well.

Virginia was one of the first states to conduct church unification successfully within the Church of God movement. A number of states have previously embarked on the mission, mostly failing to realize their objectives. As of this writing, the state of Mississippi had voted to begin the process of unification of the Black and White organizations with their state.

**Research Questions and/or Hypotheses**

The research questions lay the foundations for exploratory study and analysis. The nature of elements and practices with the church that could have inspired or churned the process of unification form the main purpose of research. This section presents the specific research questions in relation to what they are formulated to address, the specific instruments used in collecting data for the respective questions, as well as questions and portions of each instrument that respond to the specific research questions.
Research Question #1

What were the elements (e.g., steps, decisions) involved in the process of unification as it occurred?

This research question explored the specific steps that were followed in preparation for the unification process as well as the procedures observed during the actual process of unification. As such, the question explored key issues of the unification process through the examination of the effectiveness of the steps as well as their limitations. This research question also examined the role played by each of the participants in the implementation of the project. The answers to this question provided information about the preparation and intentionality or lack thereof of the leaders at the onset and throughout the phenomenon of church unification.

The instruments used in this research question were the semi-structured interview, personal observation, and reports from various managerial documents made available to the study. The primary question was broken down into six sub-questions that served as the framework for the interview, knowing full well that the questions were open-ended and the path of questioning could change dramatically with the discovery of a new line of thinking.

All interviews began with the most general and open-ended question of all: What is unity in the body of Christ?

1. What do you believe the Bible teaches about unity in the body of Christ? The purpose of this question and the next was to determine the level of awareness of the interviewees concerning the biblical principles of church unity.
2. How would you interpret this teaching in terms of unity of Spirit and institutional or organizational unity?

3. What should the end product have looked like?

4. What happened during the process?

5. What was your role in the process?

**Research Question #2**

What has been the impact of the unification process?

This research question explored the outcomes of the unification process. The question was used in examining the outcomes of every phase of the preparation and implementation process. Ultimately, the results of each phase were used to examine the overall outcome of the unification process. These results included identification of success indicators after the completion of the process of officially joining the two organizations on 11 September 2004.

Again, the instruments used to answer this research question were the semi-structured interview, personal observation, and reports from various managerial documents, such as handwritten notes or minutes, made available to the study. The primary question was divided into three sub-questions:

1. What has been the effect of the unification process on the church community?

2. What has happened since the official unification that you have been involved in, that you have noticed?

3. What larger ramifications, if any, exist from the unification event?

**Research Question #3**

What limitations were identified during and after the implementation process?
This research question examined the gaps or limitations that were experienced during the preparation, implementation, and completion of the unification process. Results of these limitations on the ongoing unity were also identified. These gaps will be instrumental in identifying possible different approaches that may be more effective in other contexts.

Once more the instruments used to answer this research question were the semi-structured interview, personal observation, and reports from various managerial documents mentioned earlier and made available to the study. The primary question was divided into three sub-questions:

1. What internal or external factors threaten unity in the body of Christ?
2. Do you believe these factors can be overcome? If not, why?
3. What practices in COGVA contribute to unity? Which contribute to disunity?

**Research Question #4**

What were the recommendations for how the process might be improved, and how should the results be used?

Based on the findings of research question 3, this question examined the manner in which the limitations may be addressed. Recommendations by the study participants were also integrated, considering their direct involvement with the project. Such recommendations might be instrumental in informing other similar projects conducted in different states.

Finally, the instruments used in this research question were the semi-structured interview, personal observation, and reports from various managerial documents.
mentioned earlier and made available to the study. The primary question was divided into four sub-questions:

1. What would you do differently?
2. How can the practices of COGVA be improved?
3. How should the leadership of COGVA respond to the factors that threaten unity?
4. To whom should I talk to find out more about the events?

**Population and Participants**

The participants in the study were selected by predetermined criteria (see Table 3.1) and by seeking out individuals who might meet such criteria. This purposive type of sampling was used because it was appropriate to this study while random sampling would be neither appropriate nor feasible. The goal was to have a purposive sample of clergy and church leaders with the number of participants determined based on the response to individual requests. Every recommended pastor in COGVA who fit the criteria was asked to participate in a confidential, semi-structured interview.

The participants in the study of the mechanisms of segregation among the churches entail a vast array of categorized respondents. Some individuals were selected on the basis of their participation regarding the movements of integration within Virginia. Other categories that comprised individual leaders in other locations but who were instrumental either directly or indirectly regarding the agenda of integration were chosen.

Criteria for selection of the respondents were based on the standard set for the desirable varieties needed. On this basis, pastors and church committee officials were interviewed on various categories of topics relevant to their attention. The classification
of respondents yielded the possibility of subjecting different segments of the respondents to different questions. The quality of responses from the interviews was thus comparable and determinate on the basis that both racial cocoons had respondents structured to the levels of diversity that was apparent to each.

Table 3.1. Criteria for Selecting Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Were in the state before and after the official unification event in 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Were part of the transition or leadership team so as to have inside insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Were representative of both Black and White groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Were recommended by current leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Were agreeable to participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were selected through a guided sampling process to ensure consistency on the basis of expected temperaments and elitist perspectives needed to understand unification holistically. The research questions were used in categorizing respondents into groups so that each group represented a given category designated to yield findings pertaining to some sections of the research. This way the quality of response and respondents was controllable. The aspects of gender, age, and race as well as clergy and laity designation were used in yielding the subclasses to the historic and entire set of notions that would give valuable clues when addressed properly.

Design of the Study

The design of the study used qualitative approaches and methodologies particularly at the data analysis stage. Gathering information about the theological foundations as well as institutional arrangements giving rise to the organizational change
entails a very intricate search for correlations. Establishing the nature of the relationship between the change process and mechanisms implementing the changes was the principal quest of this study. Qualitative research aims to gather in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. This study was focused on the why and how of the decision-making process, not just the what, where, and when. Therefore, smaller more focused samples were used for research.

Theological bases thus attained through a historically mediated progression can yield explanation as to the mode of transaction that resulted in unification of the churches despite the heights of disagreements and disunity that raged previously.

Historical research attempts to gain knowledge about an issue, an event, or the like by looking at the past rather than the present or future. By collecting historical data and performing a detailed analysis of that data, I determined cause-and-effect relationships that present-day church leaders, both laity and clergy, can use to accomplish unification successfully as well as to help prevent people who might use this research from making the same mistakes that were made in the past. The paradigm for historical analysis demanded that I analyze the background leading up to the unification event, trace them from one historical episode to another, offer a chronological sequence, and cite primary authorities who had firsthand knowledge of the event. Finally, the consequences of an event were discovered and analyzed on how they altered the course of history.

I recognized that certain aspects of leadership practices that spurned the division were pertinent to the study. Nonetheless, the design of the research would not base substantial inquiry on those practices due to the case of ethical validity. Without careful
questioning, an intense exploration of the elements of discord through interviews would
provoke fresh animosity rather than preserve the delicate truce that existed at the time this
study was undertaken.

The discrepancy between believing to belong and actual belonging of social
groups to a general religious entity such as the Church of God of Virginia with the
backdrop of racial divisions naturally intensify divisions since religions are not purely
and absolutely conciliatory entities. The use of semi-structured interviews is most
appropriate in establishing the nature and extent of social tensions and how the church in
particular mediated or yielded solutions. The semi-structured interviews have the
advantage in that they allow the interviewer to extend the breadth of inquiry rather than
be restricted by preset questions. This expansion of the questioning is a sure way to
explore all the indeterminate facts from diverse individuals with the profit that such
documentation can be treated to diverse forms of analyses by the researcher through a
variety of fluid hypothetical explorations. The main aspect of scrutiny in this study
concerned the nature of the respondents’ experiential encounters regarding the degree of
segregation within the church and mechanisms that gradually brought about integration.
The main business of the church being that of dispensing spiritual enrichment through
ministry is here also encountered as extending or perpetuating discord. Nonetheless, the
theology of unity and ministry for the redemption of humanity from the bondage of sin,
which brings about the discord, could be appropriately highlighted in the study through
suitably orchestrated inquiry. Part of the inquiry, therefore, established the contribution of
the biblical discourses that had previously sustained the racial discord.
A comparative analysis was done between the results of the structured interviews and the theological explanations of such actions or dispositions exclusively grounded in Scripture. The critical model established by Gudykunst and Kim was selected as a means of encoding and decoding the communication messages established in the semi-structured interviews. Through this model, the interactive process of using conceptual filters categorized the messages into cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental themes. These filters delimited the number of alternatives from which to choose in interpreting the messages of the interviews (44).

**Instrumentation**

In order to respond to the goal of this research, only one main instrument was required. The instrumentation of this study was a semi-structured interview protocol entitled Church of God Research Interview. The COGRI questions are included with the research questions and in Appendix C. The interviews took place January through March 2012.

A demographic instrument (see Appendix B), personal observation, and various records such as the minutes of some meetings and handwritten notes were used for verification purposes.

The literature review highlighted several essential components that had influence on church unification. Such themes as ethology, ethnology, unity, mission, multiculturalism, racial reconciliation, merger, identity, and ethics were explored, and the interview instrument was designed to address those issues.
Pilot Test or Expert Review

In exploring the instance of unification among the White and Black church organizations under the umbrella institution of the Church of God of Virginia, the recognition that the church as an institution operates within a wider political and economic system with critical latent forces that dynamically organize society becomes vital. For instance, racial segregation was a main political agenda for the people of Virginia for decades and had witnessed a decline of related sentimentalism since the late 1960s. Again, fundamental religiosity in the postmodern era witnessed a steady decline due to the progress of knowledge and enlightenment. Moreover, the church and politics are inseparable in their broader functions to organize society. In addition, governments and the institutions of the church almost similarly perform the same functions of social and moral control.

An exploratory study was conducted to establish the working modalities before the actual onset of interviews. This type of study served the functions of identifying the practical challenges, the measures to observe in preserving ethical limits, the encounters with the people to establish a general realization of the nature of the respondents experiences, and their underlying emotive characteristics vital for the control of interview progression.

The real essence of the pilot test was to gather information about the various respondents’ emotive dispositions that would hamper the accuracy of the research. The actual interview questions were tested for their objectivity before the respondents. A pilot test of four volunteers was conducted in an effort to establish accurate research questions.
The four pilot participants were representative of the eventual interviewees who were selected. This pilot interview contributed to the validity of the research sub-questions.

The principal hypothesis of the study is related to the elements of church operations and mechanisms that resulted or promoted unification between the Black and White Churches of God in Virginia (see Table 3.2). In qualitative studies of this nature, the results and data analysis mechanisms alone yield by retrospect the underlying causations of the observed conclusions.

Table 3.2. Hypothetical Outlook of the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$H_{01}$</td>
<td>The church operations, initiatives, and activities influenced the unification of the Black and White Churches of God of Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{00}$</td>
<td>The null hypothesis of the study states that church operations would not have yielded the unification of the Church of God of Virginia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of this hypothetical platform, the various elements of church operations, policies, official communication, and leadership incidences were evaluated to seek to establish any clues regarding the fact that the churches attained unification. Taken into consideration were items that were under control (though loosely) such as the number of responses and the honesty and thoroughness of the responses, gender, level of pastoral experience, emotional intelligence, age, culture, and the general social distance among the cultural groups.

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability of research findings is closely related to the appropriateness of methodology and correctness of data analysis procedure. Semi-structured questions have
the advantage of allowing the researcher the breadth to mold the questions as appropriate to the emotions and intonation of the respondents. Moreover, the interviewees can be led to give more exhaustive responses in terms of explanations and depth of analysis. The cumulative effect is that very accurate information can be obtained, thus improving on the degree of accuracy and hence reliability.

The responsibility and obligation to set the appropriate questions and probe extensively in line with the objectives and research questions nonetheless lie with the interviewer. Two aspects of research validity regarding the methods used to arrive at the findings are internal validity and external validity. With reference to qualitative research as detailed in this study, validity of the findings was established through a mechanism of triangulation, member checking, and an external audit.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was accomplished exclusively through the semi-structured interviews. Occasionally references were made to observations, registry documents, and managerial reports of the church, including memos and private communication between leaders or among the various committees of COGVA. This method of collection purposefully allowed me to retain the dichotomy of the sampled participants and minimize gentrification which reduced the efficiency of the data collection schedule. I collected the data over a two-month period from April until May 2012. The interviews took place in or near the interviewees’ hometown or church. The interviews were by appointment with possible follow-ups for validation. Data collection came in the form of recorded interviews (COGRI) that I later transcribed. I made additional efforts to locate documents and records that might shed light on the unification process. Levels of
permission were required to gain access to the participants. The state of Virginia’s Executive Committee and Executive Board had to approve this study. The study fully recognized the administrative and ethical considerations involved in collecting qualitative data.

**Interviews**

The semi-structured interviews facilitated a systematic way of talking and listening to the perspectives of the study participants. I relied on open-ended questions to provide a structure to the interviewing process. The interviews therefore enabled the involvement of the participants in the study through the presentation of their perspectives regarding the unification process and its overall outcomes. By presenting their perspectives, I was able to capture their interpretation regarding the process and, ultimately, identify emerging themes within the responses.

Data collection began with preparation prior to the scheduled days of the interviews. I started the process by identifying suitable topics and questions for the interviews. A sample of the interview questions is provided in Appendix C. The following are the key steps undertaken in preparation for the interviews:

1. Identification of suitable topics and interview questions,
2. Establishment of the level or depth of details required from each respondent in order to answer specific issues raised by the research questions in a comprehensive manner,
3. Creation of the questions,
4. Final decision on question order to ensure that they flowed in a logical and natural manner,
5. List of prompts and probes, and
6. Pilot test of the questions.

Conducting the Interviews

After the first phase had been completed, I followed these steps prior to conducting the actual interviews:

1. Contacting the respondents—I contacted identified respondents in advance in order to explain the goals and objectives of the interview;
2. Obtaining permission—I asked possible respondents whether they were willing to participate in the study;
3. Scheduling—I obtained an appointment and location for conducting the interview;
4. Gathering equipment—I obtained voice recording equipment, as well as pens and notebooks to note key points during the interview process; and,
5. Obtaining confirmation—I initiated a second contact to confirm the availability, date, and location of the interview.

Initiating the Interview

The interviews began by introducing myself to the respondents. The respondents were once again briefed on the goals and objectives of the interview, estimated duration of the interview, as well as an overview of the topics that would be discussed during the interview. The respondents were also informed that they would be interviewed as a representative of a particular group within the Church of God in Virginia. As such, the respondents may represent a congregation, leadership, administration, and more. Since the interview would be recorded electronically, a verbal consent from the respondents
was necessary with an assurance that their responses would be handled with utmost confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

I interviewed various personalities on their individual opinions about the need for cohesion and progress to eliminate the racial divide among the churches. The evolution of theological philosophies has contributed significantly to the systems and nature of church organizations over time. Therefore, in late twentieth century Virginia, humanism expressed in theology embodied a more conciliatory and rationalistic orientation than the traditionally spiritualistic trends. On a much wider front, society in Virginia had previously and historically witnessed a rather protracted encounter of the conversation in politics and religion about the topic of segregation.

Semi-structured interviews often yield erratic responses that demand considerable attention and logical approaches so that proper coding can be effected. Depending on the system of codes used for analysis, degrees of accuracy are highly dependent on the analytical competency of the researchers. Nevertheless, raw responses from the interview sessions could offer rich findings about the research agendas. Moreover, appropriate data analysis is the hallmark of social or religious research.

In order for the coding to be specific and not too broad, Gudykunst and Kim’s model of culture was used in analyzing and objectifying the cross-cultural communication gleaned from the interviews. Once appropriate coding is performed, classifying all the research questions appropriately and relating them with specific objectives set out in the research questions, the various groups and subgroups of the sample community as tailored to the coded categories of response questions were then
treated to comparative analyses to establish the primary numerical data for more concrete analyses.

In this qualitative study, data analysis was established by protocol. Because the instrument was a semi-structured interview, as expected themes evolved out of that interview. Analysis was initiated by organizing the data according to patterns, themes, and categories, each of which could be validated. In an effort to find theories grounded in data, I made use of the techniques and procedures for developing *grounded theory* to identify, retrieve, and collate concepts and themes used during the data collection (Strauss and Corbin 1-295).

I developed a table that summarized the themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews with a possibility of returning to a focus group to see if the themes accurately identified their experiences. A database was developed and coded to get a general sense of the data collected by examining what the participants discussed most frequently, what they said that was unique or surprising, and other themes that one expected to find doing such research. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of this study.

**Ethical Procedures**

The methods of inquiry into the mechanisms of integration within the Church of God in Virginia throughout the study were related to the attainment of unbiased opinions from church leaders and influential participants. Intercessory theology is a hallmark of ministry in the Church of God in Virginia. Statewide organizations often have outreach programs that worked well to lay foundations for confidence and trust to flourish between the once conflicting factions. Interview and structured questionnaires are a fast and
efficient means of gathering information about management obligations and incidences within the church.

Semi-structured interviews have the possibility of initiating emotive dispositions both from the respondents and the interviewers. This initiating of dispositions has been observed particularly when the subjects of the interview are those who are related to painful experiences and encounters. During the interview, I was intentional about refraining from interjecting any personal remarks and spoke only to rephrase or ask the next question. Moreover, governments often favor policies that take religions out of public debate by silencing them over politically emotive agendas. Religion’s silence and inaction about social concerns is a desirable status for governments. In America, the popular saying of *one nation under God* has an ideistically impractical bearing on the many fault lines existing among various social groupings.

The study analyzed the systems of pastoral care and practices within the church and their impacts. This method is in tune with conventional practice that ethnographic analyses are carried out transparently and with the consent of the respondents. In this study, all the respondents were served with letters requesting their participation (see Appendix D). Also included was an informed consent regarding the observance and taping of ministers during the interviews. The expressed permission of the COGVA leaders was sought and attained in writing and confirmed through a mentoring group (see Appendix E).

All the interviewees were made aware of the purpose of the study. In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, I followed a protocol of not identifying them by name. All participants in the interviews gave their verbal consent to being interviewed
and assisted me in the scheduling of the interviews. At the beginning of the interviews I read aloud the introductory protocol (see Appendix C) on the interview questionnaire, again requesting permission to tape the interview, pausing to answer questions, and soliciting permission to proceed. These verbal permissions were taped along with the entire interview. The participants were informed that the tapes would be destroyed within four to six weeks after the interview, that only data collected within the context of the interview would be used, and that I would share with them the final results if desired.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

For the last twenty years I have been associated with the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), a church that teaches that unity is at the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 2004, this church movement took a strong, ethical position in Virginia to end ecclesial divisiveness along the lines of racial ethnicity and color. Having been separated since sometime during the mid-1910s, the African-American contingent of the movement came under the same ecclesial umbrella within the state of Virginia.

The purpose of this research was to provide a template for the Church of God Movement (Anderson) to use in other states by exploring the process that occurred in the unification of the Black and White organizations within the Churches of God in Virginia from the inception of the idea in the mid-1990s through 2012. I explored the dynamics of the unification of the Black and White church groups in Virginia in hope that other states that are not yet united culturally might use their experiences as a model to guide their own cultural reconciliation.

Four research questions guided this study: (1) What were the elements (e.g., steps, decisions) involved in the process of unification as it occurred? (2) What has been the impact of the unification process? (3) What limitations were identified during and after the implementation process? (4) What were the recommendations for how the process might be improved, and how should the results be used?
Profile of Participants

The participants in the study were selected by predetermined criteria and by seeking out individuals who might meet such criteria. The goal was to have a purposive sample of clergy and church leaders with the number of participants determined based on the response to individual requests. Every recommended pastor in COGVA who fit the criteria was asked to participate in a confidential, semi-structured interview.

The participants in the study of the mechanisms of segregation among the churches entail a vast array of categorized respondents. Some individuals were selected on the basis of their participation regarding the movements of integration within Virginia. Other categories that comprised individual leaders in other locations but who were instrumental either directly or indirectly regarding the agenda of integration were chosen.

Criteria for selection of the participants were based on the standard set for the desirable varieties needed. The criteria chose those persons who

1. Were in the state before and after the official unification event in 2004,
2. Were part of the transition or leadership teams so as to have inside insight,
3. Were representative of both Black and White groups,
4. Were recommended by current leadership, and
5. Were agreeable to participation.

Table 4.1 shows the outcome of the selection process based on gender, ethnicity, and location.
Table 4.1. Chart of Participants and Demographics

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</table>

Gender: M (Male) F (Female); Ethnicity: Y (Black) X (White); Location: E (East) C (Central) W (West)

General Findings

By the beginning of the twentieth century first-generation leaders such as Warner had died and the Church of God’s commitment to racial inclusiveness was beginning to waiver closer to that of the national scene. In the early 1900s, “racism reared its ugly head and extinguished the flames of unity” (DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim 43). A major racial divide in the CHOG occurred at the national convention in June 1912 when “[a]n informal group of White leaders encouraged African-American leaders to establish their own national event” (55).

Over the next few years the divide widened by the suggestion that Blacks have a separate service at the annual CHOG camp meeting. Surrounded by events and societal phenomenon such as the Jim Crow laws that influenced national leaders and shaped the religious community into one segregated by race, the power of the gospel became severely weakened and the church’s witness to the world suffered. Since that time many
GHOG congregations are segregated by race and, more importantly, “nationally its leaders collaborate from the context of segregated organizations” (55).

To obtain a view of the situation better, Figure 4.1 presents the chronology of the division and the re-unification of the church in Virginia as gathered from the interviewees and various other sources, such as observation and the few written accounts that exist.

---

**Figure 4.1. Virginia unification timeline.**
In this study a comparative analysis was created using qualitative software, *Atlas.ti*. In typical fashion with qualitative research, data collection and analysis happened simultaneously. To assist me in developing my grounded theory codes, I referred to the book *Basics of Qualitative Research; Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. Data collection was done using semi-structured interviews.

First, I transcribed all of the recorded interviews into Microsoft Word documents. Next I created a *hermeneutic unit*—“an electronic container which will collect and organize all your data, codes, memos, and diagrams belonging to your analysis under one and the same label” (Strauss and Corbin 277). Then I imported all of the transcribed interviews into the *ATLAS.ti hermeneutic unit* as primary documents.

After importing the transcribed documents, I used *auto coding* to help search for key words in each document. *Auto coding* finds text with key words and assigns that text with a previously selected code or theme. *Auto coding* also assisted me in creating code names to use with *open coding*. From there, I decided on twenty code names and four code families to add to the code manager. *Open coding* assigns a previously created code to a passage of text that you choose to code. With *open coding*, the researcher picks out the main subject of the interviewees’ responses, gives it a name and that name becomes the code. Strauss and Corbin write about how the coding breaks down into similar parts:

> Broadly speaking, during open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed “categories.” (102)

For instance, both geography and property were listed under the *environmental* category. These open codes were then narrowed down to a more manageable number of code
families that were established from the *Atlas.ti* software, and these codes were viewed through the conceptual filters of Gudykunst and Kim—cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental:

Given our view of communication, we see encoding and decoding of communication messages to be an interactive process influenced by conceptual filters, which we categorize into cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental factors. (44)

These filters delimit what stimuli the researcher pays attention to and influences their interpretation of the messages transcribed.

Cultural influences focus on the dimensions “on which cultures differ”; sociocultural influences stem from “our membership in social groups and our social identities”; psychocultural influences “involve our expectations for strangers based on stereotypes and the intergroup attitudes we hold, particularly ethnocentrism and prejudice”; and environmental influences “consist of the physical environment, geography” (51).

When the coding was complete, I carefully read each interview again and wrote memos for quotes that seemed to be the main focus in each interview. When writing memos, I read each passage and asked myself, “What is the interviewee saying in this text?” I wrote down these thoughts in my own words. When the coding and memos were complete, I created a primary documents table (see Table 4.2), using twenty codes and the nine primary documents. The primary document table contains the repetitiveness of codes throughout all of the documents. I then created a codes co-occurrence table (see Table 4.3) using all twenty codes. The codes co-occurrence table shows the co-occurrence of all codes among all of the nine documents. Next I placed the code families at the top of Table 4.4 and did a co-occurrence chart to find the prominent codes as viewed through the lenses that most influenced the communication interpretations.
### Table 4.2. Primary Documents Table

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<th>Theme</th>
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<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
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</table>

P1-P9 are primary documents 1 through 9.
The left column represents the themes or categories that the program singled out.

Since most of the categories listed in the left hand column represent challenges, the fact that leadership outnumbers them all is significant. The number in each column/row represents the occurrence of the particular theme numerically, suggesting that the higher the number, the higher the importance.
Procedurally, table 4.3 makes association between the various themes discovered in *Atlas.ti* and such association informs the study. For instance, the association between *sociocultural* and *communication* is of great significance because the number of co-occurrences has the highest (thus the most important) number.

**Table 4.3. Codes Co-Occurrence Table**

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Table 4.4 is significant in that it shows the occurrence of the themes discovered in the *Atlas.ti* software as viewed through the communication lenses suggested by Gudykunst and Kim. The totals from the environmental issue were the most important and required more discussion than the others. Property and geography were the most referenced themes in each case.

**Table 4.4. Code Families Co-Occurrence Table**

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Code Families across the top
Code Themes down the side
**Research Question #1**

What were the elements (e.g., steps, decisions) involved in the process of unification as it occurred?

This research question explored the specific steps that were followed in preparation for the unification process as well as the procedures observed during the actual process of unification. As such, the question explored key issues of the unification process through the examination of the effectiveness of the steps as well as their limitations. This research question also examined the role played by each of the participants in the implementation of the project. The answers to this question provided information about the preparation and intentionality or lack thereof of the leaders at the onset and throughout the phenomenon of church unification.

**Cultural**

The first step in the unification process was to put together a credentialing committee that would unite the two groups, the Black group and the White group, into one. When asked about her role in the process, FYE8, who served as convener, was concerned with maintaining cultural identity:

And it took quite some time, then meetings looking at each, the association and the assembly by-laws. Seeing what were the basic differences, the non-differences, where we may have addressed issues that may not have been addressed in the other. In other words it was how we could pull all that together and still not take away the heritage of either organization.

Each culture was cognizant of the importance of retaining its heritage while wading through the maze of issues that had to be addressed. In addition, making sure both groups were able to keep their properties was part of the unification process. Property means something different culturally to the Black group than it does to the White group. The
Black group believes that property is tied to their heritage, and if they lose it, they are losing a portion of their heritage, also. Great strides were taken to keep the Black group from losing any of their properties.

**Sociocultural**

The establishment of a unified credentialing committee and making sure both groups had strong leaders was the beginning of the unification process. Among Black leaders, one interviewee pointed out, the question of education arose. The educational qualifications were adjusted to a more simplified degree equivalency requirement.

**Psychocultural**

Another hurdle in the unification process was the lack of trust between the two groups. To be able to have unity, the Black group needed to trust the White group and their leaders and vice versa:

> It would have to be by vote. But I think that one thing that would happen is a lot of times when things are dissolved and you can’t see that where things are going, it leaves a lot of mistrust and suspicion, you know, because who is going to be left without who, if you’re talking about majority this is one of the issues too, you talk about majority. Then we [Black folks] don’t have a majority, you know, but we know that we put such here or there. How is that going to be resolved? (FYE8)

Only after the issue of trust was resolved could the unification process continue.

**Environmental**

One step in getting through the unification process was getting over the hurdle of geography. Almost all the Black churches are on the eastern shore, Richmond and Norfolk, two in the central part of the state, and none in the southwest. Most people have difficulty traveling from one side of Virginia to the other for camp meetings or other gatherings:
I will tell you this because I’m of the theory that because of that geography it has nothing to do with us loving or hating people. It’s just too far for me to drive to Norfolk five and a half hours, or for them to come to me. (MYE9)

The importance of geography cannot be minimized nor can it be trivialized into notions of loving or hating people. To drive across this vast state would require a day’s vacation from work.

Another step in the unification process was how to handle the property. Questions arose about what do to do with the property:

And that’s an issue that’s always prevalent in all states where this has come about, particularly when both groups have property. Do you sell one and keep the other? If you do that, you’re in trouble. Do you keep them both? Sometimes that can be a financial burden on you. Do you sell them both, where there are people on both sides, traditionally, culturally? Their life’s blood is in that campground. (MYC6)

Even though a number of actions could have been taken, no logical solution to the disposal of property was satisfactory to all involved. Trust seemed to be a major barrier here.

Table 4.5 shows the number and percentage of references to each conceptual filter during the interviews. Clearly cultural identity and the social aspects of the two groups working together are prominent.

Table 4.5. Number and Percentage of References to Filters in Interviews (N=1116)

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<tr>
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<td>Physical environment</td>
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</table>
Table 4.5 suggests that cultural issues were the primary concern for the interviewees with sociocultural issues a close second. It also reflects a bias that these interviews were done approximately eight years after the unification event and some psychological adjustment had been made.

**Research Question #2**

What has been the impact of the unification process?

This research question explored the outcomes of the unification process. The question was used in examining the outcomes of every phase of the preparation and implementation process. Ultimately, the results of each phase were used to examine the overall outcome of the unification process. These results included identification of success indicators after the completion of the process of officially joining the two organizations on 11 September 2004.

**Cultural**

The state is seeing more and more multiracial congregations, and people are becoming more accepting of other races and cultures in their churches. The state achieved organizational unity as explained by MXW3 in his interview:

The first organizational unity between the Blacks and Whites of Virginia came as the structure of the credentials committee, bringing one credentials committee that would deal with all the pastors in the state of Virginia: from that, strong relationships were built among the credentials committee members, and using that as the template, we thought the next step is to bring all the ministers together, under a structure of the Minister’s Fellowship, and then to bring the churches together under a structure of one organizational unity. I think we accomplished that.
A logical sequence of steps was taken beginning with the unification of the credentialing committee, followed by the joining together of the ministerial fellowships, and finally fellowship among the congregations as a whole.

Congregations have become more tolerant of the varying preaching styles among ministers of different races and multiracial churches are beginning to worship together and accept each other completely. One pastor noted, “It is just a richer experience. I’ve always been drawn to people of other cultures.” An African-American female pastor mentioned a lifelong exposure to diversity:

My father was a pastor,… and many people came to stay in our home. I’ve always been around all kinds of people, and was taught to love everybody. I didn’t see it as any kind of issue for me to go into a predominantly White congregation, when all my life I have been surrounded by all kinds of people.

The lack of bias passed down from generation to generation when diversity was taught in the homes and thus became a way of life is noticeable in this quote.

**Sociocultural**

In the beginning of the unification process, the state minister had more involvement and communicated more effectively to the leadership in each group. Effective communication helped create better relationships and increased involvement between the two groups and their congregations. Relationally, things have improved greatly since the inception of the unification process.

**Psychocultural**

Trust has grown throughout the congregations in Virginia. As long as everyone communicates with each other, the trust between groups should continue to improve and
grow. Leaders are keeping in contact regularly and working together to keep things moving in the unification movement.

Environmental

Congregations are now working together to keep their properties and making arrangements to use them on a united front. In terms of geography, the state is still working on the distance between the Black and White churches and trying to find a solution that will agree with everyone.

Table 4.6 shows the frequency of each interviewee’s reference to the four conceptual filters. Whereas Table 4.4 shows the relationship among the filters and themes, Table 4.6 shows the association between the filters and the interviewees. MEY9 had the most references while cultural issues were deemed the most significant category followed closely by the sociocultural category.

Table 4.6. Number of References to Filters in Each Interview

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<th>MYE9</th>
<th>FYE7</th>
<th>MXW4</th>
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Research Question #3

What limitations were identified during and after the implementation process?

This research question examined the gaps, barriers, or limitations that were experienced during the preparation, implementation, and completion of the unification
process. Results of these gaps on the ongoing unity were also identified. These gaps will be instrumental in identifying possible different approaches that may be more effective in other contexts.

Cultural

Culturally, credentialing is different. In one interview, when the topic of the altering of the Black and White chair and co-chair was broached, MXW4 had the following response:

It’s kind of an unofficial thing—it’s,…. I think we’re kind of getting away from that; I think it’s a matter of actually electing a person and putting that person in place now. I don’t think there’s as much looking at the racial divide, as much as they, as different groups are saying, “This person has been doing this for some time. They have that experience. Let’s let them lead in that capacity.”

Beginning with the onset of the unification process, the sharing of the chairperson’s position was followed by a time of having a chair and co-chair that alternated between the Black and White groups. Later, after leadership developed trust in one another, positions were filled by the most qualified and available person.

One stumbling block during the unification was a White pastor who had been kicked out of the White group for misconduct. He then went to the Black group and they credentialed him. Education was also cited as being a problem with credentialing. A concern within the Black group was the average person desiring to be a minister or pastor did not have a degree:

We adjusted it to where, we weren’t requiring a degree. We were requiring education equivalent. And as long as, the person, Black or White, male or female, showed some interest, reading some books, preparing themselves—you know the process, then it would be considered in lieu of a 4-year degree. And that’s how we got around that. (MYC6)
An effort was made to make the credentialing of ministers uniform. Each group had to cede certain requirements in the joining together of the qualifications.

In addition to credentialing, property means something different to the Black group than to the White group:

Yes, it does and I think this is out of the struggle of owning. Years ago in history, [Blacks] owned a lot of property but it got away from them. I’d say it like that. And I think those who are more mature remember, you know, how hard it was to maintain property that you owned without having it taken away from you in some form or fashion. So, it becomes a thing that’s dear to the hearts because we’re taught, you know, buy property, own something, do something with it, you know, and then a period where you can’t do but so much because of restrictions. (FYE8)

The historical struggle that Blacks have had concerning the owning of property is not soon forgotten. Ownership of something material such as land or a home reflects a Black person’s identity while Whites seem to take possessions lightly because of the lack of struggle to keep them.

**Sociocultural**

Also culturally speaking, more than one interview cited that the power held in leadership was different in the Black group than in the White group. One question frequently asked concerned the leaders of the Black groups being different from the leaders of the White groups, in that, in the Black groups the power is in the person who lead, and in the White groups, the power is in the position. In response, one African-American male brought up a new issue concerning Black leadership:

The person wasn’t a dictator but in the association they viewed the chair person’s position as a leader, not just a facilitator at meetings. As a leader, he or she was a person that led and that introduced and brought things back to the leadership for voting, for inclusion. (MYC6)
When the word *dictator* was introduced in other interviews, the message seemed offensive to Blacks. Most Blacks and Whites agreed that Black leadership was more stern and that the position deserved greater respect.

**Psychocultural**

When dealing with property, groups encounter the problem of individuals or groups not being able to trust one another. Questions concerning what is best for the group or would the property be sold out from under those of a different group for their own personal gain must be considered:

You know, what do we do with the properties and how do we disperse and of course you got some little issue of trust that creeps in. You know, if we are going to put it here then how we are going to benefit? (FYE8)

The issue of trust creeps into the discussion again and again. Such distrust may be linked to the lack of relationships or time spent in fellowship together.

Interviewee FYE7 said the following concerning the significance of what was to be done with the property:

Yes a cultural thing, right. When we came here not owning any property, we didn’t have anything. We came, our ancestors came on a slave ship and okay and so we didn’t get paid for our labor, so that thing it ran deep with us. So, now we have come together we have this property at Camp Bedford and the White leaders are saying let’s put the property together, okay. We couldn’t see this as Black leadership. We couldn’t see coming in for talking about the property. We believed that first we may talk about building relationships and unity, you know like that you understand so really that was a really a snag, a wall for us. So, that was the thing they caused the deepest ruffle for us, so far as our coming together, I believe, it’s the property.

Most of the interviewees stated that property was the most controversial issue to be considered. FYE7 took us back to the 1700s concerning slave trade. Old injuries are not soon forgotten by those who have been harmed.
Leadership is another area that caused mistrust. Leaders must be available who can be trusted to do what is best for the entire group, not what is best for them personally:

We had some outsiders telling them that we couldn’t be trusted, that we’d be sweet to them until we joined, and then we’d take their property and they’d have nothing; and there are still several that are afraid of that. (MXC5)

Learning to trust was one of the hurdles that both groups had to overcome during the unification process, as was the problem of geography.

Environmental

Not only was property a barrier, but geography was a major barrier as well. Most of the Black churches are located on the East coast, two in the central part of Virginia, and none in the southwest. Traveling that far is an issue for most people. One interviewee had more detail to say about geography:

Geography was an issue in the scheme of things called unity, too. Because we knew that all the Black churches were here on the East coast and very little Black representation on this end [west]. And when we have state meetings on this end [west], Black representation was almost nil because they had to come so far. And the same thing would have happened but the one benefit if we had had meetings in the eastern part. There are still enough White churches there to have supported it. But see, in this particular case all of the Black churches are down there. So, geographically speaking, it did affect attendance and staying 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 nights at a camp meeting. (MYC6)

Relationships and trust are difficult to build when so much distance exists between the two groups, geographically.

Research Question #4

What were the recommendations for how the process might be improved, and how should the results be used?

Based on the findings of research question 3, this question examined the manner in which the limitations may be addressed. Recommendations by the study participants
were also integrated, considering their direct involvement with the project. Such recommendations might be instrumental in informing other similar projects conducted in different states.

The leaders of the unification process are said to have started the process too late. Due to cultural differences, people were filled with ignorance and fear, which, in turn, kept the state from starting the unification process sooner. One interviewee suggested the following:

The only thing I would think would be—and I hesitate to use the word—but would be to divide the state into geographical areas that would be better able to function well with each other, but when we do that, we become racially divided because of the geographical divide. (MXW4)

The word *divide* seems ironic considering the issue on the table for discussion was unity. The distance traveled was what concerned this interviewee who suddenly realized after making the above statement that to *divide* the state into closer travel destinations would only serve to segregate the state.

Another interviewee had a different idea about what should be done:

I started to mention that several minutes into this. I said we’re doing things and we’re making strides, and we need to do things differently: culturally different, worship styles, the way we sing, the way we preach. You know I have heard statements like the pastors in the association just scream and holler. And I’ve heard people say, “The pastors in the assembly just kind of teach.” It’s a different style that Black and White preachers have. Face it, we have a different preaching style. (MYC6)

Communication should have been top priority at the beginning of the unification process. If everyone had communicated more, things might have moved a lot easier and faster.

When asked what she would do differently, interviewee FYE8 replied, “What would be different probably would be in terms of getting everybody clear on the properties and what happened and having direct information you know.” Another recommendation was
to “live it out to where the world sees it” (MYC6). Unity will never be reached wholly if people do not live their everyday lives like they do for an hour on Sunday mornings.

MXW3 echoed this popular recommendation, “And the thing that we said in leadership, even at the very beginning, was that we either needed to stop preaching the unity message, or we needed to start living it.” It seemed that some involved in the unification process talked a great deal about unity but did not live a life that reflected it.

Another interviewee suggested that the process should have begun working solely on relationship:

The biggest thing right now that I would encourage Mississippi or anybody else is to start out with relationship. Leave everything else alone and I think you hit it last night, everything else will fall into place eventually, but if looking back oh did we miss the opportunity to work on relationship, we missed that opportunity, and I think today we are suffering for it. (MYE9)

This interviewee suggested that relational fellowship should precede all of the unification processes. As they look back on how the events transpired, relationships was the one issue that needed more attention.

Another suggestion was to sell both properties:

Sell both the properties. In fact, during that process, there were those who called for that. Let’s sell both properties, buy a new one, and call it Camp Unity. But, as it was set in the bylaws, the properties cannot be sold. (MXW3)

Many of the interviewees stated that they had made too huge a deal about the properties. One interviewee, who adamantly opposed any disposal of the properties, now looks back and insists that the leaders should have disposed of both properties earlier, and ownership would not be such a drain on church-wide finances today.
Summary of Major Findings

The semi-structured interviews, documents, and personal observation produced the information necessary to bring answers to four research questions established in this study. The following significant findings relate to the research questions:

1. The issues of ethnicity and ethnocentrism are part of the reality of life in the United States.

2. The major factors that provide barriers to unification are internal and fall within the following categories:

   - Lack of Unity—Almost all interviewees have a good knowledge of the meaning of unity in the body of Christ, but they were skeptical by pointing out the difference between understanding and practice.
   
   - Property—One of the greatest disputes that came to the surface was about ownership of church properties, especially concerning the campgrounds.
   
   - Leadership—Leadership denotes those persons of pastoral, staff, and lay leadership. Leaders must have a strong desire for better spiritual leadership, a more representative system with shared power, a better election system, and continuity in leadership succession.
   
   - Geography—Distance between church communities played a major role in lack of attendance at statewide meetings.
   
   - Communication—Communication denotes the amount of information being processed throughout the state that allows participants to feel a greater sense of inclusion and understanding of COGVA as a whole.
• Power—Sharing of power within the organization is essential.
• Relationships/Community—Community denotes an expression of deep Christian koinonia and how that level of belonging and personal connection lives itself out among those connected through Christ.
• Economics—The economic factor involved the economy gap among church organizations.
• Culture differences—Cultural differences included worship styles, preachers, and their preaching.
• Trust—Trust involved fear of losing congregational identity, fear of change, and interpersonal conflicts resulting from change.
• Credentialing—Credentialing issues were state specific. Land mines could surface in this area if agreements did not work out in the process.
• Structural—Structures included church association mergers and organizational change.
• Vision—Vision denotes a common goal, a preferred future with which every member can be inspired and to which every member can be accountable.

3. The major factors that provide facilitators to unification are also internal and fall within the following categories:
• Better fulfillment of the purpose of the church,
• Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources,
• Influence of leaders, both national and statewide, and
• Financial stress.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This project was born out of a personal experience that motivated me to discover the necessary factors involved in creating racial unity in the Church of God within states with multiple organizations. One of the main foci of ministry in the Church of God has always been unity. The irony of the situation today is that Blacks and Whites maintain separate national assemblies and, in most states, separate state assemblies. Although the Black and the White Church of God groups in Virginia formally united in 2004, the joining together of the separate organizations has not been without difficulties.

The purpose of this project was to discover what factors influenced the unification of the Virginia Assembly and the Virginia Association of the Church of God as it occurred in Virginia and to provide a template to be used by other states that might be considering such a move. The hope was to understand which components assure success and which provide barriers to unity so that state organizations could function as one cooperative body. Written documents, personal observations, and semi-structured interviews were the instruments used to gather data across a carefully selected group of leaders involved in the process as it occurred in Virginia. The data from this project can be useful in helping states, which are not unified racially or ethnically to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a like-mannered process. The same strengths and weaknesses can be leveraged to develop training and strategies to manage situations of unification better.
Major Findings

The major findings are grouped into three categories: the reality of ethnic diversity and ethnocentrism, barriers to unification, and facilitators to unification. Each category is then broken down into themes discovered during the interview process. Each theme is then addressed by personal observations, how the literature reviews pertain to the theme, biblical and theological views on the theme, and how each theme informs the practice of ministry.

The Reality of Ethnic Diversity and Ethnocentrism

Black Christians have had and, in many instances still have, a bitter experience when they have come into contact with White Christians. Historically, the Blacks were often demeaned by the White person’s presumption of racial superiority or ethnocentrism. Racism is a sin, and a racially divided church does not reflect Jesus’ vision for a house of prayer for all nations (Rev. 7:9). God has “made of one blood all nations” (Acts 17:26, KJV). The church must not confuse biblical unity with an invitation to assimilate Blacks into White definitions of Christianity. Church leaders seek to integrate, not assimilate (DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim 139).

Personal observation. In the primary documents table (PDT; see Table 4.2, p. 73) Ethnocentrism clearly is not a major concern for either community. This finding ranked seventeen out of twenty on the usage scale and also ranked very low on the co-occurrence table (COT; see Table 4.4, p. 75). The number of occurrences reflects the reality that some focus is on ethnocentrism, but not as much as one may predict before studying the process of unification. For the most part, those in the community are hospitable towards one another and do not exhibit an overt ethnocentrism. Obviously,
from some of the interviews, some cultural aspects, such as preaching style, take some getting accustomed to by each community, but they seem to be building a tolerance and even an excitement about different styles and gifts that the opposite community brings to the worship experience. Initial interviews showed that the Black community believed the White preachers were too didactic, while the White community thought the Black preachers shouted and were too dramatic:

> It’s a culture thing. And it’s expressed in Black ministers when they preach: loud voices,… the stomping and clapping and beating. It is a culture thing. White preachers are more reserved. Not that they all preach that way, but they are more reserved. They don’t have as much body language in their preaching. It’s more from an even tempered tempo delivery. (MYC6)

Culturally, Black preachers typically are more animated. Such behavior seems to motivate the congregation to pay attention and to get involved with the message, often repeating back words or complete sentences as a form of agreement with the speaker.

**Literature review.** The one mention in the literature sources of ethnocentrism comes from Gudykunst and Kim as they describe their view of psychocultural influences involving our perception of strangers based on ethnocentrism and prejudice (51).

DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim expand on the necessity of maintaining ethnic diversity,

> Because people exist in social contexts, they carry with them collective memories, beliefs, practices that in good part define who they are. In brief, when we bring people together with different identities, collective memories, and histories we put them at risk for losing their identities and their faith, and possibly allow the world to lose their unique perspective on God. (114)

DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim are referring to a loss of separate identity when two or more groups are joined together. The smaller of the two or more groups often suffer
the most. The authors expand their thoughts to include God’s creation, humanity, each
different and unique.

**Biblical.** Ethnocentrism has only an implicit presence in the Bible. The Old
Testament was written by people of the Jewish faith. In discussing other peoples, the
Jewish people exhibit a fair amount of ethnocentrism, but there ethnocentrism stemmed
from their belief that they were the chosen ones and all other peoples worshipped inferior
gods. The New Testament was written by Christian Jews who were trying to understand
God’s precept concerning unity. Many of the books of the New Testament exhibit this
struggle between the old, inbred ethnocentrism that was handed down through
generations and the new command to love even one’s enemies combined with Jesus’
prayer for unity. This struggle is manifested in Paul’s confrontation with Peter in
Galatians.

**Informs practice.** The COGVA community needs to continue to grow in its
disowning of the ethnocentrism present in Virginia. They need to keep in mind the
struggle of the early Church. Peter was too weak to do what he knew was right, and Paul
called his attention to his hypocrisy. Peter was a product of generations of ethnocentrism
towards non-Jewish people. Many in Virginia are the product of generations of racism
and ethnocentrism. The COGVA must be Paul, not Peter, in this instance.

**Barriers to Unification**

The following major themes relating to the research questions are listed as
barriers to the unification process.

**Lack of unity.** Unity between different cultures has to be practiced daily before it
can be fully achieved and the most difficult of those to achieve is relational unity. The
theological import of unity mandates that, as church, we seek out areas for agreement and do not overemphasize minor areas that do not require full agreement. Diversity can be exercised while maintaining unity.

Prior to the unification process, pastors preached about unity on Sunday mornings, but unity was not being practiced in everyday living. Those who were interviewed for this study were aware of the theology behind the striving to unite the two communities into one. MYC6 stated that pastors were also very conscious of a gap between theology and practice:

I think, if I had to do anything differently than just talk about it, I would have to ensure that we did more to bring about the reality of living it out today every day. The world, they don’t need to hear talk, they need to see results. And the results they see is Christ in our lives. They see Christ in our lives; they are going to see unity in fellowship because if Jesus is real in here, I’m going to love my brother. I’m going to fellowship with my brother and associate with my brother and worship with my brother. That’s all there is to it.

The world is watching Christians, especially pastors, scrutinizing every move, looking for the least mistake. Church leaders are held to a higher standard than laity.

The literature on ecclesial unity is plentiful. John Macquarrie states that unity is the “hallmark” of each church within the body of Christ (402). Demetrios Bathrellos argues that Paul admonishes the church at Corinth to end divisions and strive for unity (24). As Hendrikus Boers argues, unity entails many difficulties, including overcoming people from varying backgrounds and worship styles (112). Unity is not the charge of pastors and leadership personnel alone, especially when dealing with a process of unification; the congregation as a whole is responsible for unity among its members (Alfeyev 14). John P. Bartkowski believes that a damaged relationship with God is the foundational cause of social and ecclesial disunity (154). Gangel states that the origin of
disunity lies in the fall of Adam and Eve who were in perfect unity with God (46). The Church of God is called to be a paradigm of unity before the world. This unity is to be accomplished through mergers with other churches (Curtis 207). Getting to the heart of the interviewees’ concern that everyone knows the theological mandate and import of unity but it is not being lived on a daily basis, Hines and DeYoung state that unity is manifested when a person “demonstrates a willingness to make specific commitments” (51). Unity is a journey, not a goal.

In Ephesians, a prototype of unity is offered in Galatians 3:28. This inclusive verse informs all who read it that those who have been baptized in Christ are now one in him. Gender, race, and social status are washed away in baptism and all are perfectly united in Christ. In Ephesians 4:1-16, and again in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul shifts his imagery to the metaphor of the body. Paul attests to the fact that all are united in Christ and are called to use their different gifts for the benefit of the one body. Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us; so that the world may believe that you have sent me,” is an indication that the goal of Christ’s sacrificial death is the unity of all disciples in salvation. Paul informed the Corinthians that he wanted divisions to cease and for all to be united “in the same mind and purpose” (1 Cor. 1:10). Clearly, from the beginning of the Adam and Eve narrative in Genesis, the intention of creation was to be united with God in harmony and to enjoy the fruits of his love. Only humanity’s vanity separated them from God. Christ, as the second Adam, brought them back into unity with God through his death and resurrection (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45).
Curtis Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancy, and Karen Chai Kim further state, “Christ came to—announce a supernatural unity while respecting and celebrating particularity” (117). This aspect of unification must begin with conscious reflection upon, and intentional efforts to enact, the unity toward which Christ calls the Church. Any true unity must permeate the entire Church. A spiritual unity cannot be a testament to the external world without external expression. This expression, acted out in everyday life, is where Christianity is manifested. From the leadership down, the two communities must make an effort to become a single entity.

**Property.** Property ranked eighth in the PDT, but it soon became one of the biggest disputes in the unification process. The Black group and the White group viewed property differently. To the Black group, selling their property meant losing part of their heritage and their identity. Having property seemed to mean more to them than it did the White group. Property meant hard work and sacrifice, and they were not willing to surrender that symbol by selling it. In addition, they did not trust the White group to make decisions regarding their property. A statement had to be set in the bylaws that property could not be sold:

> We gave our word when we came together, when we united on those by-laws; we put it down for assurance that we would not sell property out from under each one. Many people have emotional and heritage ties in the property: “My daddy went there; my mommy went there.” (MXC6)

The Black group brought to the negotiating table two pieces of property—the campground in Bedford, Virginia, and a second piece of property located near Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, that had been donated to the Association prior to the unification event in 2004. My observation was that this property was to be sold as soon as possible
and the funds received from it were to go toward the improvement of the Black campground. This sale took place sometime in late 2011 or early 2012.

Presently both campgrounds are still owned by COGVA and are a constant drain on the funds received from various churches to keep the state organization operating. One prominent interviewee who was adamantly opposed to the sale of the Black campground now wishes both properties had been sold.

Complicating matters is the historical context of property within the Black community. Trust issues abound due to the fear of losing their property they worked so hard to obtain, and that has historical precedence. Originally, even the determination of where to meet caused potential problems with the merger of the two communities. However, as noted previously, the two congregations are now working together to keep their properties and arranging to use them on a united front. The communities seem to be making strides to overcome their trust issues surrounding the two properties.

The scant information found in literature on the subject is limited to the ethological theories of Brooks, as quoted in Schaller, concerning the psychological importance of place associated with behavior patterns. The implications for such spiritually significant events/activities as worship, baptism, blessing of marriage, burial, and conversion experience attest to the fact that places are not trivial matters where faith is concerned.

The significance of location or place throughout Scripture supports the conclusion that the decision concerning property can constitute a major barrier to unity. Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19-34), Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-8), Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River (Mark. 1:9), the encounter of
the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), and the holy city Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10), just to name a few, are all places with significant theological import where events that shaped the Judeo-Christian religion occurred.

The property issue presents a challenge to the practice of ministry. Before spiritual unity develops, logistical barriers need to be removed. If the two communities can devise methods to fulfill their ministry utilizing both properties in a fair and equitable manner, spiritual matters, in which a larger degree of agreement exists, will be more fruitful and authentic. Trust issues should dissolve when the two communities learn to communicate on issues such as property and when each community understands that the other community is not trying to cheat it out of its heritage and tradition. MXC6 believes that COGVA will eventually have to get rid of the properties: “I think we’re ultimately gonna get rid of the property; we’re gonna have to; I think it will be financially beneficial to us.” The expense of maintenance on the properties has become a burden on state finances.

**Leadership.** Leadership is difficult in any situation. When the subject of that leadership is two communities trying to form a single community, the topic is even more difficult. The theological impetus to provide the community with proper leadership is the person of Jesus. His leadership style calls churches to emulate him in their leadership service to the community at large.

Leadership was number one in the PDT and was the third most discussed topic following only credentialing and ethnicity (see COT). Both groups wanted leaders that they trusted and were qualified. They wanted to rely on these leaders to do what was best
for each group and all individuals involved. They wanted leadership that extended beyond one or two days a week.

The literature attests to leadership’s centrality in achieving unity. Ikpatt believes that the issue of effective leadership is the most challenging barrier to unity within the church (136). For Penley and Ao the great challenge is leading gently and firmly at the same time (96). Lawrence A. Q. Burnley believes that a leader’s role involves bringing people into a closer working relationship (76). Above all, for a Christian minister, leadership entails an ethical component that requires the minister to conform to the example set by Christ (Gangel 96). Eldin Villafane notes that leadership development occurs without the encumbrance of racism, “[w]here people are valued for their particularities, and where people do not have to curtail their ‘ethnic’ ways to gain favor. Cultural practices and traditions can be celebrated, protected, and passed on to subsequent generations” (106-07). Unity is found in diversity and one does not have to surrender their differences for the sake of unity.

Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth charges leadership with the responsibility of restoring unity in the church. In Matthew, Jesus asks a question that implies that those placed in positions of leadership are the “faithful and prudent” who are responsible for distributing food to the household (24:45). Acts and the many letters of Paul equate leadership with servanthood. Acts 3:13, while describing Jesus’ betrayal, calls him a servant. In the address of many of Paul’s letters, Paul (the leader of the communities to which he is writing) begins by calling himself a servant. In Romans 13:1-4, while discussing authority, Paul admonishes people to adhere to the direction of those in
authority and recognize that all authority comes from God. Paul then states that authority is “a servant of God” (v. 4).

John 12:26 places servanthood in the context of discipleship. Whoever serves Jesus will follow him. Implied in this imperative is the suggestion of the cross as a requirement of being a servant/leader. The letters of Timothy describe the qualities of a leader. First Timothy 3, while describing the qualification of episkopos (i.e., bishops, overseers) and diakonos (i.e., deacons, servants) admonishes those in positions of leadership to be morally upright. In 2 Timothy 2:24, the Pauline author instructs Timothy to be gentle and lead with compassion.

Leadership is of utmost importance in uniting the two communities. The matter of trust is again brought to the forefront of the conversation. Both communities need to be comfortable with, and feel spiritually fed by, whoever is in a leadership role. Determining leadership roles should involve both communities and should be preceded by combined prayer, reflection, and discussion about a unified community’s needs. The leaders of the united community should be held responsible for their actions and comportment in the same way the author of the letters of Timothy held Timothy responsible for the behavior of overseers and servants in the community. The community members want to know that their leaders are living what they preach. As interviewee MXW3 stated, “And the thing that we said in leadership, even at the very beginning, was that we either needed to stop preaching the unity message, or we needed to start living it.” Leaders must manifest the image of unity in their everyday lives.

Geography. For many people, locations have special significance. COGVA holds the significance of place in common with the Israelites and with the early Church. A trip
to the Holy Land will attest to the many places that are marked as spiritually significant sights. African-Americans have a history that involves locations as well. Just like the people of the Middle East, they are prepared, in many cases, to fight for their homeland. Such importance to location should be respected and taken seriously by the White community.

The geography finding came up late in the interviews and could be confused with property, but the two are totally different. The finding ranked only tenth in the PDT, but I believe it was much more important than that number suggests. Due to the fact that almost all the Black churches are on the eastern shore with two in the central part of the state and none in the southwest, statewide meetings are difficult. The state is over 550 miles wide, and driving from one end to the other could take as much as eight to ten hours. Most people do not want to drive that far; thus, cultural unity is slowed and relationships are not as easily made. The state is still working on a compromise that will be agreeable to both parties.

No information was uncovered in the existing literature that specifically addresses the hurdle encountered by COGVA in the geographical distance of the two communities. However, significant discussion regarding geography occurred in the interviews. For many people, more than trust issues or worship styles, the greatest division was simply the practical barrier of distance (e.g., MYC6, MYE9).

The difficulty of guiding a community while being geographically removed from that community is a common problem for Paul and the churches with which he corresponded. He is constantly addressed serious issues from a long distance away. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians applies most readily to the current study, as the issue
Paul was addressing was factional divisions in the church. Paul attempted to settle disputes, answer questions, and hold himself up as an example to follow despite being separated by such a great distance. At the end of the letter, Paul disclosed plans to visit the community. The key to Paul’s separation from a community he was trying to guide is steady communication.

Incumbent upon COGVA is a search to find ways to come together, celebrate together, and address mutual problems together in order for the community to have true unity. Using Paul and Corinth as an example, COGVA should recognize that communication is paramount. One practical suggestion would be for leadership to determine what discussions and celebrations have a high enough degree of importance that both communities are required to be present and which ones can be celebrated in two or more locations with a symbolic show of unity, such as mutual letters to one another.

**Communication.** Communication not only keeps people informed; it makes people understand that they are part of the process. Any attempt to unify these two communities without proper communication will prove futile.

Communication was not high on the list in the PDT or the COT, but personal observation revealed that the lack of communication from leaders throughout the church groups created a lack of trust and inclusion. Breakdown of communication left the door to suspicion wide open. Communication builds relationship, which is vital in the unification process. The two groups are working on solving trust issues through sound communication. The two communities followed the lead of the state minister, who, at the beginning of the unification process, communicated efficiently with all concerned. Still others believe that communication did present a hurdle. Communication was not given
precedence in the unification process when it should have been made a top priority. If everyone had communicated more, things might have moved a lot easier and faster.

According to interviewee FYE8, one of the issues that slowed the progress of unification was that information was not disseminated properly, and the communities did not have direct information. According to Allmen, church disunity involved such issues as governance, worship styles, and church traditions (132). In other words, issues could have been resolved with proper communication techniques. If churches talked with each other rather than at each other, issues such as worship style and governance should not be divisive issues. Another central issue involved in communication is the subject of how to communicate. As Christians, the starting point should always be the *kerygma*. As James Draper and Kenneth Keathley argue, those who know God *must* preach the *kerygma* (164). If the *kerygma* is the beginning of the communication process, the remaining subjects of communication should fall in line. Interviewee MXW1 made the following suggestions:

Number two, I would try to do as much information sharing as I could; there’s electronic; there’s Web based, which is I guess certainly electronic; there’s phone conversations; if I can get someone from SWVA talking to someone from Norfolk, they don’t have to sit down together face to face, but they can certainly meet together by telephone, even by Skype like we do. I think all that breaks down into I would try to get some people talking to one another. I would even try to get pastors set up as prayer partners for each other, maybe try to partner churches—give a Norfolk Black church a sister congregation with a Saltville White church for example, try to begin building those relationships. At the same time, hopefully in an electronic publication, I would try to begin not only sharing information about what’s going on in other congregations, but begin sharing information about what is unity, soliciting papers perhaps from other pastors, articles from other scholars on the matter.

This interviewee suggests that in the twenty first century, some of the communication problems could be addressed in cyber space.
The Bible does not address communication as such, but it does relay two images of the importance of communication. The first is in Genesis 11:1-9. As a way to deter the builders of the Tower of Babel, God confused their language, so they could no longer communicate. In contradistinction, in order to unite his people after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Spirit endowed those present with the ability to understand all languages (Acts 2). These passages attest to the importance of communication when performing a task or missionary work. The Tower of Babel could not be completed because of a lack of communication; the building of the kingdom of God, the missionary work, could not be accomplished without proper communication.

One of the ways COGVA can begin to instill trust is to make sure that, despite the geographic distance between the two parts of the community, leaders should relay the same messages to both communities at the same time. Each community should send correspondence to the other community, as did Paul, on a regular basis in order to foster a feeling of connectedness. Of greater significance, regular discussions should take place in person with representatives of both communities present to discuss issues of central importance.

**Power.** Power is a tenuous issue in any community. The questions of who has the power, how do they wield the power, and how are those in power *elected* to their positions must be answered. People who exercise power in a Spirit-filled manner are generally admired; those who exercise power in a dictatorial manner are usually considered tyrants.

More than once in an interview a statement was made that in the Black group the power was in the person and in the White group the power was in the position. The
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unification process wanted power to be shared throughout the organization, not held
together by one or two individuals. One White interviewee tried to explain what he
observed about the power of the Black pastor:

[A]nother [issue] is the authority that the pastor can have; in a Black
church, the pastor can remove a Sunday school teacher—just go in and tell
them you can’t teach—if they have a good reason—they are having
arguments with somebody or disagreements. It’s disrupting things. You
try that in a White church, and chances are the pastor is going to be
removed.

The Black pastor has much power as they seem to rule over all church affairs. Black
people, having grown up in this type of culture hardly notice the powers invested in their
pastor.

Randy Colver states social institutions that are in reality White-led institutions
promote unbalanced distributions of power (79). Power over one another was a central
issue at Corinth, according to Geoffrey W. Bromiley (59). In addition, the cultural divide
presents itself in terms of the issue of power. The White community believes that power
is in the position. This view of power is a very democratic approach. The United States,
for example, considers the power to reside in the office of president, not in the person
who occupies the office. The Black community, according to MYC6, believes the power
to be in the person who holds the leadership position. Using these two different models,
the Black community is likely to select charismatic leaders, those who excite and inspire
them. White communities are likely to choose leaders based on theological outlook and
education, someone who has the knowledge to lead.

In Scripture, power is equated with service. The question is not merely who has
the power, but how the person wields their power. Jesus was recognized to have power
and authority over unclean spirits (Luke 4:36). Paul acknowledges that Christ is “the
power of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). Jesus told his disciples that the greatest among them would be a servant to others (Matthew 20:26; 23:11; Luke 22:26).

The two communities must develop a common theology of power/authority. Service to the whole community should be their guide and goal. The exercise of power in this situation is a very delicate operation. No one minister, administrator, or officer wants to project an image of exercising power in a way that alienates the other community, nor does such a person want to alienate his or her own community by bending over too far to accommodate the other community. Dialogue in this situation is paramount, and trust must be earned.

**Relationships and community.** Effective relationships are the key to achieving cultural unity. To be accepting and tolerant of all cultures, without sacrificing or compromising the gospel message, is important in the eyes of God, and so the church needs to work continuously on their relationships with all people. Worshipping with all cultures is a start in that process.

The instruction about oneness spoken of elsewhere in this paper and the experience of unity must be combined with fellowship. DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim state that “unless we develop many deep and intimate relationships with individuals outside our racial and cultural group, oneness will not become a part of our lifestyle” (159). In his dissertation Russell W. West concludes, “[W]hen they [Pentecostals] allow the originality of the race-transcending themes found within their transcendental assumptive system to emerge, their community-building aims seem to be more closely achieved” (7). Rhetorical communication is one of the keys to overcoming race-related differences.
Relationships and community scored middle-of-the-road in the PDT and the COT, reflecting the growing comfort that the two communities have today after spending time with each other. The two communities show signs that they are beginning to unite into a single community. Although continuing to operate functionally as two separate communities, and acknowledging that they still have a lot of work to do, the interviews show that people are willing to find solutions to those barriers that still divide them. They seem to be forming relationships and the tolerance level for various worship styles and preaching styles is beginning to grow:

That’s where it should start if we had time just to let us just work on relationships so that we can show the rest of the state. Let us work on this relationship thing. I think everything else will fall into place and really understand what John 17 is. (MYE9)

Clearly, attitudes have changed with the passing of time. A more comfortable atmosphere can be noticed at today’s meetings.

Many theological treatises reflect on the importance of community and the relationships that build community. God is the ground of all relationships and God’s Trinitarian nature provides the example for perfect unity (Shultz 207). Doreen Rosman describes a vertical unity with the Triune God and a horizontal relationship with society. Both establish community. The former is the basis of the latter. These relationships ground a person’s work relationships (54). In contradistinction, Bromiley reminds people that Paul admonished Corinth for damaging their relationship with God by denigrating their relationship with one another (59).

The number of biblical references to relationship and community are too great to mention each. The word koinonia refers to those who are in perfect communion with one another. In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes the Eucharistic feast that has devolved into a
meal of power and a place where social outcasts are again ostracized. He contrasts this type of gathering with a true picture of *koinonia* where all are welcome and the variety of gifts bestowed by God are used for the edification of the whole community (Anderson 148). The Pentecostal scene where God reconciles the disunity present during the building of the Tower of Babel by sending forth the Spirit to unite and reconcile all nations together offers another portrait of community (Acts 2).

Such portraits as those in 1 Corinthians and Acts should inspire COGVA to move toward a single community by being intentional about forming relationships with those with whom they are unfamiliar. Rather than being threatened by different worship styles and approaches to faith, each community should view this style as an opportunity for growth and celebrate such diversity. Each community should remember Paul’s reprimand of the Corinthians and welcome the stranger in their midst and allow each other’s gifts to add a new dimension to their faith. The alternative is to remain one dimensional and stop growing in one’s Christianity.

**Economics.** Money matters are part of every organization, even those devoted to spiritual endeavors. Economics is a part of life and needs to be considered within any process such as the unification process of COGVA.

Money and funding had a huge impact on both groups in the unification process although neither was high in the PDT or COT. In the beginning, the Black group was not doing well financially when property became the issue of discussion. A major difference in the way Black churches handled their money compared to the way the White churches handled theirs became evident. In turn, the method of handling finances led to many economical conflicts within the organization.
The literature sources utilized provide no guidance in terms of economic/financial situations; they are primarily concerned with spiritual and organizational issues involved in unification. However, some of the interviewees expressed concern regarding economic affairs. The most prevalent economic issue that arose concerned the campgrounds. Keeping both campgrounds, as the COGVA in fact did, presented a financial burden to the larger COGVA. As MYC6 stated, financial feasibility or cultural ties dominates the conversation. Such an issue is potentially divisive and could quickly end a unification process.

Scriptural approaches to money generally consist of Jesus having compassion on poor people and rebuking the rich. The latter biblical scenarios portray Jesus not as condemning the rich, nor even money in and of itself. He condemned the way people use money. In Luke 16:13-15, Jesus warned that you cannot serve two masters: God and money. He clearly showed that money is not evil. Those who have money and choose to use it in self-indulgent ways when there are people in need right before them asking for help prove that money can cause problems. In Luke 19:11-26, Jesus tells a parable using money as a metaphor for gifts given. The point of the parable is stewardship, but if Jesus opposed money in and of itself, he would not have used money as the representative of gifts given by God. In Acts 8:20, Peter condemned Simon the Sorcerer for attempting to buy a spiritual gift. Again, the use of money and the intent of those with money that drew rebukes from the Christian community, not the money itself. Paul told the community at Corinth to save up money for tithing that he picked up when he visited the community. The money is for the church at Jerusalem, which shows the early Church’s practice of having the wealthier communities helping communities that were more in need (1 Cor.
16:1-3). Paul instructed Timothy that an overseer should not “be a lover of money” (1 Tim. 3:3). The author of Hebrews warns, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (13:5). The love of money, not having money causes problems. This money issue is made explicit in James 14:13, when James told the recipient of his letter, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Economics were discussed extensively in Scripture.

The concerns of money should be taken seriously. Payroll, funds needed to operate the two campgrounds, missionary outreach, worship aides and liturgical requirements, and administrative costs need to be budgeted, and those items that are not necessary for the faithful and fruitful exercise of the COGVA mission should be discussed in earnest. Tough decisions may need to be made, and once again, both communities may need to compromise. However, the united community should keep in mind the calling of Scripture about the improper use of money and to keep the poor always in mind.

**Cultural differences.** Cultural tensions run high in some mixed communities. These tensions are the product of a lack of education coupled with a fear of practices and approaches to life that are foreign. My definition of culture as used in this study is that it is an ever-changing set of symbolic, linguistic, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral patterns and rules that people create collectively in community and use to make sense of the world around them. Once people begin to see beauty in cultural diversity rather than **weirdness**, life will be more enjoyable as the gifts available to celebrate life will be richer and more plentiful.
Ranking fifth in the PDT and not ranked in the COT, many cultural differences had to be worked out during the unification process. For instance, a difference in the way Black and White pastors preach was pointed out. Different cultures have different preaching styles, and those differences were a hurdle that many had to overcome:

The central figure in the Black church is the Black preacher. He has no exact counterpart in the White church, and to attempt to see the White minister on the same plane is to risk confusion, for the Black preacher includes a dimension peculiar to the Black experience. (Mitchell 71)

Worship style is another cultural difference. Black worship is often passionate and therapeutic while White worship is more serene. Culturally, Black Christians are used to longer services with the oral tradition typical of African-American churches while White Christians are accustomed to services lasting about an hour. In addition, the oral tradition used predominantly in Black churches elicits a response from the congregation. A healthy sense of compromise for the sake of unity is necessary. One might have to have a strong willingness to absorb culturally sensitive methods from each other, to have a willingness to talk about differences and welcome them. MYC5 explained the differences in preaching style this way:

I said we’re doing things and we’re making strides, and we need to do things differently, culturally different, worship styles—the way we sing, the way we preach. You know I have heard statements like, “The pastors in the association just scream and holler.” And I’ve heard people say, “The pastors in the assembly just kind of teach.” It’s a different style that Black and White preachers have. Face it, we have a different preaching style. Somebody asked me to explain it one time, and the only way I could explain it was this. There was a time when Black people were held in slavery and held on plantations. They didn’t have entertainment. They couldn’t go to movie shows and dances. They were on the plantation 24/7. Once a week, maybe twice a week, the master would let them worship out in the field somewhere. And they were so grateful for the opportunity to be expressive and free because they were allowed to worship the way they wanted to. Part of what you see in Black worship is culture. It’s that pent-up, deprived ability to associate and to worship on the plantation 24/7.
And now we’ve got a chance to worship. That's where all the shouting, and the screaming, and the jumping.

The two communities seem to be making strides towards acceptance. Tolerance towards different preaching styles, which presented a minor hurdle, and evolving common worship practices are bringing the goal of unity closer as time passes. Another hurdle that must be removed is the leadership issue concerning the issue of worship regulations. A decision had to be made about who would determine and set practices and norms for the COGVA.

Ulinka RuBlack warns that COGVA’s cultural identity should not be elevated above the regional expressions of ecclesial unity (144). Paul A. Crow points out that the intentional exercise of multiculturalism allows for the exercise of diversity. A better picture the universal church becomes clearer as more cultural gifts and expressions are allowed to flourish in a diverse community (98).

COGVA members, being a product of the still divided South, originally resisted social change (Strege 317). Some, such as Fudge, believed that segregated communities kept the peace and once communities began to mingle, tensions would arise (79). James Marshal, as quoted in Merle D. Strege, argues that division caused by race and color are incompatible with the practices of first-century churches (319). Finally, RuBlack believes COGVA waited too long to apply the principles of inclusivity to the church (144).

The primary biblical analogue for these racial and cultural tensions comes from the tension between the Jews and the Gentiles in the early Church. In Galatians 2:12-15, Paul rebukes Peter and James for their hypocrisy in forcing the Gentiles to observe Jewish laws within their practice of Christianity. Biblical theologians are convinced that a division existed between the Gentile Christian community and the Jewish Christian
community in the first century. Paul’s attempt to resolve the problem shows that unity and uniformity are two different concepts. Likewise, Jews in the first century disliked the Samaritans. The Jews felt that Samaritans were unclean and their theology was deficient. Jesus’ hero in the parable of the Prodigal Son was a Samaritan (Luke 10:33), as was the only person who came back to thank Jesus for healing his leprosy (Luke 17:13), and the woman at the well in John 4.

When viewed from a historical perspective, clearly, racial and cultural divisions have always existed. COGVA can either learn the lesson Paul has to teach in Galatians, as well as his theological insight into the many gifts those in the body have to share (1 Cor.; Eph.), or they can once again devolve into segregation and miss the bigger calling God has for the COGVA as a light to the nations.

**Trust.** Trust is woven through the other barriers. It is the greatest obstacle to unity. Once the two communities achieve trust, everything else should begin to fall into place. Groups or individuals can have civil disagreements once they have trust; without trust, even the most trivial issue can cause disunity by all involved.

Trust was often mentioned in the interviews and was a major stumbling block to the unification process although the PDT and COT reflect only moderate concern. The lack of trust grows through fear and the unknown. The issue of trust permeates almost every other barrier listed. In some ways it is the foundational barrier to unity. The Black group feared that their property would be sold; therefore, they did not trust anyone to make decisions in regards to their property. In addition, the lack of communication led to distrust among both groups. Communication needs to be extended down through the
congregations and church communities in order for trust to grow. Each group would need to trust the leadership of the other community.

Scant literature exists on trust in the current sources. However, many interviewees spoke articulately about trust. The concerns were expressed as follows:

We had some outsiders telling them that we couldn’t be trusted, that we’d be sweet to them until we joined, and then we’d take their property and they’d have nothing; and there are still several that are afraid of that. (Mxc5)

FYE8 agreed with this assumption in an earlier quote about trust creeping into the discussion. This interviewee expressed concern about the lack of communication causing mistrust as well as the minority losing any means of control.

Scripture is filled with the concept of trust. As one example, the Psalms refer to trusting in the Lord on many occasions (e.g., Ps. 25:1; 90:2; 115:11; 145:13). The concept of trust in God carries over into the New Testament. However, in the New Testament Jesus also refers to instances of trustworthy people. Jesus tells parables where he praises the trustworthy servants (Luke 16:10-12; 19:17). For those who trust God, their faith is credited as righteousness (Rom. 4:5). Paul admonishes the Corinthians that those who are given a trust must prove faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). Paul continually states that his sayings are trustworthy, which shows that he insists on trustworthy people being involved in the mission of the church (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8).

The issue of trust is central to achieving unity. Trust cannot be manufactured; it must be earned through listening, taking the other party’s concerns seriously, and striving for equality in practice. Jesus and Paul are clear about those who seek unity with God being trustworthy. Such trustworthiness stems from emulating God who is the source of trust. COGVA communities must learn about each other in order to conquer their fear.
They must deal honestly with race relations, cultural differences, property concerns, and leadership issues. Then they can begin to trust each other.

**Credentialing.** Credentialing requires give and take in COGVA. They must decide as a community what qualities their ideal pastor/preacher should possess.

Ranked first in the COT and third in the PDT, problems in the early credentialing process made negotiations more difficult for the unification process to begin and prosper. Bringing two different groups of pastors together, from both the Black group and the White group, and forming one committee all under the same leadership in credentialing was awkward. Before the joining together of the credentialing committees, a White preacher was kicked out of the White group for misconduct and later went to the Black group where they took him in as a member and credentialed him. This situation created problems within the organization.

A lack of literature exists on the barrier of credentialing when two communities are attempting to unify into a single entity. However, many discussions ensued by those being interviewed. MYC6 stated that they had to adjust their educational requirements for credentialing a pastor because many in the Black community did not have the level of education required in the White community.

Biblical qualifications for being a church leader do not require credentialing but church leaders in the early Church adhered to a strict ethical code. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul describes the qualification of *episkopos* and *diakonos*. Among other qualities, an overseer must possess temperance, self-control, and the ability to teach. He must not be a drunkard or aggressive, and he should manage his household with dignity (1 Tim. 3:1-5). A deacon should be dignified, not deceitful, and not greedy (1 Tim. 3:8-9). In Acts when the
apostles bring on assistants to help them spread the gospel, they look for “reputable men” (6:3).

Credentialing is a difficult subject. Scripture or scholarly texts do little to guide research. To remove this barrier and remain faithful to Scripture while upholding the modern-day requirements of a preacher or pastor, COGVA should continue to adjust (but not completely neglect) their educational requirement while maintaining the high moral standard signified in Scripture for church leaders. Jesus, in his ministry, welcomed everyone, including the outcast as sinners, but in the early Church, even though all were welcome to fellowship, only those who could lead by example, as Jesus did, were called for leadership roles.

**Structure.** Organizational structure is an important issue because without a well-functioning structure, very little administrative work is completed. Even some spiritual work requires a supportive structure in today’s complicated modern world.

Although structure held only a mild reference in the PDT and the COT, organizational structure had to be approached in the beginning. Each group had different levels of leadership. The Black group had a ministers’ fellowship-like structure and a state chairman/coordinator. On the White side, three levels existed, a chairman, or the state minister, a pastor’s fellowship, and laity. The mildness of structural concern I think is reflected in the fact that at the time of the interviews, each community had become more accepting of the way the new organization was structured.

The current literature does not contain significant information on structure. In many ways, the topic of structure is part of the issue of leadership. MXW2 described the issues with structure:
This process was started and stalled several times in the eighty-year history of the two groups; different leaders attempted to build relationships and to try to bring people together for fellowships, and try to talk about some structural things, and it was started and stalled on several occasions, a lot of occasions.

Clearly, just beginning the process was difficult. Someone from each side had to take the lead role.

Scripture does not contain a large amount of information on church structure. However, the beginnings of a structure are detectable in Acts and Paul’s letters. We notice the emergence of assistants, overseers, and servants. Paul begins to delineate a loose structure when he discusses the order of those called to serve the body of Christ. He lists “first, apostles; second prophets; third, teachers, then, mighty deeds, then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and a variety of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28). A definite sequence was evident in this quote.

COGVA needed to discuss the two different conceptions of church structure. Each community may need to compromise, but the discussion should begin from a practical perspective: the goal or responsibility of the proposed structure. Very possibly a state minister, a minister’s fellowship, and the overall congregations could make up a good structure, but a system for making decisions more quickly than calling together either of these groups was needed. Maybe an executive committee consisting of no more than five people and equally representative of both communities could be elected and entrusted with certain decisions.

Vision. Vision is where any process begins. The governing board of CHOG had a vision for an integrated church of God. COGVA, after observing the attempts of other
states, took the lead in unifying Virginia’s church organizations, and their first step was asking the board for guidance. They wanted the board’s vision to become their vision.

In the beginning, everyone had a biblically based common goal and vision. The vision was for more oneness and closeness in the body of Christ. Everyone must continue to work together to keep the unification process moving forward. Apparently no one communicated a vision of what the final product (i.e., structure, organization) would look like.

The current literature does not contain significant information on structure. The topic of vision permeates the discussion of unity, however.

The subject of vision runs throughout the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. Visions usually occur when the prophet is communicating a warning, or when the prophet is communicating a sign from God, which is determined to be a joyous event. Rather than considering these visions as metaphysical events, good leaders know these visions as a wise seer’s understanding of what ought to be and what could be. In the same way, those who have a vision of what is possible regarding race relations within the Church of God are aware of their vision in terms of God’s ultimate goal, which is all people united in Christ.

Vision should encompass the practice of the COGVA. With each barrier, stumbling block, or hurdle, the community needs to come back together and discuss the original vision and the way in which that vision fits into God’s overall vision for humanity. Jesus informed the Church through the text in Revelation that the church at Ephesus had lost sight of its vision or its first love. If the people did not repent, he would
“remove their lampstand” (2:5). God’s presence would be removed from that church if they did not ground their vision in loving God and each other (Matt. 22:34-40).

Additional barriers were discussed but only briefly: (1) the status quo bias, (2) lack of sufficient time in prayer about unity, (3) lack of commitment, (4) use of human power rather than God’s power, (5) interracial dating/marriages, (6) assumption that one’s perception of unity is shared by all, (7) forced assimilation, and (8) lack of authenticity.

**Facilitators to Unification**

The following major findings relating to the research questions are listed as facilitators to the unification process.

**Purpose of the Church.** The purpose or mission of the Church provides the primary impetus for unification. The purpose of the Church, as gleaned from Jesus’ unity prayer, Acts, and Paul’s letters, involves uniting all people in Christ with the goal being salvation. Thus mission and evangelization go hand in hand.

Evidence from the interviews and historical documents makes clear that the COGVA knows the ecclesiology present in Scripture, at least at a basic level. They understand that God’s plan for all humanity is salvation. They know that Christ’s greatest cry for unity was his very death on a cross.

Throughout time, the Church has failed in its purpose: “Church history is replete with efforts to call the church back from its institutional self-concern to the purpose it was created for” (Miller 113), the *missio Dei* or mission of God reconciling humanity to himself and restoring what was lost in the Garden of Eden. Rosman states that the degree to which people are united to God allows a horizontal unity to one another. In sharing in
the same thoughts as Christ, all people share in the same purpose and goal (54). As mentioned, the purpose of the church, unity, is intimately linked to the mission of the church: evangelization and care. Crow states that when the church is involved in its missionary task, differences sink into the background and so the points of unity become more pronounced (48). Unity and mission are the reason for the church’s existence. Bodley reminds one that Christians involved in mission were becoming troubled by divisions within the Church at the same time Mott was preaching evangelization in the modern world (79).

The Church is the “bride of Christ” (Eph. 5:25-27) and the body of Christ (Col. 1:18). The Church is the flock of the Shepherd (John 10:16) and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-9). All of these metaphors imply a single entity: a united ecclesial being responding to Christ’s calling. In 1 Corinthians Paul exhorted the church at Corinth to heal their divisions and be united in the “same mind and purpose” (1 Cor. 1:10). To the Ephesians, Paul made the call to unity explicit: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). The minister’s role is to nurture the church until the church reaches “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Jesus’ prayer for unity, that all may imitate the unity of Father and Son (John 17), is given bodily expression as he died on the cross for all of humanity.

Possessing a sense of missionary goals and understanding the biblical impetus toward unity, the COGVA, and all churches, should have sufficient reason to work
toward healing divisions. A calm, biblical approach, filled with common prayer and worship, and the willingness to compromise will help resolve divisions.

**Best use of time, talent, financial, and property resources.** Another reason to unite the two separate communities is that resources can now be combined. Each community can strengthen the other community by adding gifts and strengths to the other community’s weaknesses and short fallings.

Both communities have gifts that the other community lacks. One community is more efficient with finances, while the other community has a gift for preaching and evangelization, for example. By combining the two communities, not only do they get to share their gifts and reduce their weaknesses, but each community grows in terms of leadership, divergent voices, and administrative and liturgical approaches.

There is no literature within the current resources that addresses this issue directly. The subject is broached, however, by FYE8 who was concerned that the excitement of being unified had died down:

> I feel that partially we have unity in the body of Christ, as far as the teachings, beliefs and all that. I think that we have. But in terms of reality, in terms of results, I don’t see what … have we accomplished the fact that we merged, okay so what, what’s happening? What can we see tangibly as the results of it, you know? We still, even though we have unity Sunday where we go and worship, we have some where our pastor will go over to the White churches. They come over to us and preach and all. Of course the word is always good because you’re looking for a strong word.

FYE8 is not sure what unity should look like in the end. The interviewee seems to be saying that unity exists but then it doesn’t exist.

First Corinthians provides the best biblical basis for the sharing of time, talent, and treasure. Paul’s description of the various gifts in the body, and how they should be used for the edification of the body, provides a plan for all attempts at sharing resources.
This area is a facilitator, not only because it makes running a church easier when a wider array of gifts are involved but also because Christians are called, by God, to share gifts.

Sharing resources should provide each community with an exciting reason to join together as a single entity. Realizing that one can embody God’s plan for unity by accessing spiritual and administrative gifts that the church membership never had access to before should provide a spiritual boost to all members of the united community. If not, each person needs to look at himself or herself carefully and ask whether he or she is ethnocentric or egocentric, and whether failing such a self-examination is getting in the way of God’s plan.

**Influence of leaders, national and statewide.** The national and statewide mandate to unite congregations provided the initial push for these two organizations of the church to unite into a single entity. This mandate relates back to the leaders’ understanding of God’s plan for the church.

The observation of reaction to the mandate of the Church and Ministry Service seems mixed within the communities. Some seem to favor the unification; others seem to dislike the perceived forced unification. The courageous leaders in Virginia who had the wherewithal to lead instead of just to follow are to be commended. Once when the unification talks were stalled and one group had walked out of a meeting, one great leader swallowed her pride, picked up the phone, and made the call that changed the course of events in Virginia.

No literature within the current resources addresses this issue directly. However, an overview of the document that mandates the unification states the purpose for the mandate clearly:
1. Begin immediate dialogue for the purpose of bringing about reconciliation in credentialing practices that will heal divisions, celebrate uniqueness, and bring about a greater realization of cooperation in the Church of God Movement;
2. Establish dated goals for unifying the various assemblies at least in terms of credentialing functions by June 1999;
3. Commit to creating credentialing committees and/or boards that are reflective of the various, unique constituencies which they will serve;
4. Seek assistance, mediation or whatever other tools are needed to bring about the desired result of unified credentialing procedures for the Church of God. (Callen 194)

This list is a good starting point although these for points will not complete the unification process.

The biblical analogue for following this type of leadership is Paul’s constant reminding of the communities he founded that he is their spiritual father. He has ultimate responsibility for their spiritual well-being. Likewise, the leaders of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) had the spiritual well-being of its members at heart when they issued this mandate.

COGVA must follow its leaders. Recognizing that authority comes from God, they should not only have heartfelt and earnest discussions with national and state leaders of the Church of God, but they should not be afraid to ask for help when needed.

Financial stress. Another impetus to unite is the hope of relieving financial stress. By combining their financial resources, each community can relieve debt. Additionally, if one community is better at budgeting and bookkeeping, it can share that resource with the other community.

The two communities have some preexisting financial stresses that they bring to the combined community. Interviews showed that the Black community does not handle their finances with the same efficiency as the White community. In addition, once the
community were combined, many expressed concern over the campgrounds and the financial strain they are leveling on the COGVA.

No literature within the current resources addresses this issue directly. The biblical evidence for the use of finances or budgets is discussed earlier in this text. Money, like spiritual and administrative gifts, is to be used wisely for the edification of the body. COGVA should keep in mind that all gifts are a gift from God.

The greatest hurdle, even for churches, is oftentimes the daily non-spiritual, administrative issues that every community faces. Every financial issue, no matter how daunting it seems, can be conquered if the community comes together often to reflect, pray, discuss, and celebrate. The difficulty of clearing the hurdle arises when one turns their back on unification due to a financial problem, if their life becomes invested in the lives of others in the community.

**Implications of the Findings**

These findings imply a long, difficult process with many hurdles. COGVA has been committed and dedicated to the goal of unity because they recognize it as part of God’s plan. These findings will be used to provide a roadmap to other states in aiding with the unification process. States can have a better understanding of the challenges they are likely to face before they begin the process. The objective is not to discourage unification; the objective is to give the other communities an opportunity to think through the potential dangers before they begin the process in the hope that their transition will be smoother than COGVA’s because of the groundwork laid by COGVA.

To ensure validity of this study, I triangulated the data by using individual interviews, participant and event observation and comparison of one interview to another.
Finally, I presented the rough draft of Chapters 4 and 5 to a select group of four interviewees seeking their response to the conclusions. This study suggests that church organizational mergers are a worthwhile and necessary endeavor in many circumstances. However, merger is a difficult process, often filled with minefields—not for the faint of heart. On arriving at the other side of the phenomenon of unification, many may bear wounds from the experience and some people may be lost or wounded on the journey. The final destination may or may not prove to be worth the sacrifice.

Unity in the church setting has deteriorated over the past decades with major concerns on the church leadership and the fight for power among the leading elites. The initial religious groups that comprised only Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity have seen Hindus and Muslims maintaining their unity (although Islam has multiple factions who often disagree) while Christianity has been heckled by society to make many changes. Currently, many denominations and movements of Christianity exist, and speculation is that in the next decade the number of denominations will double.

C. Peter Wagner warns unifiers against taking the task of unification of the church lightly:

In Christ there is no difference between Jew and Gentile or Black and White. Bringing Christians from diverse cultures into a local fellowship will not be an easy job because it will require a degree of cultural circumcision on both sides, but with sufficient dedication, effort, and sacrifice, it can happen. (137)

Clearly, sacrifice is needed by each group who seeks unity with the body of Christ. Unless the different sides are willing to make the tough decisions and sacrifices required for the unification process, success will be limited.
Limitations of the Study

Limitations included the fact that the issues studied are specific to COGVA. The universal Church was not considered. Many regions are not dealing with this overt issue of race relations (such as churches on the two coasts) but are dealing with other issues of equal import. When I interviewed the leaders of Mississippi and Georgia, I learned that the Black churches outnumbered the White churches. In these states I found mostly Blacks in leadership in comparison to numerically White-dominated Virginia.

Another limitation is the lack of written documentation during the initial stages of the unification process. Few minutes were taken, which means that the interviews were very subjective with no way of verifying various statements or points of view.

As presented earlier, this study was generalizable in three ways: (1) By reflecting on its current practices, COGVA could improve on their implementation of the unification process; (2) other state organizations that are similar to that of Virginia should be able to use this research to implement their own unification; and, (3) in a support role the Church of God (Anderson) should be able to provide a pattern whereby other states might begin the process of uniting their respective churches organizationally and culturally.

Unexpected Observations

Many of the issues encountered in studying the unification process of COGVA were predictable. Not surprising was that the two communities experienced trust and leadership issues. However, a few revelations took me by surprise.

First, the fact is that the greatest obstacles to unity were practical and not spiritual or theological. While discussion about worship styles and preaching styles were present
in several interviews, the two greatest barriers to unity seemed to be the properties and the geographical distance between the two communities. An expectation that ecclesial conflicts will involve theological expressions, beliefs, or ritual practices exists in such situations, but the level of distrust concerning decision on the disposal of the campgrounds was surprising. Additionally, racial tension was to be expected. I did not find the level of tension one would expect. However, the intransigent position concerning traveling a great distance for unity’s sake was revelatory. Interviewees professed to loving the other community but not wanting to travel to the other side of the state for combined gatherings.

The second revelation involved the sense by the community that the theological reasoning behind unity is well-known within the community, but its principles are not being practiced on a daily basis. To know that a particular practice is warranted by Scripture, and not have a theological justification for not following the scriptural precept, but ignore the precept nonetheless, seems blatantly confrontational to scriptural mores. At this point racial tensions seem to intersect with spiritual idealism to create a formidable barrier to unity.

**Recommendations**

The first recommendation comes from an interview with Rev. Hosea D. Anderson, evangelist and leader in the Church of God organization in Georgia, who stated that one needs to stop looking at “unity as a goal but rather see unity as a function.” I took this statement to mean that unity should be the purpose for which the Church of God is designed or why the Church of God exists, its role rather than the result toward which effort is directed, the end or terminus.
The recommendation for COGVA in order to keep this process going in the right direction concerns cultural sensitivity training and assembling and holding discussions of issues of mutual concern. Leadership should determine which issues constitute a major concern. White (or Black) privilege should be dismantled by having representational leadership. For each cultural group, the gospel must be liberated from the dominant group interpretations: racism, economic exploitation, discrimination, and ethnocentrism. The two sides of the now one community (COGVA) should elect representatives that they trust to deal with the issues in the main body. This group should assemble once a month for face-to-face meetings alternating between geographic areas, thus creating an intentional dialogue to talk about cultural differences.

Many whom I interviewed know what hardship they have experienced due to discrimination, so working in coalition with others for the elimination of discrimination in the church is part of the way one can live in the Great Commandment of loving God and neighbor together. All people wish to be valued for who they are and the contributions they make. Real faith dictates that people truly respect creation for all people are created in the image of God. Christians have no higher calling than to love God and their neighbor.

In addition, leadership should set up a calendar with dates of importance when the two sides of COGVA come together for a common celebration. These gatherings should be handled equitably so that they either alternate preachers, one time with a Black preacher, the next time a White preacher, or they should allow a preacher from each community to handle a part of the service and such gatherings should be promoted on a congregational level.
Each community should receive notice of important celebrations in the other community, such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, so that each individual can determine whether he or she can attend. The leadership of each community should appoint a certain contingency to make the trek to the other community’s location for such events to show solidarity. MXW4 lamented about errors made along the way, “I think we missed opportunities; I think we need to work on taking those opportunities of building those relationships.” Many opportunities were missed because of the issue of trust. Other opportunities were missed because of empathy.

As suggested earlier, COGVA can begin to instill trust by assuring that the leaders of COGVA relay the same messages to both communities at the same time.

Correspondence, communication, and connectedness were a few of the words used to describe future unification efforts:

The heart of what we did here in Virginia, and what the Bible says, comes from John 17, in answering Jesus’ prayer: the unity message that we may be one, even as the Father is one. And the thing that we said in leadership, even at the very beginning, was that we either needed to stop preaching the unity message, or we needed to start living it. (MXW2)

Wavering between these two positions was not acceptable as this interviewee so eloquently stated.

Postscript

The church of God seeks to be those who embrace unity in Christ, even in the midst of diverse opinions. The growing partnerships that embody a deep appreciation for mankind’s God-given diversity has been inspiring to see. Each of the two groups has a long and storied history of speaking out when being silent would have been the easier road to travel. Together COGVA will speak out about what is possible through the love,
grace, and reconciliation of Jesus Christ.

Loving only those who are lovable is not the answer to problems in society. “If we say we love our fellow man as God loved us but have no concern for an involvement in problems of human society, we are only fooling ourselves” (Rahtjen 100). I think a good place to start is public recognition of all as equal citizens who require at least two forms of respect: (1) respect for the unique identities of each individual as God created them, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or gender, and (2) respect for the activities, practices, and ways of viewing the world that are valued by or associated with members, particularly those who are members of a disadvantaged group, including African-Americans.

While the unification of the churches in Virginia is a first step, it is filled with difficulties. One of the main problems being experienced now in 2012 is lack of motivation. Questions about what should COGVA do now, how to keep the momentum up, and how to regenerate enthusiasm remain. I join my brother, Alvin Lewis, senior pastor of Central Community Church in Jackson, Mississippi, (although this title is not representative of his accomplishments) in urging the church to rethink its practice of unity. We believe that the next step is to focus on making our church congregations multicultural. DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim view the solution not as joining together of church groups but integrating churches as they stand, “The twenty-first century holds the potential to be the century of the multiracial congregation” (74). In a true melting pot such as the state of Virginia, one significant option is to break down the old segments of society. A sign of the times is that interracial marriages are increasing rapidly. COGVA should “become so convinced that multiracial is the wave of the future,
that we develop teams that can go out and help congregations that would like to move toward that” (83). These teams would travel to each church that has a desire to alter their old culture and speak to what changes need to be made to accomplish that lofty goal.

The process of undergoing this study forced deep reflection on the issue of unity, on my part. Unity is forever hoped for but, in reality, is rarely achieved by large entities such as churches. COGVA continues to strive for that unity that is exemplified in the Trinity but fall short often times. Whatever unity means, it cannot mean conflict-free agreement. However, COGVA has inspired me to hope and pray for a renewed sense of urgency for the church as a whole in the pursuit of unity. Other churches that are fragmented could use COGVA as a template. The implications for church unity in the wider sense are even more demanding but will be even more exciting if unity is attained. God calls the whole church to unity; Christians have a signal event that binds them: the death and resurrection of Jesus. Focusing on our similarities rather than the things that divide us is a good place to start:

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. (DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim 188)

Unity is a process, not a goal. This process is not without its mountains and valleys and, at times, the work can be overwhelmingly difficult. With God’s help it can be accomplished.
APPENDIX A

TOWARD UNITED CREDENTUALLING BODIES (JUNE 1996)

Whereas, the essential unity of God’s people is one of the foundational Biblical convictions of the Church of God Movement; and,

Whereas, cultural, racial, and social uniqueness are present within the Movement contributing varied resources which should be seen as strengthening our united Kingdom efforts; and,

Whereas, a lack of unified practice and process in the credentialling of ministers and churches has developed and perpetuated in some areas fostering confusion, misunderstanding and a negative witness; and,

Whereas, several states or regions where overlapping credentialling entities exist have already provided model efforts toward creating unified credentialling bodies; and,

Whereas, the recently assembled Credentials Congress affirmed that unified credentialling bodies are a worthy goal for the Church of God Movement,

Therefore Be It Resolved, that Church and Ministry Service does hereby call upon each state, region or province with two or more credentialing assemblies to:

5. Begin immediate dialogue for the purpose of bringing about reconciliation in credentialling practices that will heal divisions, celebrate uniqueness, and bring about a greater realization of cooperation in the Church of God Movement;
6. Establish dated goals for unifying the various assemblies at least in terms of credentialling functions by June 1999;
7. Commit to creating credentialling committees and/or boards that are reflective of the various, unique constituencies which they will serve;
8. Seek assistance, mediation or whatever other tools are needed to bring about the desired result of unified credentialling procedures for the Church of God.

Source: Callen 194.
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS INSTRUMENT

1) Names

2) Gender
   - Male
   - Female

3) Age
   - 20-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60-69
   - 70-plus

4) Racial Background
   - Black
   - White
   - Other

5) Position in church
   - Pastor
   - Church Leader
   - Administration
   - Other

6) How long in the pastorate?
   - 1-10 years
   - 11-20 years
   - 21-30 years
   - 31-40 years
   - 41-plus years

7) Location of Church
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE (COGRI)

[To be read to each interviewee.] These questions are being asked of selected participants in the unification process who are chosen by a set of criteria established by the interviewer and tested and approved by a random group of church leaders. It is part of a multicultural doctoral study. Neither you nor your church will be identified by name or any other means during this study without your written permission. The results of these taped interviews will help interpret the overall experiences of ministers and church leaders who were instrumental in the process of unifying the Black and White church organizations in the Church of God in Virginia.

Research Question #1: What were the elements (e.g., steps, decisions) involved in the process of unification as it occurred?

The primary question was broken down into six sub-questions that served as the framework for the interview, knowing full well that the questions were open-ended and the path of questioning could change dramatically with the discovery of a new line of thinking:

1. All interviews began with the most general and open-ended question of all: What is unity in the body of Christ?

2. What do you believe the Bible teaches about unity in the body of Christ? The purpose of this question and the next was to determine the level of awareness of the interviewees concerning the biblical principles of church unity.

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2 The research questions are not asked. They are placed here only for the purpose of designating which research questions the following questions help answer.
3. How would you interpret this teaching in terms of unity of Spirit and institutional or organizational unity?

4. What should the end product have looked like?

5. What happened during the process?

6. What was your role in the process?

**Research Question #2: What has been the impact of the unification process?**

The primary question was divided into three sub-questions:

1. What has been the effect of the unification process on the church community?

2. What has happened since the *official unification* that you have been involved in, that you have noticed?

3. What larger ramifications, if any, exist from the unification event?

**Research Question #3: What limitations were identified during and after the implementation process?**

The primary question was divided into three sub-questions:

1. What internal or external factors threaten unity in the body of Christ?

2. Do you believe these factors can be overcome? If not, why?

3. What practices in COGVA contribute to unity? Which ones contribute to disunity?

**Research Question #4: What were the recommendations for how the process might be improved, and how should the results be used?**

The primary question was divided into four sub-questions:

1. What would you do differently?

2. How can the practices of COGVA be improved?
3. How should the leadership of COGVA respond to the factors that threaten unity?

4. To whom should I talk to find out more about the events?
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

To:
From:
Subject: Racial Unification of the Church of God in Virginia

Date:

Dear ,

I am in the process of completing my dissertation for the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary. For the past 18 months I have been studying extensively in areas concerning the process of uniting churches multiculturally in state localities. The intent of the research is to discover the necessary factors involved in unifying racially distinct church organizations.

To that end, I am seeking the input of church leaders who were involved in the unification process in Virginia over that last dozen or so years. I am searching for conceptual topics that explore the problems and the celebrations in the transition to one organization. I have no desire to pursue any project that would not have at least some significant contribution to the church as a whole.

The assessment tool that I have chosen is an unstructured interview that seeks to ground discovered theories in data collected. The purpose of this research was to provide a template for the Church of God Movement (Anderson, Indiana; CHOG) to use in other states by exploring the process that occurred in the unification of the Black and White organizations within the Churches of God in Virginia from the inception of the idea in the mid-1990s through 2011.

If you agree to participate in this research, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships in your church family. My prayer is that church organizations from around the country can benefit because of you and others like you who have taken the time to participate. Once the research is completed in approximately four months, I will destroy the individual interview tapings and keep the data electronically for a period of time of at least until my dissertation is completed and approved.

I realize that your participation is voluntary, and I sincerely appreciate your willingness to consider being a part of the study. Please know that you can refuse to answer any or all of the interview questions. I will come to a location of your choosing to conduct the interview. Also feel free to write or email me at any time if you need more information. My phone number is 540-605-6072 and my email addresses are...
Steve McMurray

steve.mcmurray@asburyseminary.edu or mcmurrays@comcast.net. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rev. Steve McMurray

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature: ____________________________________________________________
(electronic signature is okay if typed in above and emailed by reply to me).

Date: ______________________
Please print your name if mailing this form: ___________________________________
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED


Hayes, John. “Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South.”


